

PROTECTING CHILDREN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

VIEWS ON AGE LIMITS

REPORT



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Introduction

For most children, social media plays a central role in their lives. It provides opportunities to connect with peers, access information, explore interests and express themselves freely. Yet it can expose them to serious harm, including sexual abuse material, violent content, exploitation, cyberbullying, disinformation, unlawful practices and addiction.

This short paper presents data showing how concerned people in the EU are about children's social media use, and which issues are of most concern to them. To better protect children online, the EU has rolled out several regulatory and practical actions to make social media participation safer [1], including:

- The Digital Services Act (DSA) and its implementation: The DSA obliges online platforms to prioritise children's safety, privacy and security (Article 28). Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) are required to assess systemic risks and implement age verification or other proportionate protective measures where necessary (Articles 34, 35) [2]. Under the DSA, several enforcement actions are ongoing, including to evaluate the effectiveness of age verification measures. The European Commission adopted guidelines under Article 28 of the DSA outlining a broad set of measures for platforms to protect children online [3].
- A harmonised EU approach to age verification: The European Commission is working towards a harmonised framework. Some Member States as well as certain online platforms are piloting an age verification system [4], designed to work with the future EU Digital Identity Wallet [5].
- An expert panel on child safety online: In March 2026, a special panel of experts was set up to advise the European Commission on child safety online and potential age limits for social media platforms in Europe [6].

Measures to improve children's online safety, such as legally enforced age limits and age assurance tools, may interfere with several fundamental rights. Therefore, any measure requires a thorough assessment both by the legislator [7] and online platforms [8]. This involves understanding children's right to protection from online harms alongside their other fundamental rights, including, but not limited to: children's right to participation and to be heard, freedom of expression and information, protection from discrimination, the right to privacy and the protection of personal data. These rights are enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Charter) [9] and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) [10], which all EU Member States have ratified. At the end of this paper, further references to relevant fundamental rights are included (see [3 Relevant provisions: EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and secondary EU law](#)).

To inform discussions on policy measures and actions, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) collected data on the concerns and views of the general population in the EU, including teenagers aged 15-17, regarding child safety online. This paper starts with an overview of the survey's key findings, then provides results of people's concerns related to children's use of social

media, before turning to views on the prohibition of social media for certain age groups.

The findings are based on an EU-wide Eurobarometer survey of 26,453 respondents, with specific questions developed by FRA. Separately, FRA has published research on the impact of technology and social media on fundamental rights risks [11] and is conducting further research on child safety online. For more detail on the methodology and data collection, see box [About the data collection](#).

About the data collection

The data presented in this document are based on the [Eurobarometer survey wave 104.2](#). Data collection was carried out between 6 and 30 November 2025 by the survey company Verian Belgium. Eurobarometer surveys are conducted at the request of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communication, 'Public Opinion & Citizen Engagement' Unit.

FRA joined the data collection by adding and financing the inclusion of specific questions – developed by FRA – related to views about and experiences with online services. This included online fraud, hate speech and content moderation, child safety, as well as privacy and data protection.

This paper briefly presents results relating to questions addressing child safety on social media.

The survey covers all European Union citizens residing in one of the 27 Member States and aged 15 years and over. The respondents were randomly selected and results weighted to match the demographic profile in each country by gender and age, urbanisation and region. The data are representative of the population in each Member State and of the European Union.

Key findings

Over eight in 10 people in the EU surveyed are fairly or very concerned about a range of harms that the use of online services and platforms may pose for children.

- 89 % (nine in 10) are concerned about children being approached online by people seeking to exploit them.
- The same number are concerned about children being exposed to violent content.
- 88 % are concerned about children spending too much time using certain apps and becoming addicted.

Most people in the EU (aged 18 and above) support legal prohibitions of social media use for children.

- 74 % (three in four) think that social media should be prohibited for children of a certain age.
- Survey respondents most often indicated that restrictions should apply until either the age of 16 (16 % of respondents) or 18 (also 16 % of respondents).
- Other survey respondents indicated until the age 15 (13 %) or 14 (11 %).

The majority of teenage respondents think that social media use should be restricted until a certain age (based on 531 respondents 15 to 17 years of age).

- When asked about what age it should be restricted until, 13 % said until age 12, 11 % said until age 13, 15 % said until age 14, and 16 % said until 15 years of age.

Less often, teenagers think social media should only be allowed when they turn 16 (6 %), 17 (0 %) or 18 (4 %).

1. EU citizens' main concerns regarding children's social media use

Respondents were surveyed on their concerns relating to children's use of social media and asked to indicate their level of concern on a variety of issues. The surveyed topics included exploitation, violence, addiction, data protection, pornography, terrorist content, recruitment to crime and exposure to conspiracy theories.

