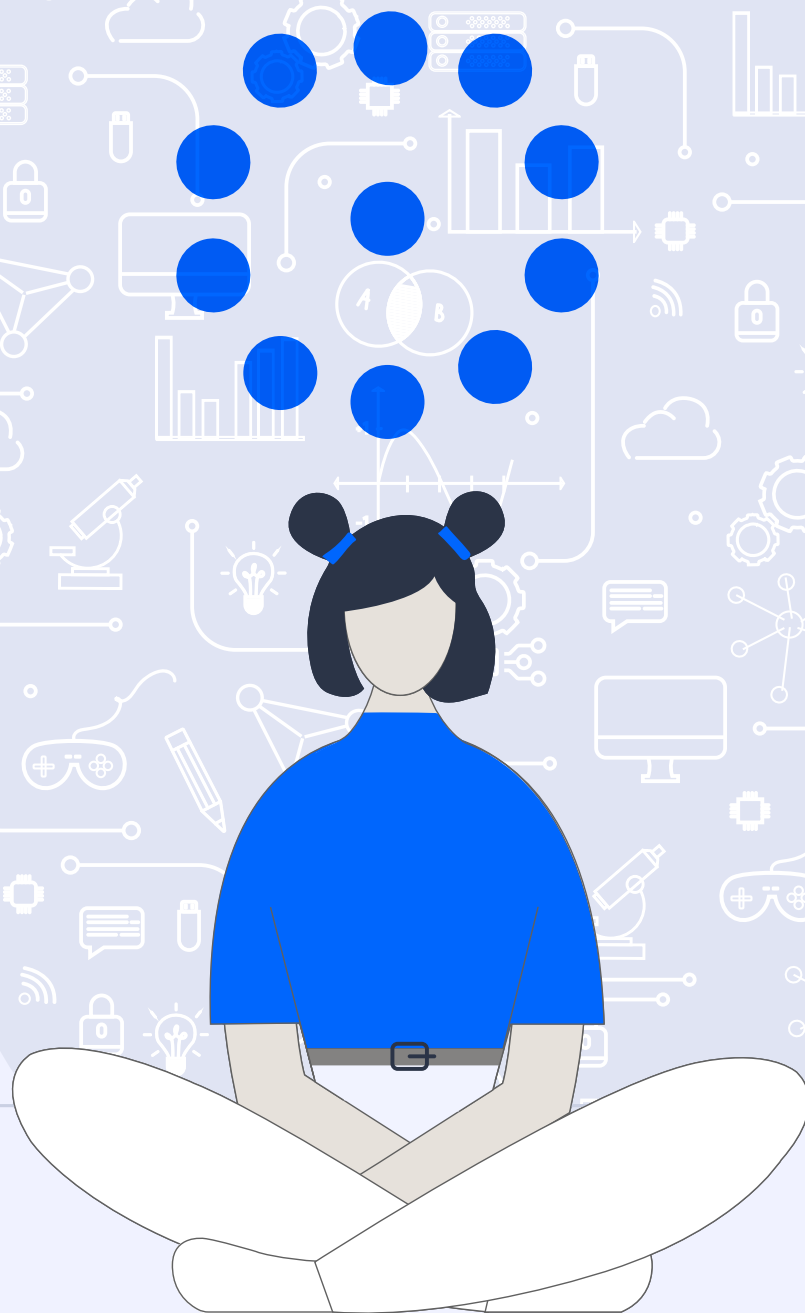# Building a *Safe* Digital Space for Minors

Towards Responsible Design and Use of Digital Devices and Services

Digital Public Policy, Regulation and Competition

2025

Telefónica

Index

1. Building a *Safe* Digital Space for Minors

Digital technologies and connectivity contribute to well-being and competitiveness. The democratisation of access to devices and innovation has created a digital world full of opportunities for all sectors of society. Connectivity and new technologies allow us to stay connected, improve access to education and healthcare, enhance productivity, develop new business models, energise the labour market, foster people's autonomy and promote sustainable development.

The Internet has been a revolution whose scope and speed of development were unimaginable in its early days. Just two decades ago, owning a mobile device was uncommon, and being able to access the Internet from the palm of your hand, anywhere, was unthinkable. Today, it is unusual to find someone who does not have a smartphone. The Internet was conceived as an open and collaborative space for information exchange, withgovernments, academia

and developers serving as its primary agents. However, rapid digital adoption and the widespread use of devices opened the doors of digital worlds to other segments of society, including children.

Children are active users in a digital ecosystem that was not designed for them. One of the greatest advantages of the Internet is that anyone can access any type of content or service, and interact with any user from anywhere at any time. However, this very feature has become a challenge. Born into the digital age, new generations tend to fluency with digital devices on the Internet. However, this fluency does not mean that they know how to make critical and intelligent use of the content, services or contacts they encounter. The absence of the notion of responsible use in their learning makes them particularly vulnerable to online risks, which can potentially affect their psychological, cognitive and social development, especially those in vulnerable situations.

1
Introduction: Building
a Safe Digital Space
for Minors

2
Minors' Access to
Inappropiate, Offensive
and Harmful Content

3
Vulnerability of Minors
to Online Interactions

4
The Impact of
Social Media

5
Online Distribution of
Minors' Sexual Content

6
Non-Responsible
Use of Digital Devices
in Classrooms

7
Decalogue of
Principles: Towards
Responsible Design
and Use of Digital
Devices and Services

Several ongoing debates surround the protection of minors online: how to ensure their safety; how to best verify age; whether access to digital platforms and social media should be limited below a certain age; how should new technologies be incorporated into the classroom; what are the areas for action; and so on. After a process of analysis, five critical areas have been identified: access to inappropriate, offensive and harmful content, vulnerability to third party interactions, the influence of social media, the distribution of child sexual abuse content and the irresponsible use of digital devices in the classroom.

At Telefónica we are aware of the magnitude of the challenge, which is why we have been active players in the protection of minors online for two decades. The beginnings of Telefónica's commitment to the protection of minors in the online space date back to 2005, with the conference on the risks of mobile phone use by minors organised by the European Commission. This conference concluded with the GSME (the predecessor of the GSMA, an association to which Telefónica belongs) taking responsibility and the subsequent signing of the "Framework Agreement on Safer Mobile Use by Children".

In 2011, Telefónica joined the "CEO Coalition to make a better and safer internet for children" initiative led by the European Commission, which resulted the implementation of several measures over the following 18 months. In parallel, Telefónica, along with other industry members, signed the "ICT Principles for the safe use of connected devices and online services for children and young people in the EU". Additionally, in 2013 we joined the "Better Internet for Kids" initiative, which was stemmed from the previously mentioned initiatives promoted by the European Commission over the years.

We are currently a member of the GSMA's Mobile Alliance against Child Sexual Abuse Content and we work in partnership with the Global Child Forum to protect children's digital rights. In addition, we block child sexual abuse content in line with the guidelines of the Internet Watch Foundation. Moreover, we collaborate with various actors to raise awareness and educate on the importance of responsible use of technology. We offer resources, training actions and programmes to families and teachers to help them build a safe online space for children in collaboration with public bodies such as the Ministry of Education and the Spanish Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training.

To address this challenge, a different look and a greater commitment to the responsible design and use of technology is needed. This must be underpinned by cooperation, a clear differentiation of responsibilities and a balance between regulation and education. On the one hand, there is a growing need for digital platforms to adopt responsible design that takes into account vulnerable groups, such as minors, and to comply with the obligations required by current regulatory frameworks, taking the necessary measures to ensure online minors' protection. On the other hand, it is essential that children, families and teachers receive the necessary support and tools to make responsible use of technology.

At Telefónica, we are commited to keep contributing to the protection of minors online. We will continue to innovate our digital solutions with the aim of enhancing the protection of minors in the digital space. We remain commiyed to supporting and developing actions that contribute to greater awareness and provide training for children, teachers and families in the responsible use of technology. Together we can build a safe digital future for minors.

1
Introduction: Building a Safe Digital Space for Minors

2
Minors' Access to Inappropiate, Offensive and Harmful Content

3
Vulnerability of Minors to Online Interactions

4
The Impact of Social Media

5
Online Distribution of Minors' Sexual Content

6
Non-Responsible Use of Digital Devices in Classrooms

7
Decalogue of Principles: Towards Responsible Design and Use of Digital Devices and Services

Our commitment today is what will define the digital well-being of future generations

Looking back just a few decades, it was unimaginable to anticipate the scope and speed of the digital transformation. The new generations, born at the dawn of the digital age, quickly became familiar with technological advances, finding digital devices almost intuitive to use. However, intuitive use does not necessarily equate to smart and responsible use of technology.

