

Platforma Copililor



**Universal Periodic
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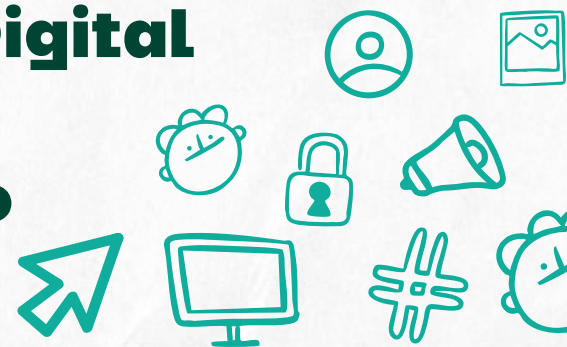
Moldova

Submitting Organization

Child Rights Information Center (CRIC) is a child rights-based organization founded in 1999 in Moldova. The NGO contributes to advancing the rights of the child to protection and participation in Moldova.

In 2017, CRIC has created the **Children's Platform** – a group of children who, supported by adults, monitor how children's rights are nationally respected in Moldova by consulting peers and communicating their findings and recommendations to national and international stakeholders. The Children's Platform also contributed a submission during the previous UPR cycle.

Children's Rights in the Digital Environment: Freedom of Expression and Access to Information



This submission raises concerns regarding the Moldovan State's recent discussions on implementing a total or partial ban on social media access for children. All findings and recommendations in this factsheet were developed through a child-led process, conducted at each phase by 30 members of the Children's Platform.

The first step was the capacity building of the group on the national legislative process and the UPR process. Then children thematically explored the links between digital access and their rights, in order to draft the survey questions used to consult their peers.

Children contributed to the promotion of the survey and reached over **1400 peers**, nationally, including vulnerable groups as follows:

70 members of the LGBTQ+ community;
53 from ethnic minority communities;
41 no longer attending school;
26 children with disabilities;

46 living in a country other than their country of origin;
23 refugee children;
14 children in foster or alternative care.

Once the peer consultation was complete, children led the data analysis phase and the crafting of the findings and recommendations. This was all compiled in a comprehensive report that can be found [here](#).¹

National Context and Follow-up to the 3rd Cycle

Following global trends, the Moldovan government has raised the possibility of age-restricting social media. However, comparative data shows these bans often result in children migrating to less-regulated, more dangerous platforms.

In the 3rd UPR cycle (2022), Moldova supported Recommendation 127.116 (Lithuania) to "ensure strengthening of freedom of expression online and offline". A ban would directly undermine this commitment, particularly as children report that the online environment is the easiest place for them to express their opinions on human rights.

Moldova also accepted Recommendation 127.38 (Uruguay), which urged the State to strengthen powers to "combat online discrimination and abuses... including on social networks".

Finding 1: The Right to Participation (Article 12 CRC)

As part of Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has the right to express their opinion on issues that affect them.

When children in Moldova were asked about a possible law to ban social media, their answer was very clear:

95%

of children believe their opinions must be listened to before any such law is made.

Another important aspect identified by children during the consultation is that social media is where children can speak up related to how their rights are respected. The **majority of respondents (44%)**, mentioned they feel the most comfortable speaking up on social media. In fact, children over the age of 12 said it is 5 times harder to talk about their rights at school than it is online.

Less than 3%

of children said they feel comfortable speaking up to state authorities or social services about their rights.

"The opinion of young people on this issue should be respected, and the authorities should not rely solely on their [the adults'] opinion." — Girl, 17 years old

"I think it shouldn't be limited... and in case of closure, the children's opinion should be taken into account." — Girl, 15 years old

¹ [Children's Opinion on the Access to Social Media in Moldova](#)



RECOMMENDATION

Moldova, by the end of 2027, should establish a formal and permanent consultation mechanism that ensures children's meaningful participation, including vulnerable groups, in the development and review of all legislation and policies impacting their rights, including any proposed regulations on social media access, to ensure compliance with Article 12 of the CRC and previous UPR commitments regarding freedom of expression.



Finding 2: Access to information

For many adults, social media is seen just as "fun," but for children, it is a tool for learning and growing. The results shows that social platforms are used for socializing, entertainment and developing personal interests, rather than just "passive consumption" of content:

4 out of 5 children have said they use social media to learn about their rights.
7 out of 10 children use it for their hobbies and to find inspiration.

According to our findings, children aged 12–14 are the most interested in using these platforms to find **educational content and reading materials**.