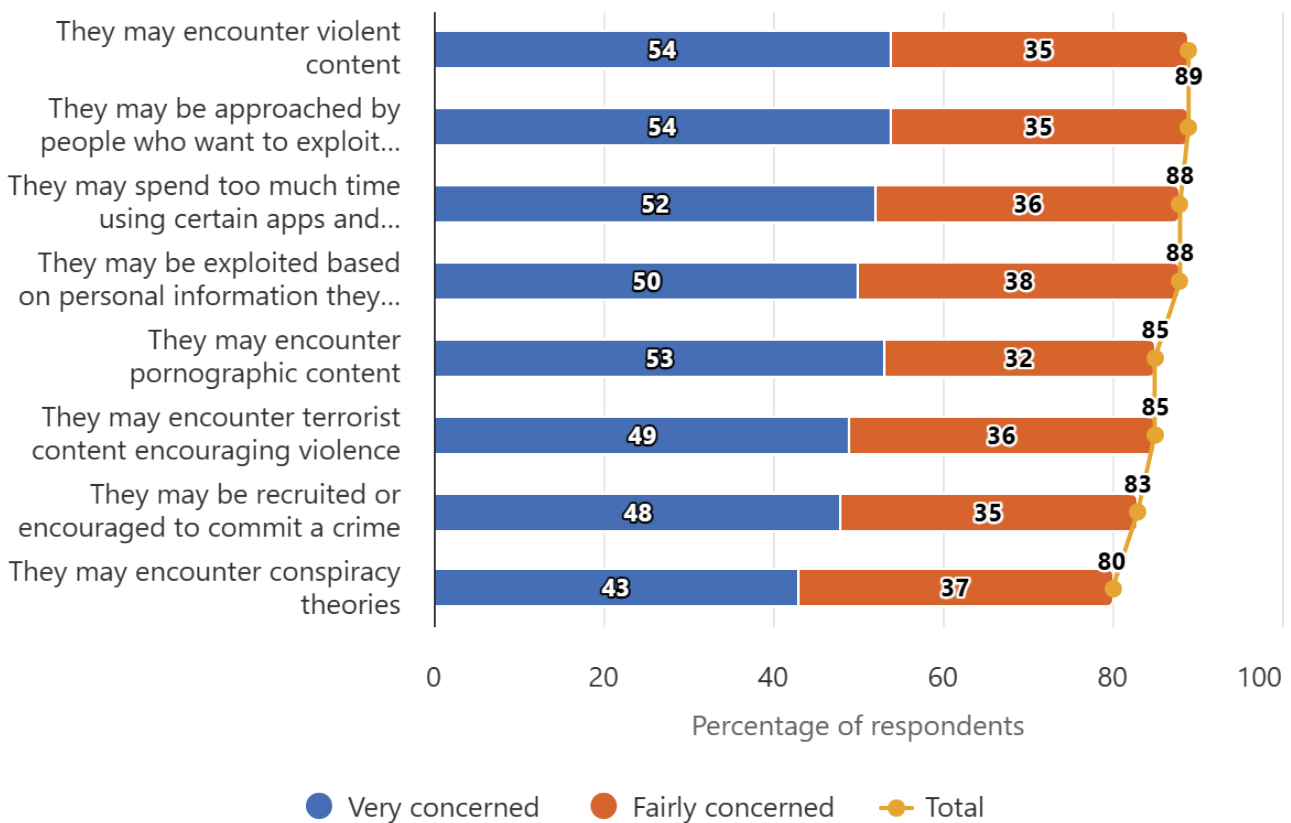
The survey question asked: 'To what extent are you concerned or not about each of the following issues when children use online services or platforms?'

Results

The vast majority of people in the EU are concerned about the safety of children online. More than eight in 10 people in the EU are fairly or very concerned about a list of threats that the use of online services and platforms poses. Between 80 % and 89 % of respondents indicated consistently high levels of overall concern regarding children's use of online services or platforms, depending on the issue asked about.

Concerns about children being approached by those seeking to exploit them as well as encountering violent content online are the biggest worries. Nine in 10 people (89 %) expressed being fairly or very concerned about these issues. The results for different concerns are shown in [Figure 1](#). Over half of people are 'very concerned' about these issues. Between 43 % and 54 % of all respondents, depending on the issue asked about, indicated being very concerned.

Figure 1 – Concerns about safety of children when using social media



NB: N = 26,453

Question: To what extent are you concerned or not about each of the following issues when children use online services or platforms? Answer categories: Very concerned, Fairly concerned, Not very concerned, Not at all concerned, Don't know.