Inadvertently, children have become active users of a digital ecosystem that was not designed for them, normalising the use of digital devices and services without prior awareness or training. This combination has ultimately resulted in a number of risks to which children are exposed online.

At Telefónica we understand the importance of addressing this challenge, as well as our responsibility to positively impact the future development of children in the digital age. For this reason, we conducted a thorough identification and analysis to better understand the challenges faced by minors, enabling all actors to contribute more effectively to their protection. During this process, different risks have been detected, which have been classified into five categories for clarity and better understanding. These categories are: access to inappropriate, harmful or offensive content; minors' vulnerability to online interactions; the impact of social media; the distribution of underage sexual content online; and the irresponsible use of digital devices in the classroom.

This position paper details the risks faced by minors, provides case studies as examples of initiatives we are undertaking at Telefónica to help mitigate these risks, and proposes concrete recommendations for building a safe digital space for minors based on responsible design and use.
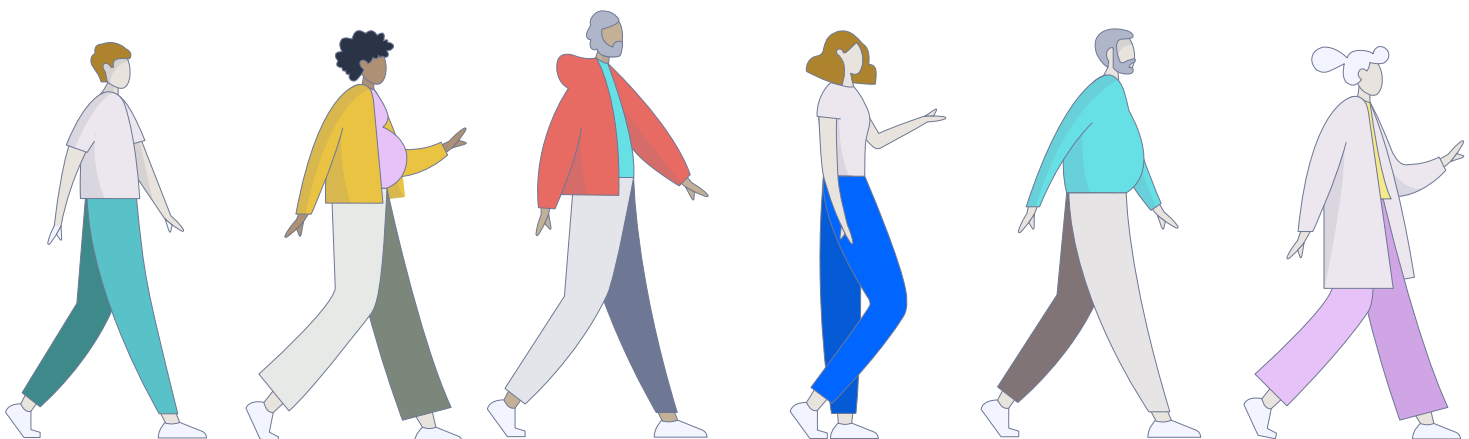
2. Minors' Access to Inappropiate, Offensive and Harmful *Content*

In the beggining, the Internet was mainly used for sharing static information. Interaction between users and the publication of multimedia content were limited. However, in the mid-2000s, the Internet began evolving into a more dynamic model, known as Web 2.0, characterised by the creation and publication of user-generated content. This transformation made the Internet a more interactive and collaborative space. While it brought numerous advantages for users, it also introduced new challenges.

During the early years of Web 2.0, there was no control of the content posted by users, which made it common to encounter inappropriate, offensive, harmful or illegal material. Over the last years, new legal frameworks have been adopted to address the removal of illegal content on the Internet. However, challenges remain. For example, when sharing text or multimedia content, there are usually no prior filters to detect inappropriate, offensive or harmful content. As a result, such content can accumulate thousands of views before it is reported and removed. Similarly, websites hosting adult content lack effective age verification systems to prevent access by minors.

Minors are highly active Internet users, frecuently browsing different websites and owning accounts on various social media and video games platforms. However, their extensive online activity exposes them to inappropriate, harmful or offensive content, which they cannot properly discern or process due to their developmental stage.

1

Introduction: Building
a Safe Digital Space
for Minors

2

Minors' Access to
Inappropiate, Offensive
and Harmful Content

3

Vulnerability of Minors
to Online Interactions

4

The Impact of
Social Media

5

Online Distribution of
Minors' Sexual Content

6

Non-Responsible
Use of Digital Devices
in Classrooms

7

Decalogue of
Principles: Towards
Responsible Design
and Use of Digital
Devices and Services

Four types of inappropriate, harmful or offensive content to which minors have access have been identified:

Access to Pornographic Content

Reports from various countries[1] warn of the early age at which minors are exposed to pornographic content, with cases involving children as young as 6 or 7 years old. When asked about their first encounter with such material, children often report stumbling upon it accidentally while browsing the Internet, bumping into pop-ups, or coming across it on social media. Others mention receiving links from friends or acquaintances. One consistent finding across these reports is that the most common age for minors to begin consuming pornographic content is 12 years old.
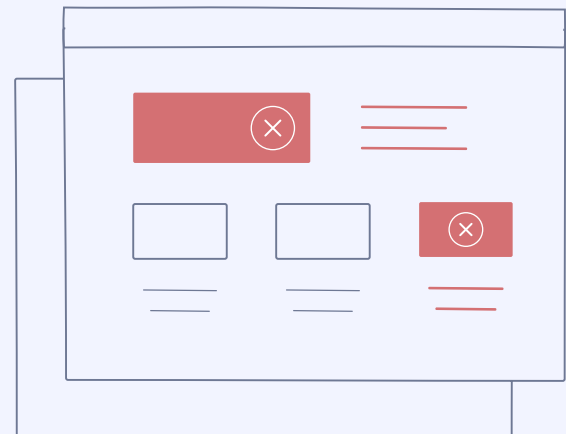
Access to Content Inciting Violence

In recent years, there has been a growing trend of minors recording and sharing videos of fights online, particulary through social media. This content often receives a large number of views driven by the curiosity it arouses in young people. This, in turn, motivates users managing profiles that promote violent content to continue posting. Frequent exposure to violent content can lead to desensitization, aggressive behavior, and difficulties in emotional regulation among minors. According to a survey conducted by the Youth Endowment Fund[2], 60% of young people reported witnessing real-life violence on social media in the past year.

Access to Suicide-Glorifying Content

Content that promotes suicidal behaviors can either convey feelings of hopelessness and depression, or glorify suicide and incite self-harm. Although this content is not mainstream, algorithmic recommendations on social media often expose young people prone to it to repeated stimuli, further deteriorating their mental health and altering their perception of suicide. Given the vulnerability of minors and their conscious or unconscious need for support, online communities of users in similar situations often emerge, normalising this content and even encourage self-harm actions to continue. According to a report by the Molly Rose Foundation[3], 24% of suicides among young people can be linked to the consumption of this type of content.

Access to Content on Body Image Disturbance

Children are widely exposed to content promoting unrealistic ideals, which can significantly distort their perception of body image. In their search for "solutions" to achieve their desired appearance, they tend to consume content that romanticises anorexia and bulimia as a lifestyle, as well as content that encourages strict dieting and exercise routines. When they do not meet the body image standards they have set for themselves, eating disorders and compulsive exercise routines often escalate. According to a study of the University of Waterloo[4], 55% of young people surveyed expressed dissatisfaction with their bodies.

1
Introduction: Building
a Safe Digital Space
for Minors

2
Minors' Access to
Inappropiate, Offensive
and Harmful Content

3
Vulnerability of Minors
to Online Interactions

4
The Impact of
Social Media

5
Online Distribution of
Minors' Sexual Content

6
Non-Responsible
Use of Digital Devices
in Classrooms

7
Decalogue of
Principles: Towards
Responsible Design
and Use of Digital
Devices and Services

● Telefónica's Initiatives
to Prevent Access to Inappropriate, Offensive, and Harmful Content

Digital Protection

Digital Protection automatically detects and blocks suspicious websites and malicious links in real time, safeguarding minors from threats such as malware (malicious software) or fraud attempts. Additionally, it prevents access to sensitive or inappropriate content such as adult websites, incitement to violence or gambling, among others.

