



CHILDREN AND DIGITAL DEVICES

Protecting children's online safety on digital devices

Guidance Note

For educational authorities, NGO partners and institutions who wish to provide children with safe digital devices for distance learning

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UNICEF Albania



Introduction

The COVID-19 emergency has changed how children and adolescents around the globe are being educated, with distance schooling and studying online becoming the new normality for school children almost everywhere. While children, teachers and parents started necessary adaptation, this novelty suddenly unveiled at unprecedented scale, new equity gaps, risks and vulnerabilities.

In Albania alone, 571,566 children are affected by the closures of educational institutions. Their traditional schooling experience suddenly got reshaped with technology, internet, screen and e-platform driven learning as a substitute for the classrooms and hardcover books. While many children perhaps got excited with the idea to be 'online' more often, their parents, caregivers and teachers found themselves mostly unprepared neither for digital literacy support nor for guidance to online safety. Longer hours online connected through digital devices both for entertainment and for education purposes, means increased exposure to online risks for children.

In addition, policymakers and child rights advocates started to worry about the new emerging inequalities. Absence of internet enabled devices at home, connectivity costs (mobile or broadband) coupled with the lack of basic digital literacy, has widened the gap between the children and families who can't afford and don't know how to follow online schooling and the rest of the population. Public institutions and non-governmental organisation are mobilizing resources to ensure access to digital devices to those children whose families cannot afford internet connectivity, so as to ensure that they continue having access to education and other online-based services and resources during the covid-19 pandemic situation.

In this context, this note aims to provide guidance to relevant actors on the recommended measures and steps that they will need to implement to ensure that devices distributed to children with the aim of ensuring internet connectivity will minimize children's exposure to online risks and security related threats, while allowing them to maximize the benefits of their online experience.

The guidance note will prove beneficial to educational authorities, development or philanthropic partners, NGOs as well as ICT industry actors that are engaged in distribution of digital devices for children.

Definition of digital device: A digital device is an electronic device that can receive, store, process or send digital information. In this guidance note, we refer to *personal computers, smartphones and tablets* as examples of digital devices.

For every child, a safe digital device

UNICEF Albania advises governmental and non-governmental institutions to guarantee that if the digital devices are distributed to children, they must be safe by design. Digital devices should also be child-friendly so that children shall be able to easily access and understand the content and all the features of the device.

- 1) **Procurement phase:** In order to minimize situations in which children might encounter harmful behaviour and content, safety features need to be built into technological products or services from the outset. If you or your company are planning to acquire digital devices that will be used by children, ensure that contracts with ICT suppliers envisage safety and security considerations in all digital devices, including:
- a. **Manual for the use of the device** translated in Albanian;
 - b. **Protective cases (dustproof, shockproof) and protective glass and safe headphones** for children receiving the digital devices should be purchased together with the digital devices;
 - c. **The dimension of the screen** of the digital device should be at least 7-inch for a safe experience;
 - d. Digital devices should have **chargers and power adaptor for 220 volts** (as per Albanian households use);
 - e. **Pre-installed educational and collaboration applications** (as per educational authorities' guidance and usage) grouped in one folder or with shortcuts on the desktop of the digital device. Some examples include:
 - i. Educational e-learning platforms: Adakemi.al; School me, etc;
 - ii. Digital learning management systems: Class Dojo, Google Classroom
 - iii. Collaboration applications: Zoom, Skype, What's App.
 - f. Digital devices should have **2 modalities/accounts** already installed and running: one password protected account for parents as Administrator and one for the child. Through the parental account, the parent should be able to manage different safety features of the child's account: how much time they can use the digital device per day, what they can and cannot watch/play, manage their installed apps, etc. When it comes to younger children, those features could include parental controls, firewalls, and apps designed specifically for children. Other measures could include content rating and classification so that children do not have unwanted exposure to extreme violence and pornography; age verification tools; tools for reporting misuse and abuse; as well as removal and blocking of illegal content such as child abuse material.
 - g. Ensure that **Antiviruses** are provided across all systems and devices, including installation, at least 3-year guarantee, licences and related keys. The Antivirus should provide total protection, including comprehensive protection for the systems and should be able to guard against the latest threats – block viruses, malware, ransomware, spyware, unwanted programs, etc.
 - h. Ensure **maintenance of device** and support to families for at least 2 years from delivery to beneficiary (either with a contact number for remote support or through a face to face support expert).

