

The Special Representative and the Team



The 'United Nations' or the UN, is an organization of almost all the countries in the world, created to promote development, peace and security, and human rights.

UN is a place where Member States (countries that are members of the UN) discuss common challenges and find solutions TOGETHER, for all humanity, including CHILDREN. The head of the UN is called the 'Secretary-General'. The UN Secretary-General selects people to work with him on specific issues.



The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (or SRSG-VAC), Najat Maalla M'jid is one of them.

Najat and her team help countries end all forms of **violence against children**, in all settings, everywhere, always putting children first!

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

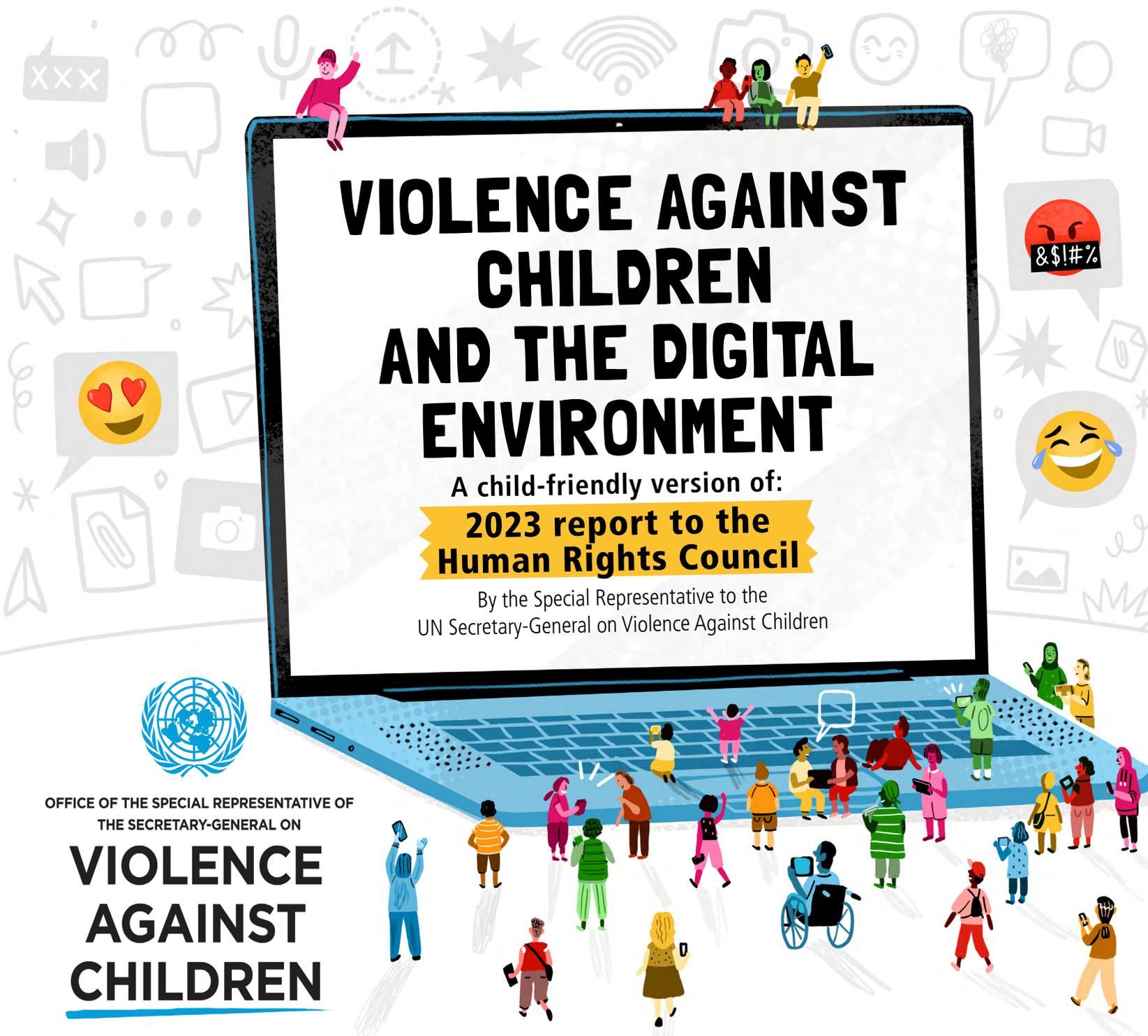
A child-friendly version of:
2023 report to the Human Rights Council

By the Special Representative to the UN Secretary-General on Violence Against Children



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN



ENGAGING WITH CHILDREN FROM ALL REGIONS!