Source: FRA, 2026

Despite consistently high levels of concern, there is a certain variety in opinions across EU Member States. The level of overall concern is highest in Spain, where nine in 10 respondents expressed concerns on any of the issues. Comparatively high levels of concern were also reported in Luxembourg, Lithuania, Slovenia, France, Ireland, Portugal and Italy (all on average above 90 % concerned).

Still very high levels of concern (but comparatively lower with respect to other Member States) were reported in Romania (ranging from 66 % to 71 % - depending on the issue asked about), Germany (71 % to 82 %), Hungary (71 % to 83 %) and Croatia (75 % to 81 %).

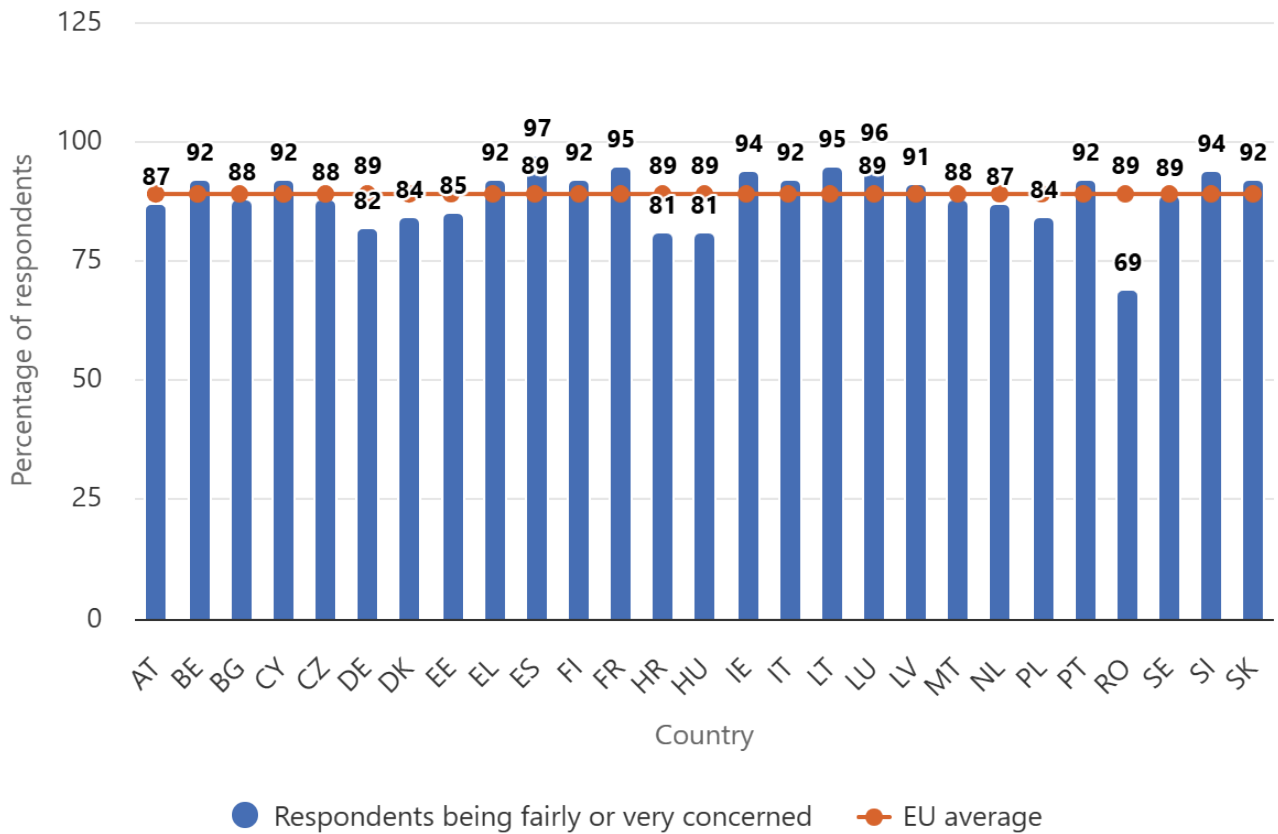
The most variation in concerns across the different online threats is found in Finland. Almost all Finnish respondents are worried about children being approached by people who want to exploit them (97 %), while fewer but still a high percentage of people (72 %) expressed concern about children encountering conspiracy theories. Similarly, in Sweden, Malta, Denmark, Czechia and Estonia, the levels of concern differ more strongly depending on the issue asked about [Figure 2](#) shows the percentage of respondents by country that are fairly or very concerned that children may encounter violent content online.

Women are slightly more often concerned than men about the threats the use of online services pose. Older people are somewhat more often concerned than younger people about the threats. These differences can be observed consistently across multiple issues, but the gender and age differences are not very strong.