The advanced version of this tool, Integral Digital Protection, extends protection to browsing from any network, whether inside or outside the home, and includes device analysis to mitigate risks. It also has an advanced parental control designed to promote healthy digital habits. The parental control tool offers several functionalities: it allows to manage the time children spend on the Internet, shares the location of the child's device and establishes routines to encourage healthy technology habits, such as regulating sleeping hours. Additionally, children can request more "Free time online" and family members or guardians can offer time rewards to children.

Movistar Plus+ Parental Control

In line with its Code of Responsible Communication, Movistar Plus+ complies with audiovisual regulations and promotes voluntary actions aimed at creating a safe digital space for minors.

To address the issue of minors accessing inappropriate content, Telefónica classifies the Movistar Plus+ television offering by age and content type. Additionally, it provides families and guardians with the Movistar Plus+ Parental Control tool, which helps prevent minors from viewing unsuitable content and allows for limiting screen time. The tool also offers the option to create a user profile with content specifically designed for minors. Finally, Movistar Plus+ has a parental purchase pin to manage purchases, preventing minors from renting content in the premiere video store or subscribing to new packages or offers.

🛦 **Code of Responsible Communication**

Proposals to Ensure a Safe Digital Space for Minors

1 **Promote accountability across the digital ecosystem.** Ensuring the protection of minors online must be a shared responsibility across the entire digital ecosystem. Every stakeholder must assume their specific role to prevent the burden from falling on parties that lack the capacity to address it effectively, which would ultimately compromise the protection of minors. For instance, imposing obligations on operators regarding the content circulating on their networks, over which they have no control, would result in an unfair distribution of responsibilities and hinder effective solutions.

2 **Address asymmetries in the audiovisual and digital ecosystem.** For instance, within the European regulatory framework, video-sharing platforms and social media are subject to dual regulation under the Audiovisual Media Services Directive and the Digital Services Act. Both legislations require the previously mentioned providers to implement measures to protect minors by controlling access and classifying content offered on their services. However, these measures have not yet been enforced. Conversely, operators offering television services already comply with both regulations, providing content that is safe for minors. They label content by age, offer specific programming for children, create special profiles for minors, and allow users to block channels or content upon request. Additionally, operators collaborate with audiovisual content providers and television channels to ensure adherence to regulations designed to protect minors.

3 **Implement effective age verification systems**. Digital platforms should adopt more robust age verification systems to prevent minors from accessing inappropriate, harmful, or offensive content. Various solutions are available on the market that could help platforms meet these requirements. Incorporating effective age verification mechanisms is critical to safeguarding minors online.

4 **Enhance parental control tools.** Parental control should complement age verification systems on social platforms and networks. These tools empower families and guardians to set limits on access and usage time for digital applications, positively impacting minors' development and mental health. However, parental control tools alone are insufficient, as they cannot filter inappropriate, harmful, or offensive content on video platforms or social media, nor can they notify families about content viewed, shared, or searched for by minors. To bridge this gap, digital platforms must implement the measures outlined in the Audiovisual Media Services Directive and the Digital Services Act.

5 **Promote age-tagging of user-generated content.** To reduce the exposure of minors to inappropriate, harmful, or offensive content, video-sharing platforms and social media should incorporate age-tagging features, enabling users to label content based on age appropriateness at the time of posting. For instance, in Europe, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive already mandates such protective measures, yet many platforms have not implemented them. It is important to note that the success of age-tagging relies on raising public awareness of the risks minors face in the digital space and educating users on how to apply age labeling responsibly. Increased awareness and education, along with the effective implementation of protective measures, are crucial for creating a safer online environment for minors. In this context, public authorities should collaborate with key stakeholders in the digital ecosystem, such as Telefónica, to develop awareness campaigns and provide guidance on best practices for users.

1
Introduction: Building a Safe Digital Space for Minors

2
Minors' Access to Inappropiate, Offensive and Harmful Content

3
Vulnerability of Minors to Online Interactions

4
The Impact of Social Media

5
Online Distribution of Minors' Sexual Content

6
Non-Responsible Use of Digital Devices in Classrooms

7
Decalogue of Principles: Towards Responsible Design and Use of Digital Devices and Services

3. Vulnerability of Minors to *Online Interactions*

In the early days of the Internet, online interactions were less frequent, slower, and primarily consisted of text-based content. On the one hand, there were applications that facilitated direct contact with people the user generally knew, such as email or instant messaging (e.g., Messenger). On the other hand, the Internet offered more open spaces, such as forums, where user communities emerged. While many users adopted pseudonyms or aliases, interactions were typically among people with shared interests or those belonging to specific niches, making it uncommon for risky situations to arise from these exchanges.

Today, the reality is quite different. Online interactions are characterized by their frequency, speed, and the wide variety of content, ranging from texts to videos. Users now post all kinds of content open to comments and that can be easily shared with others. Additionally,

the constant pursuit of recognition and popularity that defines today's online presence has led users to not only have friends and acquaintances within their communities but also engage with unknown users. This has resulted in the normalisation of meeting and forming relationships with strangers on the Internet.

Nowadays, online interactions are characterized by their frequency, speed, and the wide variety of content

1
Introduction: Building
a Safe Digital Space
for Minors

2
Minors' Access to
Inappropiate, Offensive
and Harmful Content

3
Vulnerability of Minors
to Online Interactions

4
The Impact of
Social Media

5
Online Distribution of
Minors' Sexual Content

6
Non-Responsible
Use of Digital Devices
in Classrooms

7
Decalogue of
Principles: Towards
Responsible Design
and Use of Digital
Devices and Services

In this regard, four risks have been identified to which minors are particularly vulnerable when interacting online:

Online Harassment or Cyberbullying

Pre-adolescence and adolescence are complex stages for children, marked by insecurities and a strong need to belong to a group. In this context, some resort to bullying others to project strength and gain acceptance within the group. These behaviors have now extended into the digital space, giving rise to cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can take the form of posting private or embarrassing photos and videos, sending insulting or threatening messages, spreading rumors or false information, and deliberately excluding the targeted individual. In many cases, this bullying continues in the physical world, creating a constant and uninterrupted cycle for the victim. This has a profound impact on the minor being bullied, eroding their confidence and negatively affecting their mental health. In 2024, a WHO study[5] estimated that 1 in 6 adolescents have experienced cyberbullying, with similar rates among boys and girls.

Online Sexual Harassment or Grooming

Child sexual harassment, commonly known as grooming, refers to situations where adults initiate contact with children in order to obtain sexual content or, in more extreme cases, to involve them in sexual activities. In many instances, minors are unaware that they are interacting with an adult, as groomers often create fake profiles and to gain the minor's trust. In an environment where it is common to establish connections and relationships with strangers online, minors may not recognize this behavior as suspicious, making them particularly vulnerable to falling victim to this form of harassment. According to a study conducted by Thorn and Benenson Strategy Group[6], 54% of minors surveyed reported that grooming is a common experience in the digital space.

Sharing Sexual Content Online

The exploration of sexuality during adolescence, coupled with the normalization of sharing sensual content, has contributed to the widespread practice of minors exchanging explicit material. This sharing can take various forms, such as sending images or videos directly, known as sexting; posting sexual content on social media profiles; or broadcasting it live on video-calling platforms, known as sexcasting. According to a survey conducted by ESET[7], 39% of minors have sent sexual content, while 31% claim to have received it unsolicited .

Contact by Cybercriminals

As already mentioned, minors often normalise interactions with strangers, making them ideal targets for cybercriminals. Through digital platforms, these criminals initiate contact with minors and attempt to build a relationship of trust for two primary purposes. First, they may engage in criminal activities, such as scams, identity theft, banking fraud, or even kidnapping. Second, cybercriminals may seek to recruit minors for illegal activities organized by criminal gangs, such as drug trafficking.