Every year, Najat writes a report to the 'Human Rights Council', which is part of the United Nations, and is a group of countries (Member States) that work together on helping to achieve human rights.



This year (2023), her report was about 'Violence against children and the digital environment'.



This is a child friendly version of that report, developed FOR and WITH children like you!

HOW?

A few days before presenting to the Human Rights Council, Najat connected with over 500 children like you, from different parts of the world, to talk about violence against children and the digital environment.



She hosted dialogues with children in each region, which helped confirm her messages to countries, but also finalize this document and include information that would be relevant for children everywhere.



THIS IS WHAT CHILDREN WANTED TO KNOW



Children want to know more about cyberbullying. They want to know how to prevent it, how to respond to it, and how to support victims of cyberbullying.

Children are asking about **raising awareness** with their peers and trusted adults, they want to see **better laws in place**, and they are asking **how to protect groups of children in vulnerable situations**, who may be at higher risk of experiencing harm online.

Children want safer online platforms. They are asking about the role different adults play in putting a stop to violence online, and **they want tech companies to do more in building a safe online environment.**



CHILDREN EVERYWHERE HAVE SO MUCH TO SAY!

So many children participated with THEIR messages and questions. Here's just a few...

THE AMERICAS

'I'm here to talk for all of the children who are unable to express themselves because they are unaware they are having this problem (cyberbullying). I believe we need to think of another type of strategy or another effective manner to address this topic by identifying all of those cases of people that aren't even aware of this topic'.

'We need to increase the politics to safeguard the space...as children, as youth, and as leaders, we have an important role because we are in power and it is important to spread information with more children all over the world. We have an important role with the private sector, with parents, and with caregivers. We are all agents of change and we are the present'.

AFRICA

'Are you developing any sort of tool like the conventions on the rights of the child but specifically for online safety? For example, having children have their own digital rights'.

'Every challenge which are facing children who are using internet is similar, because almost every child in the dialogue spoke about cyberbullying'.

EUROPE

'Do you think we should start to implement laws and regulations that companies have to follow before they publish an application to make sure it's working towards the standards we need it to?'.

'What are we doing to ensure that in the creation of legislation and frameworks children and young people are included in expressing their ideas and being a part of the making?'.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

'You don't have to be afraid because you are not alone. We all are here for you and we will absolutely support you'.

'Awareness in schools is not enough. Awareness to just children is not enough. We need to spread awareness to children and families'.

ASIA & THE PACIFIC

'I suggest the governments collaborate with internet service providers and other technology companies to make child friendly environments and online safety for children'.

'For decision makers I have only one word: that is decisive. Many children have big hopes and faith in the decision makers, and they want to see the best from them. And you also have the power to do the best and to do what is right for the children'.



VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

For the past thirty years, the world has witnessed how technology and connectivity have become a central part of people's lives. You are lucky to be part of this historical time! The 'information era'. This is true for

over 63% of the world's population is online.

And did you know that **one-third of the world's Internet users are under the age of 18?**

As we make global efforts to connect more and more people to the Internet, this number will only continue to grow, so we need to make sure that the online world is SAFE for all children.



Like many things in life, the Internet has a positive and a negative side. Let's look at both.

THE ONLINE WORLD: LET'S LOOK AT THE GOOD! 🥰🥰🥰

The Internet (also known as the online and digital world) is AMAZING!

When children have access to digital technologies, it can help children fulfill many of **their** rights, like...

