

# Defining boundaries and regulations for advertising targeting children

## Background

In an increasingly digital world, international boundaries and regulations concerning advertising aimed at children have become increasingly prevalent. As internet accessibility has spread, so has the availability of potentially harmful material. With more and more children gaining access to the internet, it is vital that moves are made to monitor advertising targeted towards children to ensure that they are appropriate, and do not take advantage of the naivety that comes with being young.

Whilst some countries have strict laws and codes in place to protect children from exploitative or inappropriate advertising practices, others may have more relaxed or fragmented regulations. These differences can arise due to cultural perceptions, societal values, and varying interpretations of what constitutes appropriate marketing to children. Nations often have difficulties with finding a balance between fostering healthy commercial markets and safeguarding the well-being of their youngest consumers. The absence of a unified global standard results in a diverse landscape where advertisers navigate a patchwork of rules when targeting children across borders, which is precisely why the UN Social & Cultural committee is tasked with resolving this issue.

The challenge of coordinating international regulations lies in the diversity of cultural norms and economic considerations across nations. However, there's a growing recognition of the need for a more cohesive global approach to protect children from potentially harmful advertising practices. Collaborative efforts among governments, companies, and advocacy groups become crucial in establishing common ground and setting ethical standards that prioritize children's welfare regardless of culture and where they are in the world.

## UN Involvement

The United Nations has long played a vital role in advocating for the protection of children's rights, nowadays evidenced through their various initiatives and conventions that filter advertising towards children.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) stands as a foundational document emphasizing the need to safeguard children from exploitation, including in the realm of advertising. Article 17 of the UNCRC specifically addresses children's access to information and media content, urging signatory nations to ensure that advertising and media content are in line with the well-being and rights of children. While the UNCRC doesn't prescribe specific regulations, it sets a fundamental framework encouraging countries to enact laws and policies that shield children from deceptive, harmful, or exploitative advertising practices.

Additionally, the UN supports some guidelines created by other entities, such as the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), which have contributed extensively to the conversation on responsible marketing for children. These guidelines emphasize the importance of truthful advertising, respect for children's vulnerability, and the promotion of products suitable for their age group.

The UN's involvement in endorsing such principles and frameworks has influenced global discussions, encouraging nations to adopt measures that prioritize ethical advertising while considering the vulnerability and rights of children across different cultural and societal contexts.

## Questions to Consider

1. Does my country have restrictions on media and internet access? Is there a reason for this?
2. Is my country capitalistic and heavily dependent on a free market economy? How would restrictions on marketing have an impact on my country's economy?
3. Can we balance the commercial interests of advertisers with the need to protect children from potentially harmful or exploitative advertising practices?
4. How open is my country to working with the UN on international agreements? Do I want the UN to be involved in my affairs?

## Useful Links

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/unicef-convention-rights-child-uncrc.pdf>

International Chamber of Commerce Advertising and Marketing Communications Code:

<https://iccwbo.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2018/09/icc-advertising-and-marketing-communications-code-int.pdf>

WHO Recommendations For Policies in Relation to Food Advertising:

<https://www.who.int/news/item/03-07-2023-who-recommends-stronger-policies-to-protect-children-from-the-harmful-impact-of-food-marketing>

European Advertising Standards Alliance:

<https://www.easa-alliance.org/issues/children/>