



Amirudin



Gass



Drennan



Blume

DON'T MISS IT

Tech 4 Good Challenge 2026

Submission deadline:
March 25

> ViTrox Technologies and Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) are calling on Malaysian secondary and tertiary students to participate in the Tech 4 Good Challenge 2026 – a national invention competition that challenges young minds to tackle real-world problems through the creative engineering design process.

> The competition aims to nurture essential 21st-century skills, including problem-solving, collaboration and critical thinking, while promoting STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education by providing a platform for students with a passion for science and technology to showcase their innovative and creative thinking.

> The competition comprises the secondary school category (Category 1) and the tertiary category (Category 2):

> Category 1: Students from Form 1 to Form 5 (SPM), Year 8 to Year 11 (IGCSE), and Junior and Senior High 1, 2, 3 (UEC).

> Category 2: Undergraduates, including STPM, A-Level and Foundation students.

> To develop students' skills in applying emerging technologies, participants have to integrate at least one advanced technology, such as artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, robotics, automation or machine vision, into their proposed solutions.

> Tech 4 Good Challenge 2026 comprises a qualifying round and prototype development for the Grand Finale, scheduled for July 25 at ViTrox Campus 2.0, Penang Batu Kawan.

> The competition's judging panel comprises experienced professionals, including engineers, researchers, and educators, who will evaluate submissions based on creativity, feasibility and impact.

Details: Log on to <https://college.vitrox.edu.my/tech4good-challenge> or contact Mandy Lim at 016-832 9863/chin-hui.lim@vitrox.edu.my or Dr Chong Zhi Lin at 014-905 0890/chongzli@utar.edu.my

Getting child safety right

Regulatory sandbox key to tackling online risks

Stories by
REBECCA RAJAENDRAM
rebeccagr@thestar.com.my

WITH the implementation of the minimum age limit of 16 years for social media usage expected as early as July, experts say the regulatory sandbox currently in place is vital to ensure the measure is effective.

CyberSecurity Malaysia (CSM) chief executive officer Datuk Dr Amirudin Abdul Wahab said the sandbox programme provides a controlled environment to experiment with and identify the most effective regulatory approaches for child and consumer protection in the digital ecosystem.

"It allows regulators to assess whether current protection methods are still suitable, or whether new regulatory or technical solutions are required," he said.

At the same time, he added, it facilitates collaboration between government agencies and social media service providers to jointly identify practical, technically feasible solutions.

On Jan 26, Deputy

Communications Minister Teo Nie Ching said the sandbox initiative is being carried out in line with the Online Safety Act, with discussions already underway with social media platform providers to determine the most suitable approach.

Earlier, Communications Minister Datuk Fahmi Fadzil announced the rollout of a regulatory sandbox programme from Jan 1 to assess child protection mechanisms and ensure consumer safety in the digital space ahead of full-scale enforcement.

The initiative, he said on Dec 27, would run for several months, and involve the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission and several designated social media platforms.

Amirudin said the sandbox enables real-world testing of child safety mechanisms, including age verification processes, automated content moderation and other safety tools, within controlled conditions.

"This allows regulators to observe how these tools function

in practice, rather than relying solely on theoretical or static assessments.

"As the sandbox progresses, further insights and observations will emerge to inform subsequent phases of regulatory refinement and implementation," he added.

On Jan 4, *StarEdu* reported that harmful content on social media and other online platforms is among the factors leading to the rise in sexual and aggressive violence among local youth.

Parents, said experts, need to spot red flags early in their children, as youth violence is rarely sudden.

Safe surfing

WeProtect Global Alliance executive director Iain Drennan said there is "a kind of disinhibition" where people are more willing to use shocking or offensive language in today's online culture.

"Sometimes that's not intended necessarily to harass; it's more about peer pressure, getting in with a crowd, getting attention, and so on," he noted.

Although this is happening, Drennan – citing consultations with youth – said they want a respectful, safe environment online where they can enjoy playing games and engaging with their peers.

Unicef Malaysia chief of child protection Saskia Blume said to better protect children online, safety should be designed into platforms, including privacy default settings and easy reporting channels.

"So, safety is not an afterthought," she said.

Secondly, we need to better equip children to stand up for themselves and stay safe, she added.

"This has to do with supporting parents to have a better relationship with their children, so that children can confide in them as well as teachers.

"Social and emotional learning also needs to be integrated into the curriculum, including empathy and critical thinking," she said.

Blume stressed that this cannot take place in schools alone, as social and emotional learning starts at home.

such material.

Children aged 16 to 17 and boys were also found to be the most likely groups to be exposed to sexual images and videos online.

Describing the data as sobering, CyberSecurity Malaysia chief executive officer Datuk Dr Amirudin Abdul Wahab said children's exposure to harmful content is widespread.

"These data point to a serious, ongoing problem to which many children and adolescents are gravely vulnerable – from sexual exploitation and abuse to cyberbullying, harmful content and emotional harm – and a significant portion may suffer in silence," he added.

Worrying statistics

protection, it's a limitation.

"Real safety comes from creating a digital world that prioritises children, where safety, privacy and inclusion are embedded by design, not added as an afterthought.

"Technology and digital companies must take responsibility for the environments they create, ensuring that every product, platform and app is designed with children's safety, rights and well-being at its very core," he said during the launch of the Asean ICT Forum on Child Protection in KL on Nov 18.

Meanwhile, statistics from

Unicef's *Disrupting Harm in Malaysia* report from 2022 indicate that 96% of 12- to 17-year-olds go online at least once a day, almost all using their smartphones.

This is up from 91% in 2020, with 70% exposed to disturbing content, based on a similar survey carried out by Unicef's *Our Lives Online*.

More worryingly, nearly a quarter (24%) of children had unexpectedly come across sexual content online through advertisements, social media feeds, search engines and messaging apps, while 17% reported actively looking for

ONE in four children in Malaysia has come across sexual or disturbing content online without expecting it, says Unicef representative to Malaysia Robert Gass.

On top of that, some 100,000 children experience online sexual exploitation or abuse each year, he said.

He added that while technology gives children extraordinary opportunities to learn, create and connect, advances in artificial intelligence, rapid connectivity and digital access are outpacing the laws, regulations and systems designed to protect them, exposing these same children to new and growing dangers.

Gass, however, noted that keeping children offline is not