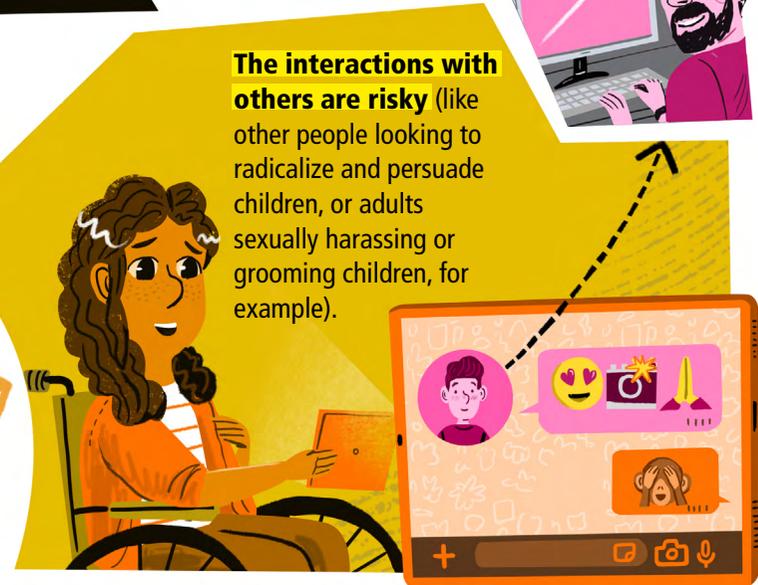


ONLINE RISKS: THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF THE INTERNET



The content children are exposed to online is harmful or not age-appropriate (violent, pornographic or sexual, hateful, or extremist, for example).

Online risks are the risks children are exposed to because they have access to the Internet, which can lead to children experiencing harm or violence.



The interactions with others are risky (like other people looking to radicalize and persuade children, or adults sexually harassing or grooming children, for example).



Children behave online in a way that puts them at risk (like when children write or post hateful comments about others, or when children bully each other online, or when they post or share images of themselves that could later be used to harm them).



Children agree to how their data and information are handled, without really understanding what they are agreeing to. This is very common with the 'Terms and Conditions' you must agree to when you sign into an app, game, or social media company for example.

The content children are exposed to online is harmful or not age-appropriate

Sometimes harm can happen as result of what you see online, because it may be illegal or not appropriate for your age.

We also talk about 'Harmful Content', which is anything online that can cause a person distress or harm, make you feel unsafe, uncomfortable or scared.



For example:



Content that is hateful, or that discriminates or harms others



Content promoting self-harm



Content about eating disorders



Content that is violent



Content that is sexually charged

Do not lie about your age online, as you may be exposed to content not appropriate for children.



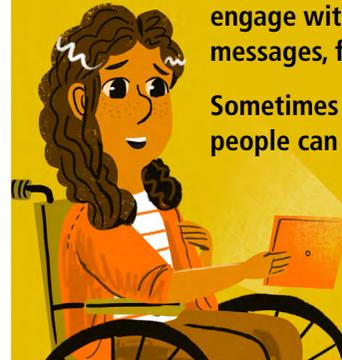
You can also block that kind of content online.

The interactions with others are risky



Children can be harmed as a result of who they engage with, whether it's through text, video call, messages, following each other in social media, etc.

Sometimes communication with other people can be risky, and could harm you. This could happen with people you know in real life, and with people you have only met online.



For example:

An adult could be seeking inappropriate contact or reaching out to a child for sexual purposes.

Sometimes a child can interact with a person online, and share information they could use for scams, identity theft and even child trafficking.

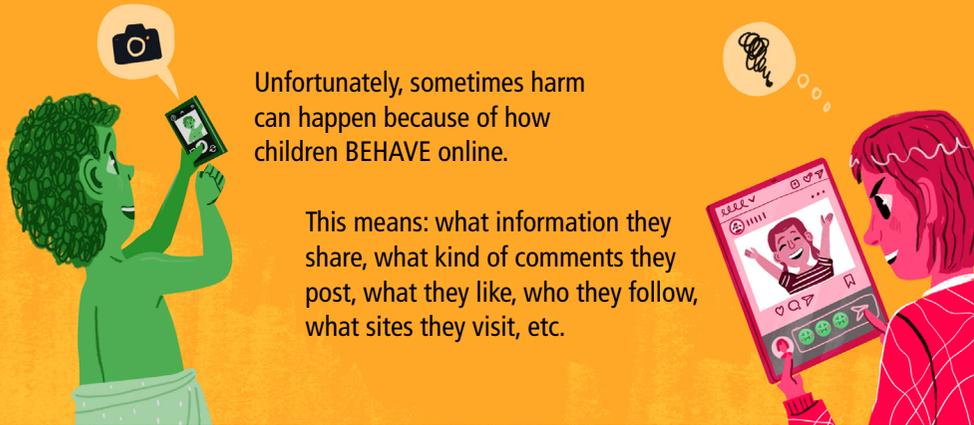
People may want to radicalize a child's thoughts. This may lead them to join violent or extremist groups.



