

Children's Rights Online Hub Community Consultation Report

July 2026



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1. Summary

In early 2026, the Digital Freedom Fund (DFF) consulted with groups and individuals working on the rights of children and young people to determine whether we should create a hub where these groups can form stronger partnerships and share knowledge to develop legal strategies that protect our children online. This report highlights that there is an urgent need to develop this collaborative space, especially to jointly strategise on topics such as child-centred AI and platform design, and prevention of online abuse of children.

2. Background

In today's technology-driven world, it is more urgent than ever to protect our children. AI is embedded in the everyday lives of many young people. They turn to AI chatbots for companionship, homework, and to play. Similarly, online platforms are used for socialising, accessing information, self-expression and having fun. Unfortunately, these technologies were not designed to prioritise their best interests and safety. Many of these tools are designed to be addictive, exposing children to sexual predators and harmful content. Profit, not children's well-being, is at the centre of these technologies.

Given the universality of the issues children are facing and the limited resources that those of us striving for children's best interests have, we decided to consult with others working on online children's safety to determine whether there is a need to establish a shared space to collaborate on legal strategies to protect our children.

3. Hub concept

The basic concept of the Children's Rights Online Hub is a space where 30+ groups across Europe, Latin America and Africa can jointly collaborate and share knowledge on legal strategies that protect our children from online harms. The Hub would help raise funding for some of the most promising cases developed in the Hub, either directly through DFF or our funder network.

Through the consultation process, our participants have provided us with a list of over 50 children's rights groups, youth and parent associations, legal organisations, funders and regional collectives like UNICEF, EDRi and BEUC who could be invited to apply to join the Hub.

The Hub would build on almost a decade's worth of experience by DFF bringing together the digital rights community, and specific, practical expertise already running hubs on

AI and Digital Democracy. It also builds on our existing expertise of funding legal strategies that fight for the protection of children's rights including:

- an antimonopoly investigation against Apple and Google app stores for their failure to protect children's privacy; and
- a complaint against a popular app for its inadequate age assurance, privacy, and child protection measures.

4. Consultation Process

In early 2026, we consulted with a range of different groups and individuals working on children's rights and combined their input on our idea to set up a Children's Rights Online Hub (Hub).

Our consultation had three goals:

- Find out whether there was a need to develop a shared space to collaborate on legal strategies for protecting children online.
- If yes, what the key elements are for the Hub.
- The most pressing topics relating to online children's rights and safety.

The steps of the consultation process were as follows:

- In April and May 2026, we had a mix of group and individual online calls with around 20 people, gathering their input in an online collaborative board. These groups included child rights advocates like Defence for Children ECPAT, Child Rights International Network, 5Rights, To Zero, BLAM UK and Child Rights Alliance Ireland; litigators like Public Interest Litigation Project and Good Law Project; advocacy groups like EDRI, Amnesty Tech and IGLYO; academics like Kate Sim and Priscilla Ruiz; and funders like Oak Foundation, Children's Investment Fund Foundation, Global Fund For Children, Mercator and Save the Children. We also spoke to parents about their biggest concerns regarding online child safety.
- We then summarised the group's input in an online collaborative board for presentation and preparing an interim report. These were shared with all contributors and other allies for review.
- In June, we hosted an online meeting that brought together those who have provided input so far, and other potential Hub participants, to analyse the results and plan the launch of the Hub. The call was attended by 20 people.
- We then incorporated the feedback from that call into this final report.

5. Need for the Hub

There was overwhelming support for the development of a shared space, i.e. the Hub, where groups could develop legal strategies to protect online children's rights. The more than 20 collaborators confirmed the importance of the Hub and their desire to take part, while recommending dozens of other groups and associations that could also take part in the Hub.

For groups in Europe, the development of the Hub would be especially timely given that recently passed legislation, such as the EU Digital Services Act and AI Act, offer new avenues for protecting children online. Likewise, the African Union was the first regional body to develop a comprehensive Child Online Safety and Empowerment Policy.