The Access Gap for Vulnerable Children: A ban would impact some children more than others. For those who feel different or lonely, the digital world is often the only safe place to find information: LGBTQ+ children rely on social media the most to find out more about human rights and child rights and **1 in 3 LGBTQI+ children** use it specifically for this reason.

"I believe that children's access to social networks is not something negative, on the contrary, you can learn more things... I learn and practice foreign languages through the online environment, I develop and begin to better understand what I like to do. You can find a lot of useful information."

Girl, 14 years old

"It helps us develop, I found friends, interests, hobbies, I learned many interesting things."

Girl, 15 years old



RECOMMENDATION

The state should, by the end of 2027, update the school curriculum and the framework plan for Primary, Middle and High School education to include at least two annual activities on how to use the online environment for responsible learning, hobby-finding, and rights-education for all students.



Finding 3: Children Want Education, Not a Ban

Children are not asking to be locked out of the digital world. Instead, they are asking for the keys to navigate it safely. Instead of a ban that locks out, children are asking for digital education that helps navigate the online world safely.

According to the consultation, **81% of students** who said they received online safety information in school found it highly useful, with over **42%** giving it the highest possible grades for its utility (9–10). Despite this, according to the result, with the majority of children, these topics were not discussed in school. This proves that education works and is a viable alternative to restrictive bans.

Our consultation shows a gap in what children are taught in school:

6 out of 10 children say that the risks of social media are rarely or never talked about in class. **4 out of 10** students say that the good opportunities online are rarely discussed, and **2 out of 10** say they are never mentioned at all.

8 out of 10 children told us they want and need to learn about serious issues like cyberbullying, harassment, grooming, and hate speech while they are at school.

The current plan of the state is trying to fix a complicated problem with a simple age limitation, but a ban doesn't teach children safety. In fact, children mentioned that banning platforms will only lead to *"rebellion and the creation of fake accounts"*. This is dangerous because it pushes them on less-regulated platforms.

A child mentioned that platforms where most users are children, are a **big focal point for pedophiles** and such measures could impose a potential risk, as it makes children a more vulnerable target. This empathises more the need to discuss risks from early stages of childhood, since our findings indicate that this topic is discussed less with younger children.

Moreover, children know exactly what they need to learn. **8 out of 10** want to discuss cyberbullying, grooming, and hate speech, while 7 out of 10 want to learn how to manage the risks of "excessive use". **LGBTQ+ children** are the most worried about online safety, with **9 out of 10** saying they feel a great need to discuss cyberbullying and harassment at school.

Children with disabilities are often forgotten; they report that the benefits of being online are discussed with them the least of all.

"I think that banning is not the solution... I believe that correct information and improving platforms are more useful and effective." — Girl, 14 years old



RECOMMENDATIONS

- By 2028, the Moldovan state should update the school curriculum, starting from primary school, in order to include up-to-date topics related to online safety (handle grooming, catfishing, and cyberbullying, harassment), adapted specifically to the context of social media.
- Moldova to create a national online protection system by 2028 that offers rapid response to reporting and free psychological support, particularly suitable for vulnerable groups, including LGBTQ+ children and children with disabilities, who seek help in relation to social media use.



Finding 4: A Ban is not an effective solution, while safety by design is

Children in Moldova consider that the ban does not minimize the risks it wants to reduce. As they mention, children will simply find another way in, often in places that are even more dangerous and less regulated.

9 out of 10 children
in Moldova do not agree with a ban on social media.

A ban will make children look for ways to overcome restrictions. Children told us that if the government

tries to stop them, they will simply hide what they are doing: children will use VPNs or create fake accounts to stay online.

A ban can lead to "rebellion," making children less likely to talk to adults when they actually encounter a real problem online.

The Rights Perspective: International rules say that the government cannot just take away child rights because they are worried about risks. Any limit on child rights must be "necessary and proportional." This means a ban should only be used if it is the only way and the least restrictive way to keep us safe. The consultation proves that a ban is neither effective nor the least restrictive option.

Moreover, **8 out of 10** children surveyed mentioned they want a rapid child friendly reporting system that removes harmful content in less than 24 hours.

"I think that banning is not the solution, young people will see this as a possibility for rebellion and the creation of fake accounts. I believe that correct information and improving applications are more useful and effective." — **Girl, 14 years old**

"It doesn't make sense to block children's access... unless children under 13 have stricter rules regarding the use of online space." — **Girl, 17 years old**



RECOMMENDATIONS

The State should, by 2028, pass laws that force social media companies to remove harmful content faster (within 24 hours) and implement a child-friendly reporting system.

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