1
Introduction: Building a Safe Digital Space for Minors

2
Minors' Access to Inappropiate, Offensive and Harmful Content

3
Vulnerability of Minors to Online Interactions

4
The Impact of Social Media

5
Online Distribution of Minors' Sexual Content

6
Non-Responsible Use of Digital Devices in Classrooms

7
Decalogue of Principles: Towards Responsible Design and Use of Digital Devices and Services

● Telefónica's Initiatives
to Mitigate Online Interactions's Risks

WAKE UP! O2 Germany

To provide children with the knowledge and guidance needed to navigate the risks of cyberbullying and grooming, Telefónica O2 Germany launched the initiative WAKE UP! This program aims to create a safe digital environment for minors fostering respectful behavior among users. To achieve this, it offers a variety of resources, including engaging educational stories -or "edustories"-, workshops tailored for children, informative events designed for families, and educational materials for teachers to integrate into their classrooms.

↗ **WAKE UP**

This is not a Game

This Is Not a Game is a short produced by Telefónica Movistar Mexico which highlights the dangers of minors interacting with strangers within the gaming community, particularly in relation to grooming and the presence of cybercriminals. The short film won four awards at the Cannes Lions Festival, including two Golden Lions in the categories of "Entertainment in Games" and "Corporate Purpose and Social Responsibility." Additionally, Telefónica launched a dedicated website offering guidance for minors on playing responsibly and providing families with tools to manage the potential risks associated with online interactions.

↗ **This is not a game**   ↗ **Video on youtube**

Love Story

Telefónica Movistar Mexico produced a second short tittled *Love Story* which seeks to raise awareness about grooming by showing the relative ease with which adults can supplant their identity to make contact with minors. The short film received multiple awards, such as the Sol de plata at the Festival Iberoamericano de la Comunicación 2017 or the gold award at the Festival Ojo de Iberoamérica 2017.

↗ **Love Story**

1 Introduction: Building a Safe Digital Space for Minors

2 Minors' Access to Inappropiate, Offensive and Harmful Content

3 Vulnerability of Minors to Online Interactions

4 The Impact of Social Media

5 Online Distribution of Minors' Sexual Content

6 Non-Responsible Use of Digital Devices in Classrooms

7 Decalogue of Principles: Towards Responsible Design and Use of Digital Devices and Services

Stop Cyberbullying

Telefónica Spain launched the *Stop Cyberbullying* campaign to raise public awareness about the urgent need to address and prevent cyberbullying. The campaign featured a compelling audiovisual piece that highlighted the serious consequences of sharing offensive content online. It was further enriched by insights and practical advice from numerous experts, who provided guidance on identifying and addressing this pervasive issue that impacts children and young people. The message emphasized that society cannot remain passive spectators but must actively work to combat cyberbullying.

⬈ Stop Ciberacoso

Movimiento Azul

Movistar Spain launched *Movimiento Azul*, a website dedicated to social and community initiatives aimed at improving people's lives. Under the "Digital Impulse" pillar, Movistar strives to make technology accessible to everyone, ensuring it is used safely and responsibly. Through its educational platform, Movistar focuses on supporting families, children, and teenagers by offering expert-driven educational content. This includes practical guidance on enhancing online safety and protecting against risks associated with interacting with strangers online.

⬈ Movimiento Azul

1

Introduction: Building
a Safe Digital Space
for Minors

2

Minors' Access to
Inappropiate, Offensive
and Harmful Content

3

Vulnerability of Minors
to Online Interactions

4

The Impact of
Social Media

5

Online Distribution of
Minors' Sexual Content

6

Non-Responsible
Use of Digital Devices
in Classrooms

7

Decalogue of
Principles: Towards
Responsible Design
and Use of Digital
Devices and Services

Proposals to Ensure a Safe Digital Space for Minors

1 **Provide an online reporting and support tool.** This tool should be visible and intuitive, allowing users, especially minors, to report any of the risks associated with interaction with third parties described in this section of the document. In addition, digital platforms should make available a helpline or chat for minors who are experiencing psychological problems and do not know who to contact for support. This support should not only be aimed at trying to guide them through the situation they are in, but also at encouraging them to share these problems with their family or friends to help them find real-life solutions.

2 **Establish a distinction between adult and minors profiles.** Digital platforms, particularly online games and social media, should incorporate features that clearly differentiate adult profiles from those of minors. Such functionality would help mitigate risks like grooming and interactions with cybercriminals by reducing the likelihood of minors forming trusting relationships with unknown adults.

3 **Promote awareness-raising actions and courses for minors, families and teachers on the risks of interactions with third parties online.** Educational centres, in collaboration with other agents in the digital ecosystem such as Telefónica, should incorporate courses into their curriculum designed to educate minors about the risks associated with online interactions and provide guidance on what to do if they or someone they know faces a potentially dangerous situation. Additionally, awareness programs should be offered to families, guardians, and teachers, equipping them with the tools to recognize signs that a child may be experiencing abuse or manipulation. These programs should also provide clear guidance on how to respond effectively to such situations to ensure the child's safety and well-being.

4. The Impact of *Social Media*

Despite their widespread popularity in the past decade, social media have been a part of the Internet since its early days. The first recognized social networking platform, SixDegrees.com, was launched in 1997. Shortly after, other platforms such as Meetup.com, Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook emerged, forming what may be considered the "first generation" of social media. At that time, internet access was limited, with few households owning computers; the only device available for internet access. As a result, the social media user base and its influence were relatively small.

In the early 2010s, the "second generation" of social media emerged, introducing platforms like Instagram, Vine, and Musical.ly (which was later rebranded as TikTok in the late 2010s). This marked the beginning of a rapid transformation in the digital landscape. As more people gained access to high-quality internet connections and a variety of devices such as smartphones and tablets, generations familiar with the Internet quickly adopted these new social media.

Today, social media are a central part of our daily life. According to the latest data, over half of the global population now uses social media. In 2023, of the 7.91 billion people worldwide, approximately 4.62 billion were active social media users. On average, users spend about two and a half hours per day on these platforms, which accounts for a significant portion of the seven hours a day the average person spends online[8]. Long-term projections suggest this could rise to three to four hours per day[9].

1

Introduction: Building
a Safe Digital Space
for Minors

2

Minors' Access to
Inappropiate, Offensive
and Harmful Content

3

Vulnerability of Minors
to Online Interactions

4

The Impact of
Social Media

5

Online Distribution of
Minors' Sexual Content

6

Non-Responsible
Use of Digital Devices
in Classrooms

7

Decalogue of
Principles: Towards
Responsible Design
and Use of Digital
Devices and Services

Three issues have been identified in relation to the influence and impact of social media on children:
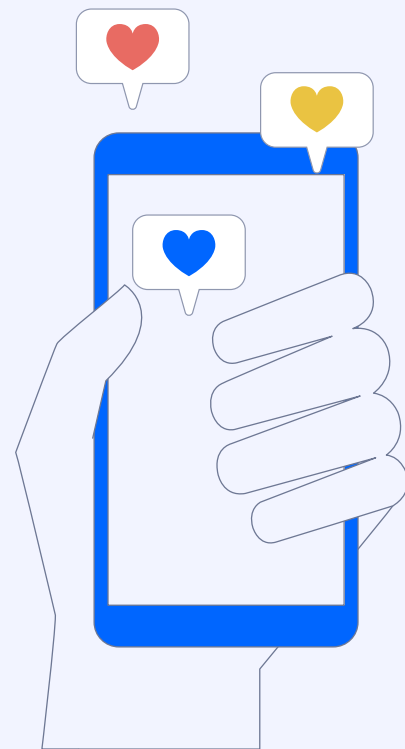
Development of Addictive Behaviours

Social media algorithms are designed to present users with content tailored to their interests, creating a continuous expectation for entertaining, informative, or amusing audiovisual content that provides immediate gratification or a sense of reward. Minors, in particular, are more vulnerable to this dynamic, as their brains develop reward systems earlier than their abilities to exercise self-control, delay gratification, and resist temptation. This is further amplified by attention-grabbing features of social media, such as infinite scrolling and by the rapid succession of images and videos enhanced with visual effects and scene transitions. As a result, minors can become deeply immersed in social media, losing track of time and finding it difficult to regain their focus. A survey conducted by Stem4[10] among young people revealed that two-thirds of respondents were concerned about the time they spent on social media, yet continued to use these applications frequently.

The Role of Influencers in Generating Expectations

Influencers are content creators with a large following on social media, often seen as successful both financially and socially. Minors, in particular, tend to view influencers as role models, leading them to follow the trends influencers promote and imitate their lifestyles. Beyond the income they earn from creating content, influencers also generate revenue through advertising partnerships. Minors are particularly vulnerable to this consumer-driven dynamic, often purchasing products or services they don't really need, based on the belief that these items will help them meet their desires or expectations.