For example, when asked about how concerned they are that children may encounter violent content online, 81 % of respondents below the age of 18 (aged 15-17) were fairly or very concerned compared to 89 % of respondents aged 18 and above. The biggest difference in the level of concern by age can be found with respect to children encountering conspiracy theories. 63 % of those aged 15-17 indicated being fairly or very concerned compared to 81 % of those aged 18 and above.

Figure 2 – Concerns about safety of children when using social media, by country (%)

Children may encounter violent content



NB: N = 26,453

Question: "To what extent are you concerned or not about each of the following issues when children use online services or platforms? They may encounter violent content." The percentage includes those that indicated being 'very concerned' or 'fairly concerned', whereas the remaining respondents either indicated being 'not very concerned' or 'not at all concerned' or 'don't know'. The orange line shows the EU average.

Source: FRA, 2026

2. EU citizens' views on the prohibition of social media use for certain age groups

The survey asked people in the EU whether they consider that the use of social media should legally only be allowed after a certain age, thus legally prohibiting it below a certain age.

The survey question asked: *'How old should a child be before they are legally allowed to access social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram or Pinterest, or should there be no limitations by age?'*

Results

The majority of people in the EU surveyed support the legal prohibitions of social media use for children. Three in four (74 %) of respondents think that social media should be prohibited for children at a certain age. However, there are different views on the age from which access to social media should be allowed.

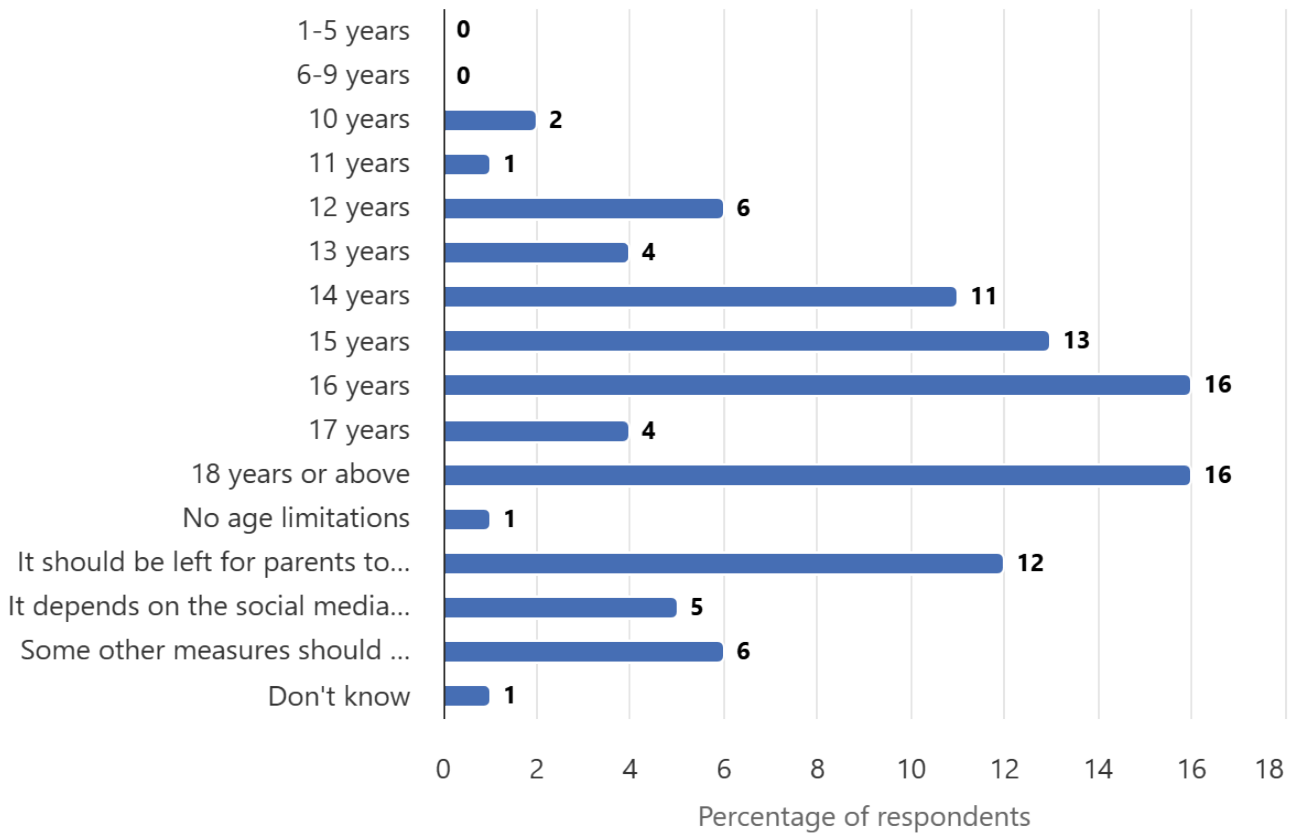
When presented with ages at which children should have social media access, respondents most often indicated restrictions until the age of 16 (16 % of respondents) or the age of 18 (also 16 % of respondents). Furthermore, significant numbers of respondents indicated that restrictions should apply until the age 15 (13 %) or 14 (11 %). Very few respondents consider that social media use should be allowed from age 10 or below (3 %).