These are just a few examples, and they often happen because children become 'friends' with people they have only met online through social networks and online games. Remember, online people are not always who they say they are.



Children behave online in a way that puts them at risk



Unfortunately, sometimes harm can happen because of how children BEHAVE online.

This means: what information they share, what kind of comments they post, what they like, who they follow, what sites they visit, etc.

A few examples of why children's behaviors could be risky or harmful are:



When children are mean to each other online.



When children create hateful materials about others, and post them encouraging racism, discrimination, xenophobia.



When children post or share images or videos of themselves that could later be used to harm them.



If something feels wrong 'in person', it's also probably wrong online.

Always treat others with empathy and respect.



We invite you to read more about cyberbullying in this same document, so we can all help end peer to peer violence.

Children agree to how their data and information are handled, without always understanding what they are agreeing to

Your online activity is transformed into data about you. This can include information about the sites you visit, the comments you write, where you move with your device, who you interact with, the things you buy and the apps you use.



This data can be used by companies who own the platforms and services you use for commercial reasons. Sometimes, children agree to this when they accept the 'Terms and Conditions'.



Agreeing to terms and conditions involves a sort of contract with the company, which can sometimes result in risks for children, like these examples:

- Targeted advertising
- Aggressive marketing schemes or hidden costs
- Misuse of personal data
- Discriminatory profiling of people



There are ways to limit the data you share through 'privacy control features'. Ask a trusted adult to help you set it up.



THE FOLLOWING ONLINE ENGAGEMENTS:

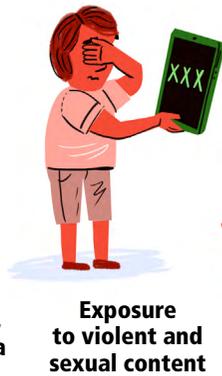
How you behave

What you see online

Who you interact with

What you agree to

Can result in what we call online risks



Online grooming is where someone befriends a child online and builds up their trust with the intention to cause harm such as sexual violence.

These are a few of the most common forms of online risks, although the list could be longer.



Even though there are many risks online, in the following document we will be focusing on forms of violence that happens between children.

As we will see in the following pages there is a very strong connection between offline and online violence. Not only can one lead to the other, but violent actions can be made worse through the internet, as they can leave a permanent footprint in cyberspace and quickly reach a wide audience.



AND WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE RISKS?

IT DEPENDS



Sometimes risks come from adults.



Sometimes nobody knows who's behind online risks.



Sometimes risks come from other children.

When children are the ones responsible for their peers experiencing harm or violence, we talk about 'peer-to-peer violence'.



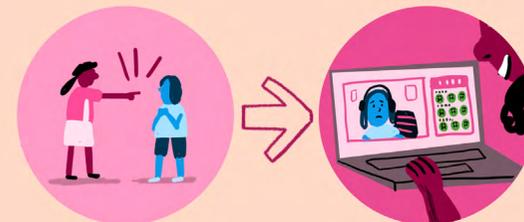
Let's look at one example of peer-to-peer violence:

Cyberbullying



Cyberbullying is a form of bullying or harassment that happens through electronic means, like cell phones, computers, and tablets. It can happen through chat, text, apps, social media forums, online gaming, or anywhere where people interact online.

A few things you may not know about cyberbullying.



There is a strong connection between in-person bullying and cyberbullying. Children who are likelier to be victims of in-person bullying, are also likelier to be victims of cyberbullying.