Online Publication of Minors' Content by Family Members or Sharenting

Social media platforms offer users an easy and instant way to share moments they consider special with others. Many parents and family members, often unaware of the risks, post images and videos of their children online. However, with advances in technologies like deepfakes, a photograph of a child can be manipulated into a realistic image or video that cybercriminals may exploit for harmful purposes. For example, such content could be used to deceive families into providing financial compensation or to create illegal sexual content involving minors, which could then be distributed on illicit websites. It is estimated that 73% of children in Europe, and 92% in the US, have some form of social networking presence before the age of two[11].

1

Introduction: Building
a Safe Digital Space
for Minors

2

Minors' Access to
Inappropiate, Offensive
and Harmful Content

3

Vulnerability of Minors
to Online Interactions

4

The Impact of
Social Media

5

Online Distribution of
Minors' Sexual Content

6

Non-Responsible
Use of Digital Devices
in Classrooms

7

Decalogue of
Principles: Towards
Responsible Design
and Use of Digital
Devices and Services

● Telefónica's Initiatives
to Reduce the Impact of Social Media

Efecto Mil

Fundación Telefónica and Fundación Atresmedia have collaborated to develop the *Efecto Mil* initiative, which aims to raise awareness among minors about the risks of social media to encourage a responsible use. More specifically, it deals with addictive behaviour, misinformation, viral challenges, harassment and hate speech. To capture the attention of young people and involve them actively in the initiative, *Efecto Mil* launches an annual competition of short videos in which young people express their views on one of the above-mentioned topics.

↗ **Efecto Mil**

Let's Connect Responsibly and Learn about Sharenting

Telefónica Movistar Argentina launched a campaign to raise awareness about the excessive sharing of minors' content on social media by families. The campaign aims to promote responsible social media use within families and educate them on the importance of safeguarding the digital identity of children and adolescents. As part of this initiative, Telefónica Movistar Argentina introduced a dedicated website that provides valuable resources for families, guardians, and educators. The site offers information on the potential risks associated with sharenting, along with practical advice on how to mitigate these risks and ensure the online safety of minors.

↗ **Let's connect responsibly**   ↗ **Learn about Sharenting**

BASECAMP Dialogues with Young People

Telefónica O2 Germany joins the initiatives BASECAMP -a popular meeting place for Berlin's digital community- and WAKE UP! to offer an intergenerational discussion space where young people have the opportunity to talk directly to politicians, experts and representatives about the issues that concern them, as well as receive valuable tips on how to use social media competently and safely.

↗ **Dialogues with young people**

1

Introduction: Building
a Safe Digital Space
for Minors

2

Minors' Access to
Inappropiate, Offensive
and Harmful Content

3

Vulnerability of Minors
to Online Interactions

4

The Impact of
Social Media

5

Online Distribution of
Minors' Sexual Content

6

Non-Responsible
Use of Digital Devices
in Classrooms

7

Decalogue of
Principles: Towards
Responsible Design
and Use of Digital
Devices and Services

Proposals to Ensure a Safe Digital Space for Minors

1 **Promote the adoption of a Code of Conduct to be signed by social media platforms.** The protection of minors on social media platforms largely depends on the commitment and voluntary actions of these companies. To address this, we propose the development of a Code of Conduct that outlines a set of best practices aimed at safeguarding young users. Some key aspects to be included in the Code should be: disabling video previews in feeds to reduce exposure to inappropriate or excessive content; slowing down content update rates after a specified duration to interrupt continuous visual and auditory stimulation; and implementing time notifications to inform users about their time spent on the platform, with intervals determined by experts and psychologists specializing in digital behavior and mental health, among others. To ensure compliance, platforms that fail to adhere to these guidelines should face legal consequences or penalties, fostering accountability and prioritizing the well-being of minors in the digital space.

2 **Launch awareness campaigns about online risks for minors and promote a responsible use of social media.** Social media platforms revolve around user-generated content. Raising awareness could positively influence their behaviour when posting content, encouraging effective use of age labelling and ensuring that content accessible to minors is appropriate.

3 **Foster awareness initiatives for minors.** Educational centres, in partnership with other agents in the digital ecosystem such as Telefónica, should strive to raise awareness among young people on the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between their digital and real lives. These initiatives should emphasize the potential risks of social media and promote responsible, critical engagement with online platforms.

4 **Highlight the risks of sharenting for families, guardians and teachers.** The public sector, in partnership with other players in the digital ecosystem such as Telefónica, should strive to raise awareness among families, guardians and teachers of the risks to which they expose minors by giving them a presence on social media, especially if they are public accounts.
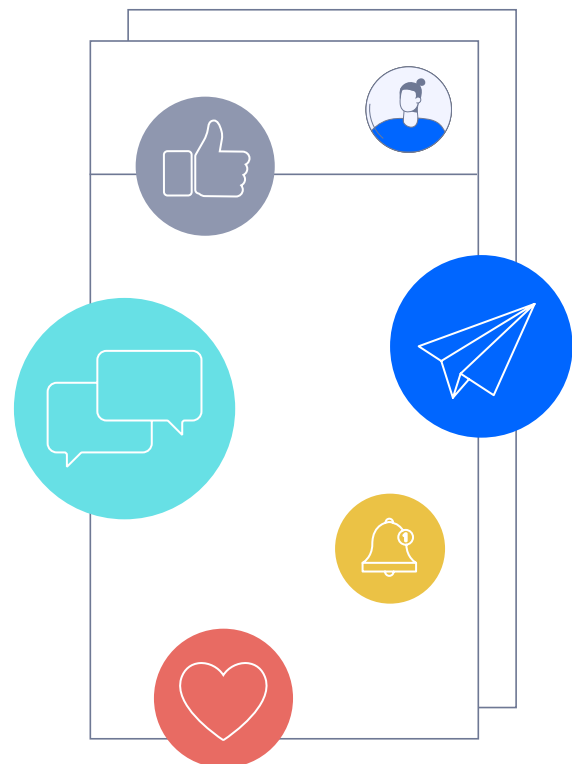
5. *Online* Distribution of Minors' Sexual Content

In the last decade, reports of online child sexual abuse have increased by a factor of 200 worldwide. Between 2019 to 2023 alone, there was an almost 90% increase in reported cases of child sexual material, with over 32 million incidents documented worldwide[12]. While precise forecast are unavailable, it can be anticipated that these numbers will continue to rise driven by advances in new technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI).

AI enables cybercriminals to generate highly realistic images of child sexual content with alarming speed and ease, often from existing photographs of children. This capability is fueling the proliferation of such material on illicit websites. The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)[13] identified more than 3,500 AI-generated child sexual abuse material were published on a single illicit website within just six months. According to IWF, 90% of the AI-generated images assessed by analysts were realistic enough to potentially fall under future regional or national legislation regulating child sexual abuse content. These developments underscore the urgent need for enhanced global efforts to address the misuse of AI in producing and distributing such harmful material.

Reports of online child sexual abuse have increased by a factor of 200 worldwide

1 Introduction: Building a Safe Digital Space for Minors

2 Minors' Access to Inappropiate, Offensive and Harmful Content

3 Vulnerability of Minors to Online Interactions

4 The Impact of Social Media

5 Online Distribution of Minors' Sexual Content

6 Non-Responsible Use of Digital Devices in Classrooms

7 Decalogue of Principles: Towards Responsible Design and Use of Digital Devices and Services

● Telefónica's Initiatives
to Combat the Distribution of Minors' Sexual Content

GSMA Mobile Alliance to Fight Digital Child Sexual Exploitation

Telefónica is member of the GSMA's Mobile Alliance to Combat Digital Child Sexual Exploitation, a coalition created to combat online child sexual abuse. The alliance fosters exchanging best practices with other companies, and promoting concrete actions around the responsible use of technology and child protection. Through the Mobile Alliance, the GSMA engages with various external stakeholders to address the issue of online child sexual abuse content. Among others, the GSMA is a member of the International Telecommunication Union's Child Online Protection initiative, is a member of the Financial Coalition Against Child Pornography, has developed with INHOPE a guide for child online abuse helplines and has offered its expertise to ICMEC to investigate cases of online child abuse and exploitation.