Conversely, just over one in 10 (13 %) would not like to see a legal restriction. The majority of these indicate that it should be left to the parents to decide. According to 5 % of respondents, it depends on the social media platform, and 7 % say that they do not know or would like to see other measures. These results apply to the general adult population in the survey (respondents age 18 and above).

While the above results hold for the population age 18 and over, those aged between 15 and 17 years have slightly different views. The majority of teenagers surveyed think that social media should be restricted until a certain age, namely until age 12 (13 %), age 13 (11 %), age 14 (15 %) and 15 years of age (16 %). Less often, teenagers think social media should only be allowed when they turn 16 (6 %), 17 (0 %) or 18 (4 %). The 15–17-year-olds interviewed also more often indicated that it depends on the social media platform. This was selected as a response by 11 % of teenagers compared to only 5 % of adults. The results are visualised in [Figures 3a](#) and [3b](#).

Figure 3a – Social media prohibition for children

How old should a child be before they are legally allowed to access social media platforms or should there be no age limitation? – Respondents aged 18 and above



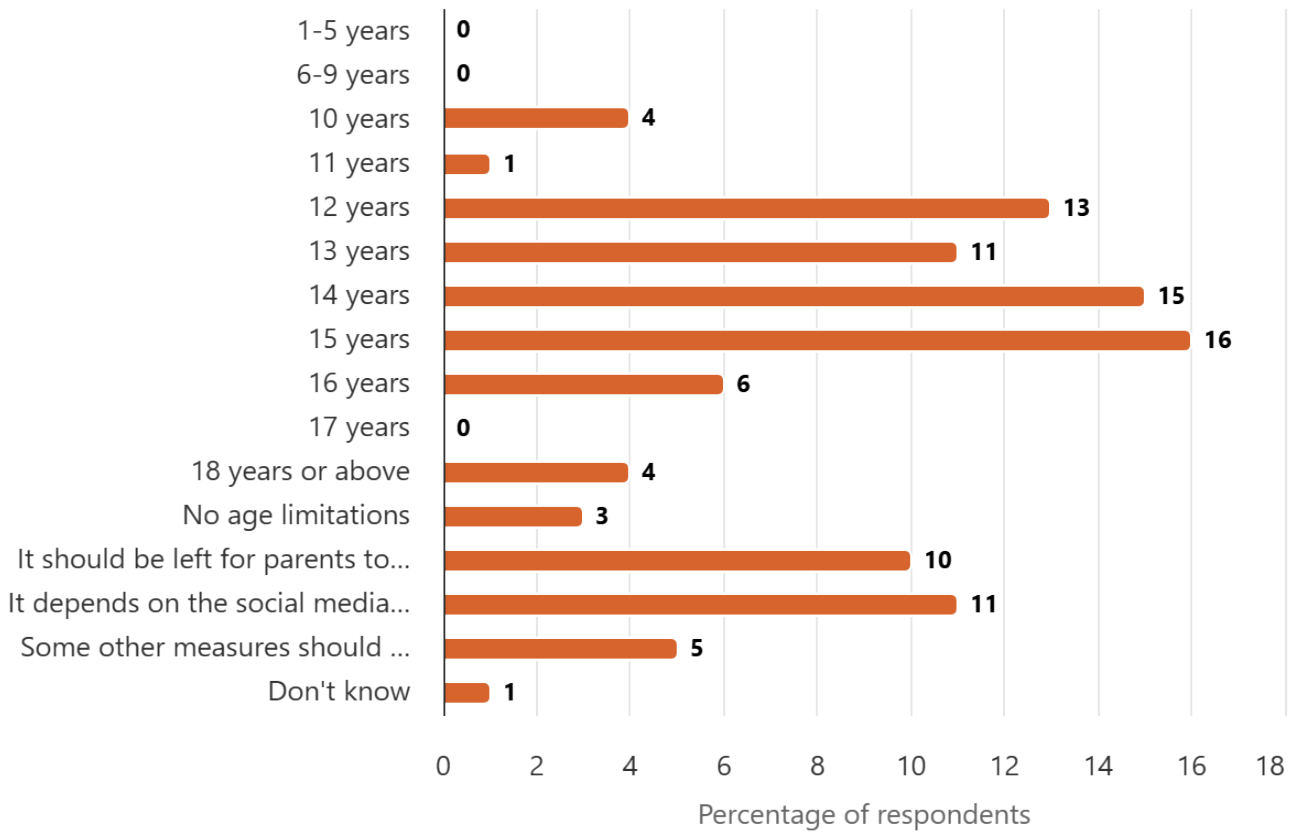
NB: Number of respondents aged 18 and above: 25,922.

