

Prerequisites for Effective Online Safety Policy and Regulatory Pathways

Progress in online safety rarely comes from a single stakeholder or law. It depends on coordination and follow-through. Experience across Kenya, the Philippines, and comparable settings points to practical conditions that shape where regulatory pathways can start and how momentum can build, even when conditions are only partial or emerging.

Political room to act

Online safety requires enough space to hold practical, nonpartisan discussions and take workable steps. When space is limited, start with evidence and build trust.

Entry points grounded in real harms

Start with how people are already experiencing harm and seeking support; mapping real journeys keeps reforms grounded even when services are fragmented.

Iteration as technologies change

Technology and harms evolve quickly – prioritize coordination and adaptable safeguards (e.g., safety-by-design) rather than one-time regulatory fixes.

Coordination to clarify roles

Because responsibilities are spread across regulators, justice actors, and social services, progress depends on coordination to clarify roles and gaps.

Coalitions that share responsibility

Progress requires shared responsibility and complementary roles across government, civil society, education actors, and technology companies.

Alignment on outcomes

Regulation is strongest when stakeholders align on outcomes: clearer reporting routes, less duplication, timely response, and meaningful support and redress.

Making these conditions explicit helps sequence realistic next steps. Pathway mapping is not about a single “right” model; it is about charting feasible routes toward prevention, protection, and accountability.

INSIGHTS

Prerequisites for Effective Online Safety Policy and Regulatory Pathways

Effective online safety policy is rarely a result of a single perfect law. What enables progress is practical coordination and sustained follow-through. While every governance context is distinct, experience across Kenya, the Philippines, and comparable settings suggests a set of recurring conditions that shape where regulatory pathways can start, how next steps can be sequenced, and what types of investment are most likely to unlock momentum. These conditions do not need to be met in full before action begins. Rather, they can be partial, emerging, or even lacking, and can still be built upon for long-term, systems-level change.



Political room to act

Online safety sits at the crossroads of free expression, platform accountability, elections, and security, so it can become politicized quickly. Progress does not require full consensus or immediate legal reform, but it does require enough room to hold practical discussions without the work being pulled into partisan debate.

When that room exists, even informally, it can be used to map the system, clarify mandates, and identify feasible starting points. When it does not, early effort is often best spent on evidence, coordination, and trust-building to create space for later action.



Coordination to clarify roles

Online safety rarely fits neatly within one institution's scope. Multiple duty-bearers must coordinate across silos to clarify who is responsible for what, where handoffs can break down, and what gaps are not being addressed.

Since responsibilities are often shared or duplicated across regulators, law enforcement, courts, and social services, even a basic willingness to work through overlap makes this work more productive.



Entry points grounded in real harms

Harms happen whether formal reporting and referral systems exist or not. While mapping online safety pathways does not depend on having effective survivor-centered services in place, it does benefit from starting with how people currently experience harm, seek support, or encounter institutions.

Where entry points exist, even if fragmented, mapping how people experience harm and seek help keeps reforms grounded. Where they do not, identifying informal practices, bottlenecks, and institutional touchpoints can still provide a practical basis for improvement.



Coalitions that share responsibility

No single ministry or agency can deliver online safety advancements alone. Progress depends on shared responsibility across government and, where appropriate, collaboration with civil society, education actors, and technology companies.

This does not require full alignment on regulation. It requires agreement on the problem, complementary roles, and coordination, since single-agency approaches tend to reinforce fragmentation rather than reduce it.



Iteration as technologies change

Technology and online harms evolve faster than policy and institutions. Effective governance therefore depends on an approach that can adapt over time, rather than treating regulation as a one-time fix.

Mapping online safety pathways assumes a level of uncertainty – prioritizing coordination and procedural safeguards like safety-by-design approaches, which are more dynamic than fixed technical solutions. Waiting for perfect definitions, complete data, or full technological clarity often slows action until the problem has already shifted.



Alignment on outcomes

Pathway work is stronger when institutions share a basic understanding of what “progress” is meant to achieve. When stakeholders align around outcomes such as clearer reporting pathways, less duplication, timely responses, and meaningful support and redress, efforts are more likely to stay grounded in lived realities. This does not require agreement on every tool, but it does require clarity on the outcomes people should experience: systems that are easier to navigate, more protective, and more responsive.

Making these conditions explicit helps governments and partners approach pathway work with realism and sequence effort based on what is politically and institutionally feasible. This work is not about identifying a single correct model. It is about working within real constraints to chart plausible routes toward prevention, protection, and accountability. When these conditions are in view, pathway mapping helps turn big ambitions into concrete steps that people can feel in practice.