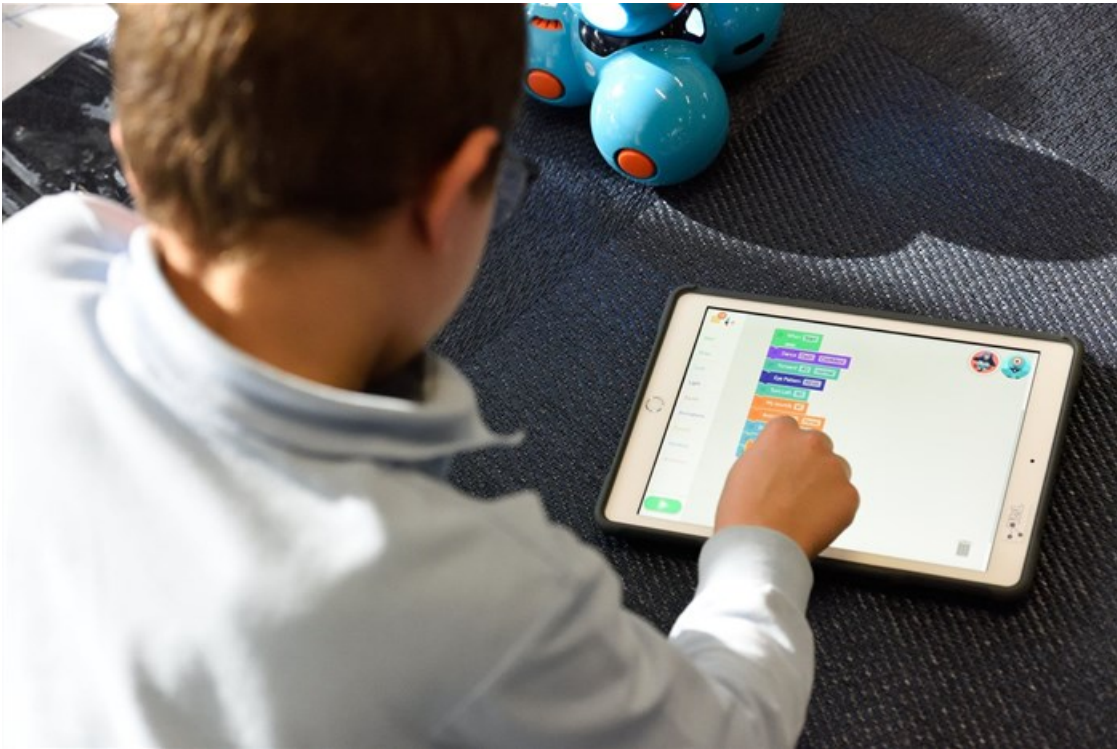


Children urged to take full advantage of their digital rights

Children in South Africa have been urged to become active digital citizens and take full advantage of their digital rights.



Source: [Unsplash](#)

This comes after a webinar on creating a safer internet space for children was hosted by the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) in partnership with Digify Africa on Tuesday, 29 March.

The webinar aimed to highlight the importance of online safety, recommend interventions to protect children online and promote responsible digital citizenry.

One of the panelists, Phakamile Khumalo from Media Monitoring Africa, said that it is really important to understand what children and young people are doing online.

She said despite the enormous challenges of access and digital literacy, children are online.

Referring to a South African study by Unicef together with the Department of Social Development, Khumalo said that 70%

of children surveyed have used the internet without parental consent and only 41% surveyed have some sort of information about online safety.



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"The children are using the internet be it at home, school or at a friend's place and not a lot of them have the resources to be safe online. Children in South Africa are not in a position to fully take advantage of their digital rights or become active digital citizens.

"It is so important that our young people begin to become active digital citizens and this is now leading to the skills resources and platform to be able to participate in the digital world in a way that enhances our democracy as a country."

Khumalo added that although children are using the internet they are not using it wisely or in a way that puts them on platforms where they can participate in high-level discussions and decision-making processes.

She said the Covid-19 pandemic has shown the country that digital literacy skills are no longer a nice-to-have, but rather a must-have for every child.

"The only way to achieve this is through the integration of digital and media literacy skills into the schooling curriculum. In order for us to overcome this challenge of lack of digital skills among children is to integrate it into the schooling curriculum. They must start using the internet in meaningful way, to advance their careers, become influencers and make it work to their advantage," she said.

Safe content for children

Mmaletjema Poto, child protection officer at the Film and Publications Board (FPB) spoke about the dangers young people face online and what parents and adults at large can do to make sure children consume content that is safe for them.

Poto said that one of the biggest challenges the country faces online is the issue of child sexual abuse material, known as child pornography.

She said the FPB is passionate about fighting this challenge as there is a lot of distribution of such content.

"Through our outreach programmes, we find that there are a lot of children especially teenagers who are creating child sexual abuse material without being aware of that, but also most importantly we have adults that are distributing such content without being aware of the dangers of it.

"When we talk about such material we talk about evidence of a child being raped and in the SA community it has been a norm for people to be on social media and feel comfortable enough to share such content," Poto said.

Poto said communities that also show videos containing violence against children need to look at the impact of such content and the impact it has on families and the victims themselves.

She said it is important for people to be mindful of those who are affected.

"We need to make sure that such acts are punished by law so that people understand the seriousness of the offence. Public participation is important in the work that the FPB does, when they come across such content they must call and report it," she said.

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