- 2) **Internet connectivity:** To ensure effective internet access for vulnerable children, organisations or institutions purchasing and delivering digital devices should consider supporting families with internet connectivity packages such as:
- a. **Pre-registered SIM cards** in case the digital device is working with 3G-4G (e.g. tablets). SIM cards should be automatically set for only data (ideally 5GB data for videos, uploading and remote learning), while the telephone modality should be disabled to ensure families are not charged with additional costs;
 - b. **Filtered internet connection** from child abuse materials and adult pornography (for both broadband cabled internet and Wi-Fi). A filtered internet connection reassures parents and caregivers that the internet children are using blocks access to adult pornography and all the blacklisted child sexual abuse web contents. "[Friendly Wi-Fi](#)" Albania initiative is an example of a certification standard that in collaboration with the Internet Service Providers can ensure that access to the internet is protected from child sexual abuse and adult pornography. Application form for businesses and service providers available [here](#).
- 3) **Parent Control Guide:** Upon delivery of products, ensure that dedicated Parental Control Guides are provided to parents, caregivers and teachers in Albanian language, including easily understandable options for them to download and monitor. The guide can be in printed booklets or through audio-visual materials and should contain the minimum information for parents on how to:
- open email addresses;
 - block websites and filtering illegal and harmful content;
 - set limits and monitor the activities of children
 - manage screen time tools;
 - disable location tracking;
 - connect all children's digital devices to parent's accounts, etc.

Examples on how to enable parental controls:

1. [How to turn on SafeSearch on Android Operating Systems:](#)
2. [Use parental controls on your child's iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch](#)

- 4) **Accessibility:** When providing digital devices for children with disabilities ensure their compliance with the standards of accessibility as per best practice in assistive technologies¹.

¹ Assistive Technology for Children with Disabilities: a discussion paper, WHO/UNICEF, 2015 UNICEF, Available at: <http://www.unicefinemergencies.com/downloads/eresource/docs/Disability/Assistive-Tech-Web.pdf> ; Assistive Product Specifications for Procurement: <https://at2030.org/at-procurement-workshops/>

Examples:

- E-learning platform for children with hearing impairment, "I Learn/Unë mësoj" (on payment); [The website for persons with hearing impairment](#) which can be inserted as a short cut on the digital device's desktop.
- Accessibility for persons with vision impairment can be ensured with digital devices operating on [IOS systems](#).

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Useful Resources

One Click Away: Children's Experiences of Internet Use in Albania (UNICEF Albania, 2019)
European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children (European Commission, 2012)
Child Safety Online: Global Challenges and Strategies (UNICEF Office of Innocenti, 2011)
Digital Literacy for Children Exploring definitions and Frameworks (UNICEF, 2019)
Guidelines for Industry on Child Online Protection (ITU and UNICEF, 2014)
Friendly WiFi Albania (Friendly WiFi Initiative webpage)
Child online safety quiz for children (I-Child quiz for online safety)
Peer to Peer Manual for Online Safety (in Albanian) (AKCESK and UNICEF Albania, 2019)
Access to School and the Learning Environment, Physical, Information and Communication (UNICEF, 2014)
Assistive Technology for Children with Disabilities: a discussion paper Assistive Product Specifications for Procurement (1 , 2) (World Health Organization, 201)
Module 1: Child Rights and the ICT Sector (UNICEF, 2019)
Module 2: COP Guidelines for ICT Industry (UNICEF, 2019)
Communication for Development Strategies to Support and Empower Adolescent Girls (UNICEF, 2013)
Raising Learning Outcomes: the opportunities and challenges of ICT for learning (UNICEF, 2018)
Policy guide on children and digital connectivity (UNICEF, 2018)
A Series of Tutorials for Beginners (Website with Android operating systems tutorials, accessed May 2020).