When children bully others online, it's common that they don't see the impacts of their actions, as there is always a screen between themselves and the children who suffer from bullying or harassment online. But bullying and cyberbullying are very harmful to children, causing:

Sleeping disorders

Depression

Low self-esteem

Anxiety

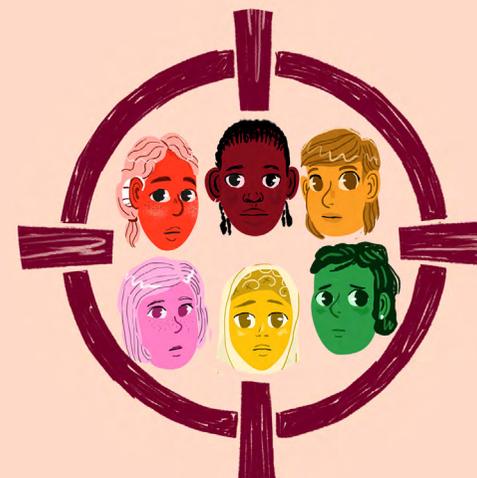
Alcohol and drug dependence

Aggression

Self-harming behavior (especially for girls)

Suicide

And more...



Girls tend to be targeted more than boys for their appearance, weight, sexuality, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and more. They are also more likely to be victims of gender-based harassment, exclusion, and reputational damage.

AND WHAT'S CHILDREN'S ROLE IN A BULLYING OR CYBERBULLYING SITUATION?

When responding to violence between children, it is important to respond in a way that guarantees the rights of all children. In bullying or cyberbullying, for example, there are at least three people involved:



The child or person who **IS BULLYING OTHERS** (who is probably reacting to other problems and also needs help)



The child or person who is **BEING BULLIED** (who is never to blame and who probably will need help in knowing how to respond to these situations).



THE BYSTANDERS are those who witness a situation of bullying (who may not always know it, but they could change and stop a situation of bullying).



Together we can all help put a stop to bullying!

HOW CAN WE CHANGE THIS SITUATION?

Bystanders CAN act!

Anyone who witnesses bullying, either in person or online, is a bystander.



For example, friends, students, peers, teachers, school staff, parents and coaches can be bystanders. With cyberbullying, even strangers can be bystanders.



There are bystanders who help or defend the child being bullied, there are those who reinforce the situations, and also there are those who do nothing.

Separately: 'If you ever witness a situation of bullying, we encourage you to **do something and help stop it.**

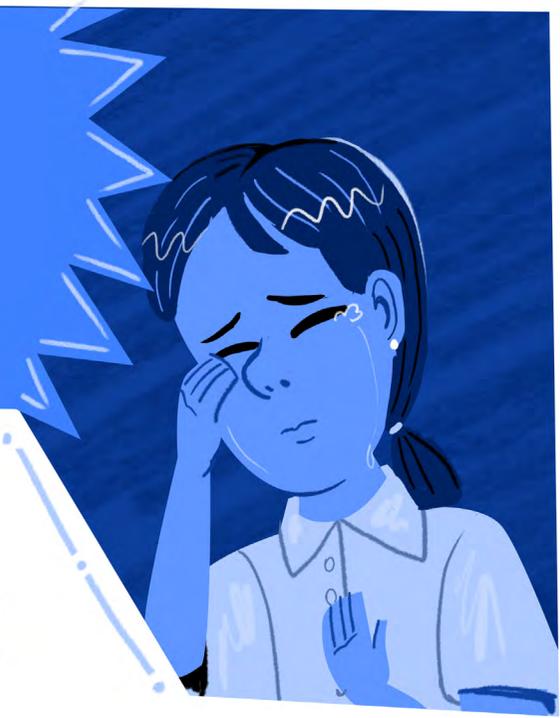


And bystanders do have a very important role when they decide to move from being passive observers to active defenders.



AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ACT?

Children who are being bullied will often feel more alone when there are witnesses who do nothing. If no one says or does anything, the child who's being bullied may feel that no one cares or that the witnesses agree with what is happening.



It is normal that bystanders sometimes don't know how to intervene, or that they may be unsure of the consequences of their actions.

Here are a few ideas of what you CAN do!



BEING MORE THAN A BYSTANDER!



You can say something and **speak up.**



You **can speak to an adult** if you don't feel comfortable speaking up.



You can **speak to your friends** and to other bystanders to help the situation.