Participants suggested that the following aspects would give the Hub an added value that is currently missing from children's rights spaces and discussions:

- Finding common strategies for systemic change related to the well-being of children, including coming together around points where there has been disagreement, like the impact of some child safety measures on privacy rights and social media bans and restrictions for younger children in many countries such as Australia, Spain and Brazil.
- Sharing of knowledge and learning from different experts.
- Meeting other Hub participants in person.
- Centring those children and young people most affected by online harms.

In the group call in June, participants agreed the topics raised so far covered the most important issues, though there was some nuance in terms of individual priorities and questions of what exactly was covered by a particular topic. A common thread identified is about ensuring that Apps and AI are by-design child-wellbeing-and-rights-centred. This is seen as going to the root causes behind online harm to children rather than only addressing the manifestations of harm.

We ended the June call with a session where participants started to design legal actions that could be further developed in the Hub. The most common legal action discussed was using the EU Digital Services Act and/or the data protection laws to ensure strong enforcement against tech companies. Meanwhile there are already cases being planned related to product liability and pushing national authorities to legislate to prevent the risks of peer-to-peer digital harms.

6. Expected Impact

Through the Hub, we aim to:

- Have a larger, more resilient and more connected children's rights community who centre children affected by online harms and their caregivers.
- Have justice for children and young people secured through accountability of government and tech companies, better laws and stronger enforcement.
- Ensure technology is designed and used in a way that increases the well-being and safety of children and young people.

7. Key Online Child Rights and Safety Topics

Hub participants identified six topics that they felt the Hub should prioritise:

- Design of AI, platforms and apps centred on children's wellbeing:
 - o Safety by design rather than addictive, manipulative and dark patterns design
 - o Accountability and due diligence of companies
 - o Effectiveness of government regulations
 - o Restricting children's exposure to distressing content that negatively affects their mental health
 - o AI companions that centre the best interests of children and their wellbeing and safety
- Preventing child abuse enabled by technology such as:
 - o The distribution of child sexual materials
 - o Explicit deep fakes and generative AI
 - o Stopping online predators and grooming
 - o Intra-family harm and domestic violence
- Preventive and educational work for children's wellbeing that focuses on:
 - o Children's right to access information and right to assembly
 - o Edtech and redistribution of tech resources towards wellbeing of children
 - o Effective remedies for children
 - o Preventing peer-to-peer harm
 - o Youth empowerment over parental protection
- Ensuring children's privacy and data is protected in relation to:
 - o GDPR enforcement
 - o Collection, distribution and sale of data, including schools and police, and online advertising firms
 - o Surveillance
 - o Right to be deleted, including "sharenting" (parents sharing of children's data)
 - o Maintaining privacy in relation to age assurance
- Countering and protecting children from being recruited or used for scams, terrorism or other illegal activities.
- Protecting children's wellbeing in relation to extreme content such as:
 - o Gambling
 - o Pornography
 - o The manosphere

8. Key Targets

The participants felt like the main targets for enforcing online children's rights and safety were:

- Big Tech, including Meta, Google, TikTok, Apple and OpenAI
- Other companies, like game and EdTech providers, and gambling companies
- Governments and municipalities
- Regional bodies like the EU

- For governments, a number of initial target countries and regions were identified including the EU, United Kingdom and Brazil.

9. Next Steps

Creating a shared online folder for sharing documents and contact details among hub contributors to maintain contact until the hub is launched.

Partner with more foundations and other philanthropic bodies to raise additional seed funding of EUR 500,000 on top of funds already committed for launching the Hub and funding the promising legal cases and strategies that are developed within the Hub.

Reaching out to more groups, especially children and youth-led groups and more groups in Africa to get their additional inputs.

Full launch of the Hub in 2027 with a public invitation for interested groups and individuals to apply to join.

