Online safety in Kiribati

PACIFIC OCEAN

Teraina
Tabuaeran
Kiritimati

Makin
Butaritari
Marakei
Abaiang
TARAWA Tarawa
Maiana
Kuria Abemama
Aranuka
Nonouti
Beru
Banaba
Tabiteuea
Nikunau
Onotoa
Tamana
Arorae

GILBERT ISLANDS

PHOENIX ISLANDS

Kanton
Enderbury
McKean Birnie Rawaki
Nikumaroro Orona
Manra

LINE ISLANDS

Malden

Starbuck

Caroline
Vostok
Flint

The digital landscape in Kiribati is currently undergoing significant transformation with the new undersea fibre optic cable providing high-speed connectivity. Enhanced access and increasing uptake of mobile digital technologies has profound implications for children's online safety, opening up potential for exposure to new risks of harm. Simultaneously, however, these technologies offer a wide range of new possibilities and benefits for children's education, health and development.

The Young and Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney University, ChildFund Australia and Plan International Australia conducted research to map the challenges and opportunities that digital technology presents in Kiribati. Child and adult participants for this research were recruited from a low socio-economic neighbourhood in South Tarawa. Stakeholders were recruited from a range of organisations, agencies and businesses involved in digital practice and provision, including the telecommunications industry, local and national NGOs, churches, government agencies and police.

Children & young people

Key findings:

- Children consider social media platforms, specifically Facebook, a conduit through which perpetrators of online violence and cyberbullying may reach them.

- Children's confidence in their online safety practices is high, however, they primarily turn to their parents for guidance around online concerns.

- Children are most excited about accessing educational resources online. However, none of the child participants indicate that they have access to a computer at school.

- To protect themselves online, children generally employ behavioural strategies such as avoiding downloading explicit content, more commonly than technical strategies like password controls.

- Access to digital technology and reliable internet remains a key challenge for children in Kiribati, with 20% reporting unstable electricity supply and lack of access to digital devices.

Parents and caregivers

Key findings:

- Parents and carers emphasise how their children's development of digital literacy could better position them for future careers in technology-related fields.

- Parents and carers worry most about the contact risks of meeting strangers online and how digital technology may negatively impact their children's sleep patterns.

- Parents and carers tend to use prohibitive or restrictive strategies to safeguard their children online, with around 15% of parents and carers banning their children from using digital technology.

- Over 40% of parents and carers indicate that they are most responsible for children's online safety but feel ill-equipped with a lack of knowledge around digital technology.

"

[It can] help them to become better person by seeing and imitating positive attitudes."

- Kiribati, parents, male, 60; female, 42

Communities

Key findings:

- Children's contact with strangers online is the primary online concern among Kiribati stakeholders.

- Children and parents do not identify teachers, community or religious leaders as potential supports for children's digital practice. Instead, alongside parents, Kiribati participants place a much greater importance on the responsibility of the police in keeping children safe online.

- Stakeholders highlight the important role of schools and teachers, calling for targeted and comprehensive digital literacy and online safety education to be embedded within the school curriculum.

Societies

Key findings:

- Parents and carers in Kiribati vote the police as the most responsible and governments among the least for keeping children safe online.

- Stakeholders agree on the necessity for multilevel approaches and multi-sector collaborations to effectively understand and address the risks children face online.

- Aside from the Australia Federal Police initiative, stakeholders identify few other dedicated online safety support programs for children.