↗ GSMA Mobile Alliance

Blocking Child Sexual Abuse Content

As part of our commitment to fight child sexual abuse content, we block websites following lists provided by the Internet Watch Foundation for all our markets, with the exception of Colombia and Peru at the request of their governments. In Colombia, we follow the guidelines of the Colombian Ministry of Information Technology and Communications, the Directorate of Criminal Investigation and Interpol and judicial authorities. In Peru, we carry out blockades at the request of the authorities. In addition to blocking harmful websites, we actively work with authorities in case we detect child sexual abuse material. As an example, in Spain we collaborate with the National Police, the Civil Guard, the Data Protection Agency and INCIBE.
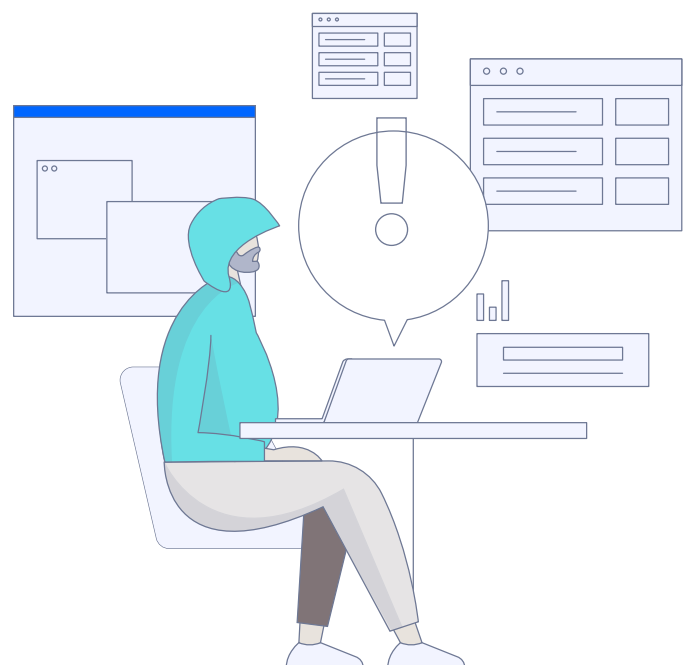
Terms of Mutual Co-operation Against Paedophilia

Telefónica Vivo Brasil is a signatory to the Mutual Cooperation Terms Agreement Against Paedophilia, a collaborative framework aimed at combating virtual crimes against minors. Other signatories include the Federal Senate, the Federal and State Public Prosecutor's Offices, the Federal Police, the Brazilian Internet Management Committee, the NGO Safernet Brazil, and other regional telecommunications operators. By signing this agreement, Telefónica Vivo Brasil commits to assisting in criminal investigations and prosecutions of cybercrimes against minors. With prior judicial authorization, the company provides essential user data for investigations, including connection details, registration information of individuals under investigation, accessed content, and associated IP addresses.

Proposals to Ensure a Safe Digital Space for Minors

1 **Adequately distribute the responsibility for detecting and blocking child sexual content across the entire digital value chain.** Effectively combating child sexual abuse content requires a shared responsibility. It's important to recognize that the dissemination of such content occurs not only via traditional electronic communication networks but also through platforms such as the Dark Web, Tor networks, anonymized proxies, encrypted browsing, and live-streamed events funded by cryptocurrencies. These channels often bypass existing regulations and the monitoring activities of operators, making it more challenging to address illicit activities. Telecommunications operators are already playing an active role in blocking child sexual abuse content. This includes collaboration with committed stakeholders, police, and law enforcement agencies to combat illegal content. Furthermore, operators are implementing measures to prevent its dissemination. However, there remains a critical need for greater involvement from other actors within the digital ecosystem, such as platform providers, hosting services, and financial intermediaries, among others, to contribute more effectively. To address this issue comprehensively, authorities, legislators, and digital ecosystem stakeholders must work together to establish stronger regulatory frameworks and international cooperation mechanisms. These efforts are vital to tackling the challenges posed by "dark" digital spaces where illicit activities persist unchecked.

2 **Differenciate between telephone number-based and telephone number-independent Interpersonal Communication Services when assigning regulatory obligations on the detection of child sexual content.** For instance, in Europe, the proposed Regulation to Prevent and Combat Child Sexual Abuse currently under development applies uniform responsibilities to all actors, regardless of their communication methods. This lack of distinction imposes disproportionate obligations on services like traditional SMS and voice calls, which are not typically used for disseminating visual content associated with child sexual abuse. Additionally, such obligations could conflict with telecommunications confidentiality requirements outlined in the ePrivacy Directive. To ensure effective and balanced regulation, a more nuanced approach is needed, assigning responsibilities that reflect the nature of each service while respecting users' privacy and existing legal frameworks.

1   Introduction: Building a Safe Digital Space for Minors

2   Minors' Access to Inappropiate, Offensive and Harmful Content

3   Vulnerability of Minors to Online Interactions

4   The Impact of Social Media

5   Online Distribution of Minors' Sexual Content

6   Non-Responsible Use of Digital Devices in Classrooms

7   Decalogue of Principles: Towards Responsible Design and Use of Digital Devices and Services

6. *Non–Responsible* Use of Digital Devices in Classrooms

The Internet provides students with quick and easy access to an expansive array of information, enabling them to explore topics beyond the scope of traditional textbooks. Through digital devices, young learners can engage with educational applications, resources, and interactive platforms that deliver a more dynamic and engaging learning experience, helping to sustain their attention and motivation throughout the educational process.

Moreover, the integration of digital tools and emerging technologies into education introduces young people to the digital world from an early age. On the one hand, they improve their ICT skills necessary for their participation in an increasingly digital society and working life, and their ability to adapt to a constantly changing space. On the other hand, it fosters the generation of new ideas, which help to drive innovation in the future.

However, while digital devices offer numerous advantages in the classroom, their use without clear pedagogical intent can lead to distractions, undermining the benefits of digitalisation and, in some cases, hindering the learning process.

Educational institutions often take measures to mitigate distractions by blocking access to websites that disrupt learning, such as social media platforms and online games. Despite these efforts, students frequently find alternative ways to divert their attention, including using messaging apps or unblocked websites.

Additionally, the rapid advancement and widespread accessibility of artificial intelligence have introduced new challenges. AI-powered platforms provide students with vast amounts of information and ready-made answers, reducing the effort required for academic tasks. While this ease of access can be beneficial, it also risks stifling the development of critical skills essential for the future, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity.

To maximise the potential of digital tools in education, it is crucial to adopt a balanced approach that combines thoughtful pedagogical strategies with robust digital literacy education. This ensures students can harness the advantages of technology while mitigating its potential drawbacks.

1
Introduction: Building
a Safe Digital Space
for Minors

2
Minors' Access to
Inappropiate, Offensive
and Harmful Content

3
Vulnerability of Minors
to Online Interactions

4
The Impact of
Social Media

5
Online Distribution of
Minors' Sexual Content

6
Non-Responsible
Use of Digital Devices
in Classrooms

7
Decalogue of
Principles: Towards
Responsible Design
and Use of Digital
Devices and Services

● **Telefónica's Initiatives**
to Foster a Responsible Use in Classrooms

Digital Technologies in Brazil's Municipal Educational Centres

With the aim of understanding the different realities faced by public educational centres in their digitisation process, Fundación Telefónica Vivo in Brazil presented the document *Digital Technologies in Brazilian Municipal Educational Centres: Scenario and Recommendations*. The document provides recommendations to support the Brazilian Ministry of Education to expand and implement policies and programmes for the adoption of digital solutions in the classroom, as well as to develop teachers and students' digital skills to foster a responsible use of technology.

↗ **Scenario and recommendations**

Digital Teachers

Digital Teachers (Docentes Digitales) is an initiative by Fundación ProFuturo designed to help educators become proficient in using various technological tools to create engaging and impactful learning experiences for their students. The courses offer teachers the opportunity to reflect on the pedagogical potential of the technologies they are learning to use, understand when and how these tools can be most effective, and engage in practical activities that they can share with their colleagues. To accommodate the diverse needs of educators, ProFuturo organizes the courses into four levels of digital competence: basic, intermediate, advanced, and expert. This structure ensures that teachers, regardless of their prior experience, can progress at their own pace, building confidence and skills in integrating technology into their teaching practices.

