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At High-Level Policy Session 10 - Ethical Dimensions of Information
and Knowledge Societies (26 March 2021)
WSIS Forum 2021

“Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests and Attendees, thank you for joining, and warm greetings from Helsinki, Finland. ICTs, digital technologies, and associated services are recognised as a fundamental enabler of economic and social development, that is the growth of smart connected and sustainable society, and of course, to achieve the SDGs.

I would like to call attention to an area of growing and utmost importance – the interrelationship between children and technology. More than ever, Children and Young People are utilising, engaging, and inhabiting the digital space. For several years social networking and gaming platforms have brought children online for recreation, and now the COVID- 19 pandemic has brought many of them online for school and remote learning. Children’s contact with technology is not confined to the traditional IT space, however, as physical toys are now connected, generating, and capturing data, even when it is not obvious to children and parents

The very nature of privacy is increasingly under scrutiny in the digital age, as the technologies that mediate communication, information and data of all kinds is globally networked, commercially valuable, and algorithmically analysed. Everyday actions generate data, whether given by digital actors, observable from digital traces, or inferred by others, either human or algorithmic.

The intersection of technology and children is an area of high impact.

Many social platforms used by children are not designed with children’s rights and well-being in mind. As a result, they often fail to consider the vulnerabilities and unique capacities that children have. Children must be able to explore, learn and develop in trustworthy, safe environments that enable them to fulfil their curiosities at an age-appropriate level, and within the context of their familial societies.



The current landscape is unmanaged and unregulated. High-level principles have emerged, but they lack technical specificity and standardisation/certification, to govern and promote better practice. As such, there is a real danger that innovative technologies could be used in invasive and exploitative ways.

As the Founder of Iron Lakes, a consultancy based in Finland that empowers businesses and civil society to address and solve their biggest challenges through deployed technological innovations in data interoperability and portability that take into account ethical, security, privacy, and sustainability concerns, by design. Together, with our partner, Future Memory, Inc., in Canada, we are undertaking research examining how the quantified play experienced in gaming might influence children's sense of identity and their interaction with the world.

Being in Finland, I should also mention that Finland has expanded its support to the UN's work in child-centricity. Finland supports UNICEF's two-year Artificial Intelligence and Children Project; its goal, to establish policy guidance on how AI strategies and practices can best promote child rights and children's development. Finland also supports the ITU and UNICEF's Giga project for connecting all schools to the Internet. At a municipal level, the City of Imatra in Eastern Finland is leading the Nesttec Project, in collaboration with a school in St Petersburg, Russia, focusing on engagement and education in STEAM subjects for children either side of the Finnish – Russian Border.

Looking beyond the borders of Europe, the UK has adopted the next generation of child-centric data protection policies, which will be coming into force in September. Indeed, moves are afoot by civil society actors in Australia to push for similar upgrades in the law. As we speak, the Sri Lankan Government is moving towards Cabinet Approval for their National Response to Online Child Sexual Exploitation and abuse. Fiji is also making some bold and innovative moves, including the introduction of an eSafety Commissioner. And further afield, in Cambodia, the National Council for Children is developing and implementing a comprehensive action plan around Child Online Protection.

We must acknowledge the sheer scale and breadth of this undertaking; and that technological constructs and ontological concepts vary between the global north and south; and as such, the acceptability, experiences, and priorities in the child-centric sphere are as diverse as our children. We should not assume that a successful model made in the Global North and



deployed in the Global North would govern the same level of success for those in areas of deployment in the Global South.

Community-forged ecosystems are needed to lower the barriers of engagement and enable a collaborative, global, and inclusive community to build, develop, and continually iterate better practices for products and services intended for children, such as connected toys, social platforms, or online games.

This is why I have started the IEEE Trustworthy Technical Implementations of Children's Online/Offline Experiences Program, the aim of which is to collaboratively develop a market-based framework to define and enable transparent, accountable operations of children's products and services – with the benefit of this being lowered barriers to engagement, the cultivation and influencing of key stakeholders and groups in a newly defined child-centric arena.

IEEE has a strong open process and technical community working on ICT, gaming, AI, and other technologies, and has standards projects focused on age-appropriate design, nudging, (disruptive) behaviour in gaming, and ethical considerations around affective computing. Furthermore, IEEE compiled a report on applied case studies on children's data governance, being released next week, and will compile more such case studies.

Now is the time for creativity, innovation, and open collaboration to forge new paths. We need to work together to promote the generation of novel standards that will better shape industry, intersectional engagement, and representation to support the ecosystem for solutions that contribute to children's wellbeing and flourishing.

Thank you."

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