For methodological reasons, the question for Figure 3 was asked in the Eurobarometer survey before the question on concerns (Figures 1 and 2) was asked so as not to negatively influence the responses to the question on age limitations. Question: How old should a child be before they are legally allowed to access social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram or Pinterest, or should there be no limitations by age?

Source: FRA, 2026

Figure 3b – Social media prohibition for children

How old should a child be before they are legally allowed to access social media platforms or should there be no age limitation? – Respondents aged 15-17



NB: Number of respondents aged 15-17 years: 531.

For methodological reasons, the question for Figure 3 was asked in the Eurobarometer survey before the question on concerns (Figures 1 and 2) was asked so as not to negatively influence the responses to the question on age limitations. Question: How old should a child be before they are legally allowed to access social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram or Pinterest, or should there be no limitations by age?

Source: FRA, 2026

3. Relevant provisions: EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and secondary EU law

With respect to children's access to and use of social media, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Charter) [12] and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) [13] include several relevant provisions [14]. The following section paraphrases these rights with respect to the protection afforded to children and accompanying measures, with the relevant articles and references to the Charter and UN CRC, including selected secondary EU law [15].

- Human dignity and protection from all forms of violence [16]:

Social media can expose children to harmful content [17], such as sexual abuse, hate speech, and cyberbullying, with negative effects on their mental health and development. EU law explicitly prohibits certain content [18]. The Digital Services Act (DSA), among other relevant provisions, requires online platforms to take measures to ensure a high level of privacy, safety, and security of minors, on their service [19]. According to the CRC, laws, policies and measures should prevent and address these harms, promote positive and supportive online environments, and ensure access to help and counselling when needed [20].

- Best interests of the child [21]:

The child's best interests should be the primary consideration in any public and private action to determine their age or limit their access to social media, with legislation, policies and measures reflecting their evolving capacities [22].

- Protection from discrimination [23]:

Laws, policies and measures should enable *all* children to participate safely online. They must take into account the specific risks faced by different children due to their personal characteristics and circumstances. This includes children with disabilities, with minority or migrant backgrounds, and differences between girls and boys [24].

- Privacy and data protection [25]:

Children's personal data requires a high level of protection [26]. This includes data protection by design and by default, strong privacy settings, age-appropriate information on data use, prohibition of profiling and tracking, strict data minimisation, and the right to have their data [27]. In EU law, processing personal data of children is one of the criteria that need to be considered when assessing whether the data processing is likely of high-risk, which requires a data protection impact assessment [28]. Age-assurance tools should respect the evolving capacities of children and be privacy-preserving for all users, with due regard for the special vulnerabilities of children [29].

- Freedoms of thought, conscience and religion, of expression and information, of assembly and association, of the arts and sciences, and the right to education [30] :

Children should be able to express themselves, connect with peers, and access diverse, good quality, age-appropriate information and educational content online [31] . Digital literacy and rights awareness are essential so that children can use online services safely, give informed consent when relevant, and seek help when needed [32] .

- Participation and right to be heard [33] :

Children's views, including those living in vulnerable situations, should be considered on matters concerning them, in line with their age and maturity and with appropriate safeguards. This includes involving them in relevant consultations, in the development, monitoring and evaluation of child protection strategies, policies, programmes and services [34] .

- Protection as consumers [35] :

As digital consumers, children should receive age-appropriate information about commercial practices and terms of service of online platforms so they can make informed choices [36] . They should not be profiled for advertising, and they should be protected from commercial exploitation [37] .

- Redress [38] :

Accessible, child-friendly complaint channels and support systems should be available when harms occur online, including reporting mechanisms on platforms, national helplines and independent authorities, with clear information on how to use them in a child-friendly way [39] .