↗ **Digital Teachers**   ↗ **Learning to teach with technology**

ICT School Family

Fundación Telefónica Movistar in Colombia launched the ICT School Family project (Escuela TIC Familia) to train and support families and guardians in developing ICT skills, with the guidance of an educational advisor or tutor. The initiative recognizes family members and tutors as essential in safeguarding and ensuring the digital rights of minors. Their role is crucial not only within the family unit but also in educational communities. As part of this effort, Fundación Telefónica Movistar aims to strengthen the active and collaborative involvement of families and guardians in digital education, empowering them to play a more engaged role in their children's learning and overall digital development. By promoting this participation, the project seeks to foster a safer and more informed digital environment for young people.
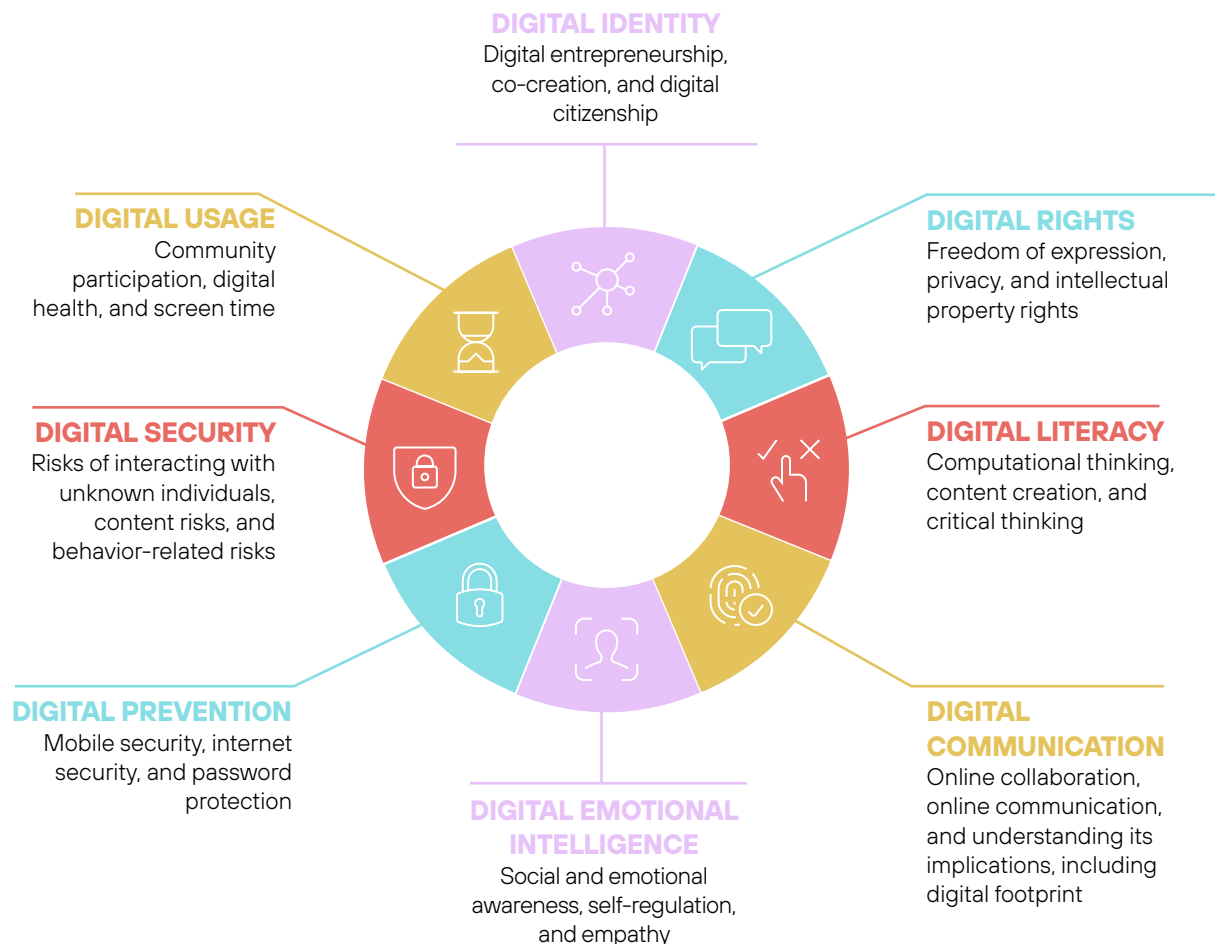
↗ **ICT School Family**

1
Introduction: Building a Safe Digital Space for Minors

2
Minors' Access to Inappropiate, Offensive and Harmful Content

3
Vulnerability of Minors to Online Interactions

4
The Impact of Social Media

5
Online Distribution of Minors' Sexual Content

6
Non-Responsible Use of Digital Devices in Classrooms

7
Decalogue of Principles: Towards Responsible Design and Use of Digital Devices and Services

Digital Leaders

Digital Leaders is a project developed by Fundación Telefónica as part of the Telefónica Volunteers Program. Its main purpose is to promote the responsible and beneficial use of technology among all members of the educational community, encompassing both the school and family environments, while also fostering the development of digital skills in children and young people. To achieve this, training sessions are provided to teachers, parents, and students in key areas such as developing digital competencies, fostering responsible technology use from an early age, encouraging healthy digital habits, empowering teachers in the digital transformation process, and raising awareness among families about their shared responsibility in the digital sphere. This comprehensive training is delivered by Telefónica Volunteers and is carried out over the course of a month, referred to as the "Digital Month". For teachers, the training includes 20 hours of theoretical self-study and 10 hours of practical workshops designed for classroom implementation, with a focus on fostering critical thinking and encouraging responsible practices.

⤤ Digital Leaders

DIGITAL IDENTITY
Digital entrepreneurship, co-creation, and digital citizenship

DIGITAL USAGE
Community participation, digital health, and screen time

DIGITAL RIGHTS
Freedom of expression, privacy, and intellectual property rights

DIGITAL SECURITY
Risks of interacting with unknown individuals, content risks, and behavior-related risks

DIGITAL LITERACY
Computational thinking, content creation, and critical thinking

DIGITAL PREVENTION
Mobile security, internet security, and password protection

DIGITAL EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
Social and emotional awareness, self-regulation, and empathy

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION
Online collaboration, online communication, and understanding its implications, including digital footprint

1

Introduction: Building
a Safe Digital Space
for Minors

2

Minors' Access to
Inappropiate, Offensive
and Harmful Content

3

Vulnerability of Minors
to Online Interactions

4

The Impact of
Social Media

5

Online Distribution of
Minors' Sexual Content

6

Non-Responsible
Use of Digital Devices
in Classrooms

7

Decalogue of
Principles: Towards
Responsible Design
and Use of Digital
Devices and Services

Proposals to Ensure a Safe Digital Space for Minors

1 **Raise awareness on the responsible use of digital devices and platforms before their implementation in the classroom.** Educational centres, in partnership with other players in the digital ecosystem such as Telefónica, should educate students on how to make a responsible use of digital devices and platforms in the classroom before implementing them. Additionally, students should receive further guidance to understand that these devices are complementary tools designed to enhance their skills and expand their knowledge.

2 **Support the introduction of devices with continuous training in digital skills and responsible technology use.** Educational centres, in partnership with key players in the digital ecosystem like Telefónica, should provide a continuous, progressive training program to guide students in their use of digital devices anld platforms. These programs should cover not only technical aspects, such as navigation and the use of educational software, but also broader digital competencies, such as identifying misinformation and understanding privacy, among others. Additionally, they should promote a healthy balance between screen time and non-screen activities.

7. Towards *Responsible* Design and Use of Digital Devices and Services

We face a significant challenge that requires the collective action of all stakeholders: the public sector, the private sector, academia, and society. "Cooperation" is a familiar concept to each of these actors, but it takes on special significance when it comes to minors' protection. It is crucial that all parties recognize the importance of ensuring a safe digital space and take responsibility in line with their activities and impact.

