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# Digital literacy for children: 10 things you need to know

## 1 Digital literacy goes beyond technical know-how.

It refers to the knowledge, skills and attitudes that allow children to be both safe and empowered in an increasingly digital world. This encompasses their play, participation, socializing, searching and learning through digital technologies. What constitutes digital literacy will vary according to children's age, local culture and context.

## 2 Children need to be digitally literate even when they are not online.

Facial scanning and artificial intelligence-based profiling increasingly affect children's lives. Children's schooling, social welfare and future job opportunities may depend on how well they understand the digital world around them.

## 3 Digital literacy is a growing part of any approach to skills development.

It features in UNICEF's framework which seeks to prepare children and adolescents for school, work and life. In addition to digital literacy, other interconnected skills for UNICEF are: foundational skills (literacy and numeracy); transferable skills (also known as life skills, 21st-century skills or soft skills); and job-specific skills (technical and vocational skills).

## 4 Tools to develop and assess digital literacy are proliferating.

A number of digital competence frameworks have been developed by both international agencies and companies. Frameworks are a necessary starting point as they define the boundaries of what constitutes digital literacy and inform curricula and assessments. Despite using a range of labels (e.g. digital literacy, skills, citizenship), they broadly converge around the idea of a set of competencies that include technical as well as transferable skills, such as communication and problem solving.

## 5 Yet most existing tools place little emphasis on children.

Digital literacy definitions usually focus on citizens of all ages and not on children specifically. UNICEF believes there is a need to focus more on digital literacy for children, who have unique needs. In this area, there is a slow change from a risk and safety paradigm towards rights-based approaches that favour expression, play and development.

## 6 Few programmes operate at scale or have been evaluated for impact.

One contributing factor is the lack of global consensus and standards that makes it difficult for governments and other stakeholders to design and implement comparative and cost-effective initiatives, especially within developing countries.

## 7 Similarly, UNICEF programmes would benefit from greater coordination.

While UNICEF has delivered a range of digital literacy programmes at the request of governments, a survey of 40 initiatives carried out by 37 Country Offices shows they are not well coordinated with each other, and knowledge is not systematically generated or shared about efficacy and impact.

## 8 Implementing digital literacy is not easy.

According to the Country Offices surveyed, key barriers to digital literacy programming are: lack of teachers' and trainers' capacity; lack of ICT infrastructure; low

connectivity (especially for remote areas); and a lack of understanding from decision-makers. The Country Offices are asking for policy development support, digital literacy frameworks, curriculum guidelines and practical tools, such as training manuals and toolkits.

## 9 Some existing digital literacy frameworks or tools suit UNICEF well.

These include the DigComp framework of the European Commission and the Digital Kids Asia-Pacific framework developed by the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Office in Bangkok. If using existing digital literacy frameworks, UNICEF can add value by focusing on children.

## 10 Digital literacy programmes should be context-driven.

Implementing digital literacy programmes effectively requires more than simply importing a good programme from elsewhere. Beyond choosing a framework, an integrated approach to digital literacy involves undertaking a preliminary diagnostic review of the local context, developing operationalization guidelines and conducting impact assessments.

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Read more in the scoping paper 'Digital literacy for children: exploring definitions and frameworks' published in August 2019.

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