



# Child Online Safety in Mauritius: A Rights-Based and Comprehensive Protection Framework

**Protecting children online is not only an obligation — it is an investment in the very future of Mauritius**



# P R E A M B L E

This report has been prepared by ILMA Foundation in direct response to the public consultation initiated by the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (MITCI) on the Draft Child Online Safety Policy for Mauritius.

The advent of digital technologies has fundamentally reshaped the environment in which children grow, learn, and interact. While the internet offers immense educational, social, and developmental opportunities, it simultaneously exposes minors to a spectrum of online risks, including exploitation, harmful content, and breaches of privacy. In this context, the safeguarding of children online emerges not only as a national priority but also as an international human rights obligation.

In addressing these challenges, it is essential that child protection measures are carefully calibrated to preserve fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, the right to access information, the right to privacy, and parental authority. An effective child online safety framework must strike an appropriate balance: ensuring that children are shielded from online harms without enabling unwarranted restrictions, censorship, or disproportionate control over digital spaces.

This submission is founded upon three guiding principles:

1. The paramountcy of the best interests of the child, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and regional standards.
2. The necessity for any restrictions or interventions to comply with the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, and legitimate aim, as articulated in international human rights law.
3. The imperative of fostering an ecosystem of shared responsibility, where government, parents, educators, industry, and civil society actors collectively contribute to a safe, empowering, and rights-respecting digital environment.

Drawing upon comparative international frameworks, empirical research, and the socio-legal context of Mauritius, this report aims to complement and strengthen the policy development process. It offers a series of recommendations and observations with particular emphasis on ensuring that protective mechanisms are not inadvertently instrumentalized for purposes of unjustified content control or political censorship.

ILMA Foundation commends the Ministry for its inclusive and consultative approach. We trust that this submission will assist in the elaboration of a comprehensive, future-proof, and rights-compatible framework for the protection of children online in Mauritius.

## ABSTRACT

The digital revolution has transformed children's lives in Mauritius, offering unprecedented opportunities for education, communication, and personal development. However, the rapid expansion of internet access has simultaneously exposed minors to serious online risks, including cyberbullying, grooming, exploitation, harmful content, and data misuse.

While Mauritius has taken preliminary steps through initiatives such as the Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act 2021 and MAUCORS+, there remains a critical gap: the absence of a dedicated, child-specific, and rights-compliant framework to safeguard children in the digital environment.

In response to the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation's public consultation, this report proposes a comprehensive, structured, and principled Child Online Safety Framework that balances the need for robust child protection with the imperative to uphold fundamental freedoms — notably, freedom of expression, access to information, and privacy.

Drawing from international best practices (Singapore, UAE, Scandinavia, Malaysia, China), and aligned with global rights frameworks (CRC, ICCPR), the key recommendations of this submission include:

- **Establishing a Digital Age of Consent (18–20 years)**, requiring verified parental consent for minors to engage online.
- **Mandatory Age Verification Mechanisms** for all platforms operating in Mauritius.
- **Strengthening Legal Frameworks** to criminalize emerging online offenses such as grooming, sextortion, and live-streamed exploitation.
- **Restricting Social Media Access by Age Tier**, with a complete ban under 14 and graduated supervision between 14–18.
- **Implementing Data Collection and Profiling Safeguards** for minors, including mandatory data purges at the age of majority.
- **Mandating Content Filtering by Age Group**, following a model similar to Douyin (China's version of TikTok), focusing on educational and motivational content for minors.
- **Enforcing Online Gaming and Gambling Regulations**, including mandatory age checks and time restrictions for minors.
- **Creating Child-Only Digital Spaces** to limit exposure to adult users and interactions.

Institutional innovations proposed include the establishment of a Child Online Protection Ombudsman (COPA) with independent authority to issue binding takedown orders, manage a child-specific incident reporting system, and liaise with international child safety networks.

In parallel, the report underscores the necessity of empowering parents and educators through national digital literacy programs, the creation of a Digital Parenting Portal, community engagement campaigns, and integration of digital resilience education into school curricula from an early age.

The proposed strategy is phased across three years, combining immediate legislative actions, medium-term capacity-building, and long-term evaluation through a dynamic, evidence-based monitoring framework. Key milestones include the enactment of a Child Online Protection Act, the operationalization of COPA, and the publication of annual Child Online Safety Reports to Parliament. The expected outcomes extend beyond protecting children:

- Strengthened family and educational environments;
- Safer digital ecosystems;
- Enhanced national and international reputation as a child-friendly, rights-respecting digital society;
- And the fostering of a digitally resilient generation.

This submission emphasizes that child online safety must not be pursued at the cost of democracy. Measures must be lawful, necessary, proportionate, transparent, and subject to independent oversight to prevent the misuse of content moderation structures for political or improper purposes.

The ILMA Foundation remains committed to assisting policymakers, educators, industry stakeholders, and the Mauritian public in building a digital environment where every child can explore, learn, and thrive — safely, confidently, and freely.