Endnotes

- [1] For an overview of main legislation and policy at the EU and Member State levels on child safety online, see [Better Internet for Kids Initiative](#), European Commission website.
- [2] European Parliament and Council of the European Union, [Regulation \(EU\) 2022/2065 of the European and Council of the European Union of 19 October 2022 on a single market for digital services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC \(Digital Services Act\)](#), OJ L 277, 27 October 2022.
- [3] European Commission, [Communication from the Commission – Guidelines on measures to ensure a high level of privacy, safety and security for minors online, pursuant to Article 28\(4\) of Regulation \(EU\) 2022/2065](#), OJ C/2025/5519, 10 October 2025.
- [4] European Commission, [Blueprint for an age verification solution to help protect minors online](#), European Commission website, accessed on 2 March 2025.
- [5] European Commission, [EU digital identity wallet home](#), European Commission website, accessed on 2 March 2025.
- [6] European Commission, [Special panel on child safety online](#), European Commission website, accessed on 25 March 2026.
- [7] European Union (EU), [Consolidated treaties, Charter of Fundamental Rights 2016](#) (Charter of Fundamental Rights) (2016/C 202/02), 2016, Art. 5; for a presentation of the necessity and proportionality test under the Charter, consult FRA, [Better legislation – Human rights impact assessments in lawmaking](#), 8 December 2025, Chapters 1-2; FRA, Charterpedia, [Article 52- Scope and interpretation](#), FRA website, accessed on 3 March 2026.
- [8] The Digital Services Act (DSA) requires very large online platforms and search engines to assess and mitigate systemic risks to children’s rights and on the protection of children (Art. 34- 35). It also requires online platforms accessible to children to put in place ‘appropriate and proportionate measures to ensure a high level of privacy, safety, and security of minors on their services’ (DSA, Art.28 (1)).
- [9] EU, [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) (2016/C 202/02), 2016, pp. 389-405), 2000.
- [10] United Nations, [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC), 20 November 1989.
- [11] FRA, [Assessing High-risk Artificial Intelligence – Fundamental Rights Risks](#), Publication Office of the European Union, 2025, pp. 58-59; FRA, [Online Content Moderation – Current challenges in detecting hate speech](#), Publication Office of the European Union, 2023, pp. 73-74.
- [12] EU, [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) (2016/C 202/02), 2016, pp. 389-405.
- [13] United Nations, [CRC](#), 1989.
- [14] Rights referred to herein are as set out in the EU, [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), 2016 and the United Nations, [CRC](#), 1989; for an analysis of [the European Convention on Human Rights](#) and the rights of the child, see FRA, [Handbook on European law relating to the rights of the child - 2022 edition](#), Publications Office of the European Union, 2022.

- [15] The 2025 Guide on the case law of the European Court of Human Rights on the rights of the child also provides a useful reference with respect to specific cases - https://ks.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr-ks/guide_rights_of_the_child_eng
- [16] EU, [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), 2016, Art. 1, 3, 5, 24(1); United Nations, [CRC](#), 1989, Art. 19, 32, 34, 35, 36, 39, 40.
- [17] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Existing and emerging sexually exploitative practices against children in the digital environment – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale, exploitation and sexual abuse of children](#) (A/79/122), 9 July 2024; Eurostat, ‘50 % of young people encounter hostile messages online’, Eurostat website, 1 August 2024; FRA, [EU LGBTIQ Survey III](#), (Topic: Violence and harassment, Question: Encountered/seen online LGBTIQ people to be “unnatural” or mentally ill in the last 12 months, Answer: Often; Filter 1: All; Age: 15-17), 2023; European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC), [Cyberbullying: insights from science, policy and legislation](#), 11 November 2025; European Commission, JRC, [Social media usage and adolescents’ mental health in the EU](#), (Science for policy brief, JRC 141047), 2025.
- [18] At the EU level, prohibited content relevant for child protection, but also adults, includes incitement to terrorism ([Directive \(EU\) 2017/541](#)); child sexual abuse material ([Directive \(EU\) 2011/92/EU](#));, racism and xenophobia ([Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA](#)); harmful audiovisual content affecting children, such as gratuitous violence and pornography ([Directive \(EU\) 2018/1808](#) (Audiovisual media directive)); and, as of June 2027, cyberviolence against women and girls, in particular cyberstalking, cyber harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate or manipulated material, cyber incitement to violence or hatred, and cyber flashing (Domestic violence directive ([Directive \(EU\) 2024/1385](#))). For further details on protecting children from sexual abuse, including online, see FRA, [Handbook on European law relating to the rights of the child - 2022 edition](#), 2022, Chapter 7.1.3.
- [19]
- [20] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General comment No25 \(2021\) on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment](#) (General comment No25), (CRC/C/GC/25), 02 March 2021, paragraphs 14,16, 45, 46, 54, 80-83, 112-116.
- [21] EU, [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), 2016, Art. 24 (2); United Nations, [CRC](#), 1989, Art. 3.
- [22] European Parliament and Council of the European Union, [Digital Services Act](#), 2022, Recital 89 (very large online platforms and search engines to consider the child’s best interests in their systems and features); United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General Comment No25](#), 2021, paragraphs 12-13 (best interests of the child) and paragraphs 19-21 (evolving capacities) refer to considerations for States Parties to develop legislation, policies and measures taking into account the best interests of the child and their evolving capacities.
- [23] EU, [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), 2016, Art.21, 26; United Nations, [CRC](#), 1989, Art. 2, 23.
- [24] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General Comment No25](#), 2021, paragraphs 9-11 (outline measures by State Parties to ensure non-discrimination in the digital environment for children); [Digital Services Act](#), 2022, Art. 34-35 (requires very large online platforms and very large search engines to assess and mitigate risks of discriminatory impacts stemming from the design and functioning, and use of their services).
- [25] EU, [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), 2016, Art. 7, 8; United Nations, [CRC](#), 1989, Art. 16.
- [26] European Parliament and Council of the European Union, [Digital Services Act](#), 2022, Art. 28, Recital 71; European Parliament and Council of the European Union, [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the](#)

Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation) (GDPR), OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, pp. 1-88; in particular, see Article 8 and Recital 38 (children as vulnerable data subjects) of the GDPR.

[27] For data protection safeguards for children, see FRA, [Handbook on European law relating to the rights of the child - 2022 edition](#), 2022, Chapter 10.1; and: FRA, [Handbook on European data protection law – 2018 edition](#), 2018, Publications Office of the European Union, pp. 361-369.

[28] European Parliament and Council of the European Union, [GDPR](#), 2016, Art. 35, Recital 75; for more information, see Article 29 Working Party, [Guidelines on Data Protection Impact Assessment \(DPIA\)](#), 13 October 2017, as endorsed by the European Data Protection Board, 25 May 2018.

[29] European Data Protection Board, [Statement 1/2025 on Age Assurance](#), 12 February 2025, paragraphs 11, 12, 13, 22; United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General Comment No25](#), 2021, paragraph 114 mentions the set-up of robust age verification for access to illegal products or services and data protection compliance.

[30] EU, [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), 2016, Art. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14; United Nations, [CRC](#), 1989, Art. 13, 14, 15, 17, 28, 29, 30, 31; please note that Art. 17 (e) of the [CRC](#), 1989, obliges State parties to ‘encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being [...]’.

[31] European Parliament and Council of the European Union, [Digital Services Act](#), 2022, Art 34-35 (risk assessments and mitigating measures), Recital 81 (age-inappropriate content), Recital 83 (design features causing addiction), Recital 71 (child safeguarding as critical priority); European Parliament and Council of the European Union, [Audiovisual Media Services Directive](#), 2018, Art. 6, 20, 24, 27. See FRA, [Handbook on European law relating to the rights of the child - 2022 edition](#), 2022, Chapter 7.1.3 (Sexual abuse) and 10.2.7 (Children and Advertising).

[32] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General Comment No25](#), 2021, paragraphs 50-66; 99-111.

[33] EU, [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), 2016, Art. 24(1); United Nations, [CRC](#), 1989, Art. 12.

[34] FRA, [Towards Integrated child protection systems](#), 2025, Publications Office of the European Union, pp. 12-14; for information on children’s right to be heard in national processes, see European Commission, [Recommendation of 24/04.2024 on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems in the best interests of the child](#) (C (2024) 2630 final), paragraph 4; United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General Comment No25](#), paragraphs 17-18; FRA, [Handbook on European law relating to the rights of the child - 2022 edition](#), 2022, Chapter 2.4.

[35] EU, [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), 2016, Art. 38; for more information on the protection of children as consumers in EU law, see FRA, [Handbook on European law relating to the rights of the child - 2022 edition](#), 2022, Chapter 10.2.

[36] European Parliament and Council of the European Union, [Digital Services Act](#), 2022, Article 14(3) and Recital 46 (terms and conditions easily understandable for children).

[37] European Parliament and Council of the European Union, [Digital Services Act](#), 2022, Art. 28(2) prohibits online platforms from targeting children with advertisement based on profiling (as defined in [GDPR](#), 2016, Art. 4(4)) when they are aware the user is a child; European Parliament and Council of the EU, [Audiovisual Media Services Directive](#), 2018, Article 6a(2) prohibits processing children’s personal data for commercial purposes, including profiling and

targeted advertising, on video-sharing platforms.

[38] EU, [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), 2016, Art. 47; United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General Comment No25](#), 2021, paragraphs 43-49.

[39] European Parliament and Council of the European Union, [Digital Services Act](#), 2022, Art. 16 (notification and action mechanisms), Recital 89 (child friendly complaint and reporting systems to be implemented by very large online platforms and search engines); United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General Comment No25](#), 2021, paragraphs 43-49 outlining measures that States Parties to ensure access to justice and remedies, including support and referral.

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