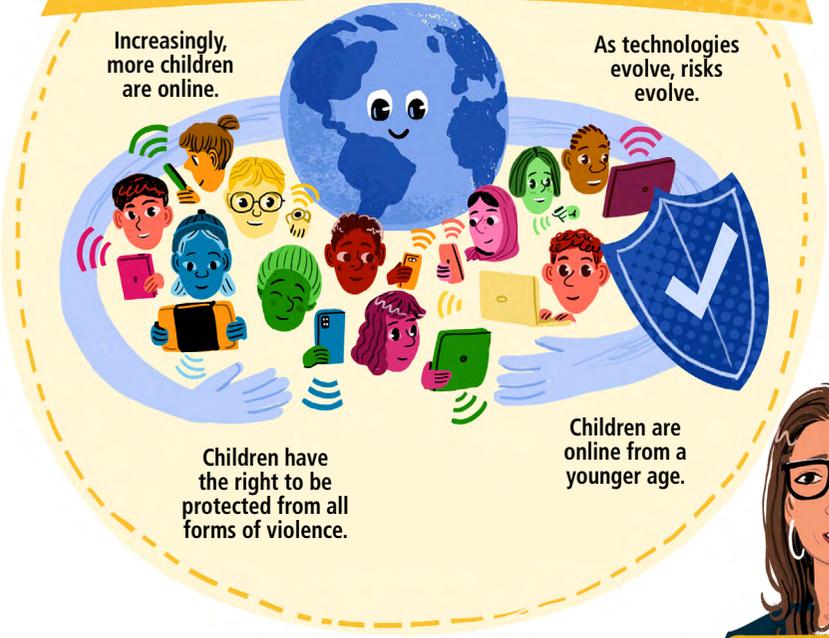
You can **show support to the child** who is being bullied (support takes different shapes! You can send them a message, call them, send them a funny video...)



You can **speak privately** to the child who is bullying.

And more...

And the world needs to move faster and better in protecting children from these risks because:



WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PUT A STOP TO VIOLENCE ONLINE?

Many things! Making the Internet safer and putting a stop to violence online is a shared responsibility. Everyone has a role to play:

Governments

Stronger rules on tech companies and others to ensure the platforms and online activities are safer.

Parents

Equip themselves with the knowledge and skills to protect their children online.

Educators

Equip children with the skills they need to be safe online.

Children and young people

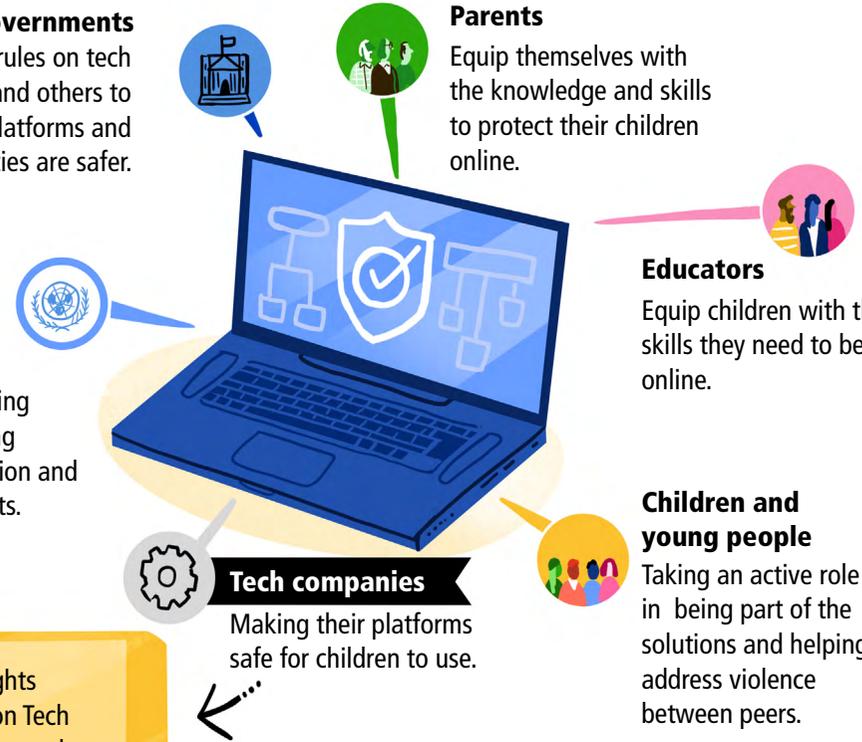
Taking an active role in being part of the solutions and helping address violence between peers.

Civil society organizations

Advocating, raising awareness, developing resources, supporting children's participation and working with parents.

Tech companies

Making their platforms safe for children to use.