Telefónica proposes to tackle this challenge through the lens of responsible design and use, a perspective reflected in the recommendations outlined throughout this document. With this approach, we present a set of guiding principles to direct actions toward building a safe digital space for minors.
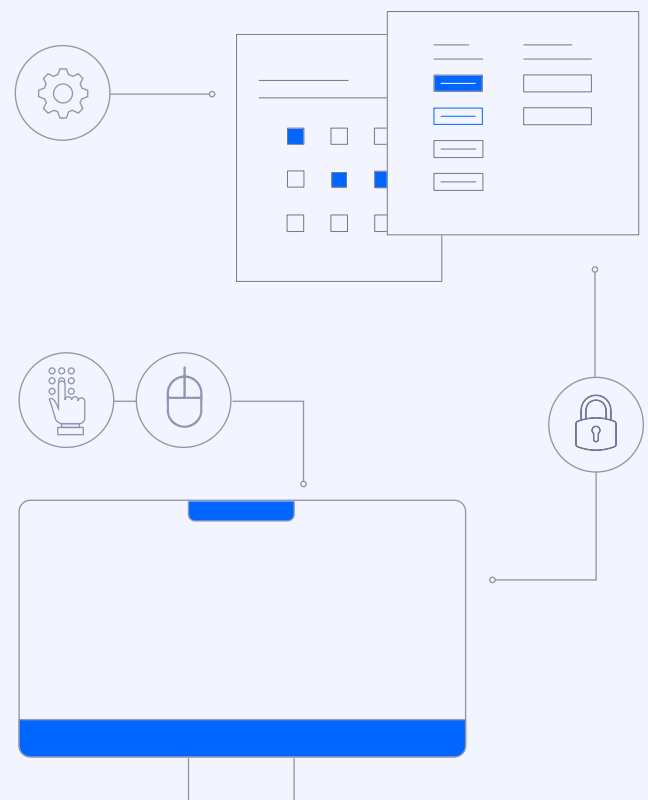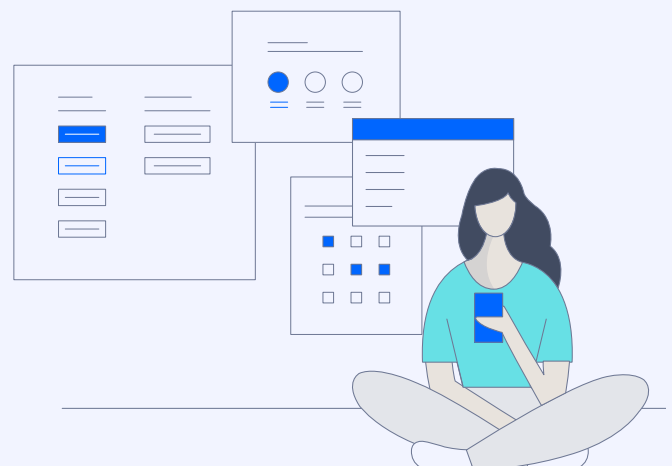
Decalogue of Principles
for Responsible Design and Use

Towards Responsible Design

1 Establish an effective age verification system on video-sharing platforms, social media, online video games platforms and adult content websites to prevent minors from accessing explicit and age-inappropriate content.

2 Implement best practices such as issuing warnings for excessive usage time, slowing down the reloading of sequential videos after this time, or deactivating the recommendation system based on interactions that create secondary profiles by default, among others.

3 Enable age classification for content in public user profiles, facilitating content filtering based on its appropriateness for the user's age group.

4 Facilitate a reporting tool that considers the different risks to which minors are exposed so that digital platforms can take appropriate measures according to the seriousness of the situation.

5 Offering an online help chat for minors who do not know how to manage their situation.

Towards Responsible Use

6 Include in the educational program courses or talks aimed at raising awareness among minors about the risks they face and promoting responsible use of digital devices and services.

7 Offer families and teachers awareness-raising talks and courses that provide guidance on how to detect potential risk situations and information on the tools available to them.

8 Include in the educational program courses for minors on responsible use of digital devices in the classroom.

9 Provide teachers with lectures and courses on how to effectively integrate digital technologies into the classroom.

10 Promote awareness campaigns aimed at society at large to increase awareness of the various risks minors face and provide a series of best practices to mitigate these risks collectively.

1
Introduction: Building a Safe Digital Space for Minors

2
Minors' Access to Inappropiate, Offensive and Harmful Content

3
Vulnerability of Minors to Online Interactions

4
The Impact of Social Media

5
Online Distribution of Minors' Sexual Content

6
Non-Responsible Use of Digital Devices in Classrooms

7
Decalogue of Principles: Towards Responsible Design and Use of Digital Devices and Services

References

1. BBFC (2020). Young people and pornography. https://www.revealingreality.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BBFC-Young-people-and-pornography-Final-report-2401.pdf Study conducted in the United Kingdom with minors aged 16 to 18.

Common Sense. (2022). Teens and Pornography. https://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/research/report/2022-teens-and-pornography-final-web.pdf Study conducted in the United States with minors aged 13 to 17.

Merlyn, M.F. et al. (2020). Pornography consumption and its impact on attitudes and behaviours in Ecuadorian university students. https://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2451-66002020000200059 Study conducted in the United Kingdom with young people aged 18 to 25.

Save the children (2020). Sexual (Mis)information: Pornography and Adolescence https://www.savethechildren.es/sites/default/files/2020-09/Informe_Desinformacion_sexual-Pornografia_y_adolescencia.pdf Study conducted in Spain with minors aged 13 to 17.

2. Youth Endowment Fund (2023). Children, violence and vulnerability https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2023/ Study conducted in England and Wales with minors aged 13 to 17.

3. C Rodway et al. (2022). Online harms? Suicide-related online experience: a UK-wide case series study of young people who die by suicide https://doi.org/10.1017/s0033291722001258 Study conducted in the United Kingdom that examined the backgrounds of suicides among young people aged 10 to 19 over a period of three years.

4. Hock, K., et al. (2024). Body Weight Perceptions Among Youth From 6 Countries and Associations With Social Media Use: Findings From the International Food Policy Study https://www.jandonline.org/article/S2212-2672(24)00517-3/fulltext#%20 Study conducted in Australia, Canada, Chile, Mexico, United Kingdom y United States with minors aged 10 to 17.

5. World Health Organization Europe. (2024). One in six school-aged children experiences cyberbullying. https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/27-03-2024-one-in-six-school-aged-children-experiences-cyberbullying--finds-new-who-europe-study Study conducted in 44 countries with minors aged 11 to 15.

6. Thorn (2022). Online Grooming: Examining risky encounters amid everyday digital socialization. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/2022_Online_Grooming_Report.pdf Study conducted in the United States with minors aged 9 to 17.

7. ESER. (n.d) Think Twice: The risks of online intimacy. https://www.eset.com/uk/thinktwice/ Study conducted in the United Kingdom with minors aged 12 to 17, and young people over 18.

2. DataReportal (2024). The time we spend on social media. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-deep-dive-the-time-we-spend-on-social-media

9. Arthur D. Little (2023). The evolution of data growth in Europe. https://www.adlittle.com/en/insights/report/evolution-data-growth-europe

10. Stem4. (2022). Body image among young people: negative perceptions and damaging content on social media, combined with pandemic fallout, contribute to a low sense of self-worth and a rise in eating difficulties, new survey reveals. https://stem4.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Body-image-among-young-people-Negative-perceptions-and-damaging-content-on-social-media...-new-survey-reveals-Dec-22.pdf Study conducted in the United Kingdom with young people aged 12 to 21.

11. Ferrara, Pietro et al. (2023). Online "Sharenting": The Dangers of Posting Sensitive Information About Children on Social Media. https://www.jpeds.com/article/S0022-3476(23)00018-5/fulltext

12. WeProtect Global Alliance (2023). Fourth Global Threat Assessment Report. https://www.weprotect.org/wp-content/uploads/Global-Threat-Asssesment-2023-Press-Release.pdf

13. Internet Watch Foundation (2024). What has changed in the AI CSAM landscape? https://www.iwf.org.uk/media/nadlcb1z/iwf-ai-csam-report_update-public-jul24v13.pdf

Building a *Safe* Digital Space for Minors
Towards Responsible Design and Use of Digital Devices and Services
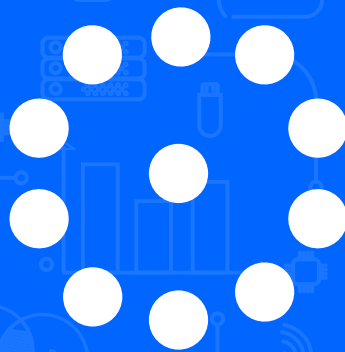
Follow the conversation on:
our **Web**, **Linkedin** or
subscribe to our **Newsletter**

Telefónica