In her report to the Human Rights Council, Najat put the emphasis on Tech Companies' responsibility in doing much more to protect children online.

What does this mean?
Here are a few suggestions:



Ensuring the safety of the platforms used by children in their design.



Platforms used by children should have better reporting systems, and quick ways of removing harmful content.



Platforms should have better ways of verifying the age of their users to avoid being used by younger children.



The platforms children use should incorporate better systems for moderating the content accessed by children.



Children should be involved in the designing and making of the platforms they use. So they can advise what works and what doesn't.

AND NAJAT ALSO RECOMMENDED THE FOLLOWING KEY MESSAGES TO ALL COUNTRIES

Prevention must be the priority.

We can't focus on fixing the problems after they occur. We need to make the online world safer and help prevent violence from happening in the first place.



Children have a role, and they are being part of the solutions.

Children have an important role in helping create a culture of safety online by:

Being kind to others. Empowering their peers on digital safety and wellbeing.



Respecting the Internet's rules of engagement.



Not replicating negative actions.



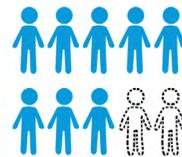
Taking action and using digital tools to build a better, safer, greener, and more inclusive world.



And what do children think?

In early 2023, in collaboration with 'WeProtect Global Alliance' (a global movement of governments, organizations and tech companies working together to end child sexual exploitation online) we asked close to 600 children from all regions of the world their views on online safety.

And this is what we learned from them:



8 out of 10 think it's 'likely' or 'very likely' for children to experience things that may harm them or make them feel unsafe online.



We asked them which are the **biggest risks for children when being ONLINE**, and the vast majority chose **being asked to do something sexual** they're uncomfortable with, followed by **interacting with someone who is pretending to be someone else**.



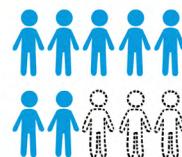
Out of the different online spaces, **most children feel most safe in private messaging apps and least safe in social media platforms**.



Most children think they're more likely to **be at home when experiencing harm or abuse online**.



We also asked them which are the **biggest risks for children when PLAYING ONLINE GAMES**, and most children chose **experiencing bullying, harassment or discrimination**, followed by **interacting with someone who is pretending to be someone they're not**.



Almost **7 out of 10** children think that **people - adults, children and young people - they don't know are likely to harm them online**.



To make the online world safer, children wanted to see **stronger laws to deal with harm and abuse, and clear ways of reporting harmful and abusive content inside the platforms**.

10 TIPS FOR BEING SAFE ONLINE



Do not share any personal information online, like your phone number, where you live, your location, where you go to school, your family name, or bank information.



Don't stay online if you see something uncomfortable, or something that your parents or guardians would not like or approve of.



Do not like, post or share negative comments about others. If something feels wrong in-person, it's probably also wrong online.

It is not recommended to meet in-person with someone you met online. But if you have made a friend online and you decide to meet up in real life, keep safe by taking a trusted adult with you.



Think before you post: Stop and think before filling out forms online, updating your status or posting pictures and videos of yourself or your friends. Think about who can see what you post online, because once shared, you can easily lose control.



Do not send pictures or videos of yourself to strangers.

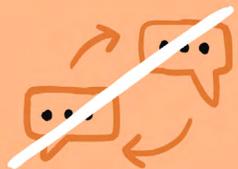


Treat others with respect online. If someone upsets you, do not react. Block or report the person, and tell an adult you trust. Never bully anyone, and if being bullied, talk to a friend or trusted adult.



Don't share your passwords with anyone but your parents or guardians.

Don't download or install anything without your parents or guardian's permission. It may contain a virus that could harm or ruin your device.



Don't respond to texts, e-mails or messages from strangers. If you ever see a message that makes you uncomfortable, talk to your parents or guardian about it.



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Check
out other
child-friendly
reports and
resources
here

Let's
continue the
conversation



violenceagainstchildren.un.org



[un_violenceagainstchildren](https://www.instagram.com/un_violenceagainstchildren)



srsg-vac@un.org



[UNviolenceagainstchildren](https://www.facebook.com/UNviolenceagainstchildren)



[@UN_EndViolence](https://twitter.com/UN_EndViolence)

Illustrations by [@oyemathias](https://www.instagram.com/oyemathias)