	Author(s): The Online Safety Expert Group (OSEG), is an informal multistakeholder coalition of online safety experts and organisations from across Europe which has come together to try to ensure that online child safety legislation is practical, effective and respects the rights of parents and minors. See www.oseg.online

Common principles and busting the myths regarding potential Social Media bans on minors

The use of social media by all parts of society has brought many benefits but equally it has presented complex challenges, particularly the protection and wellbeing of young people which is a serious concern for parents, educators, the wider community and government authorities around the world.

Legislative landscape
New comprehensive legislation has been implemented in 2025 in the EU (Digital Services Act), theUK (Online Safety Act), which incorporate "Rights Based Approaches" and "safety by design" principles mandating that social media companies and other online platforms accessible to minors must implement necessary & proportionate protections backed by severe penalties for non-compliance.

Despite these laws and regulations now coming into effect, we have noted that in a number of countries including Romania, France, Finland, Denmark, Greece and Norway there is growing political discourse calling for additional national legislation with proposals ranging from harsh access restrictions to an outright ban on minors using online social media.

Bans are a blunt instrument and they don't work
While such proposals may invariably be well-intentioned, broad legal bans on social media access for minors are a crude blunt instrument. Also they could potentially be in conflict with existing regional, national and international legislation, and will most likely have unintended consequences. Banning minors from access to social media would create a false sense of security and a false expectation that minors are protected, when in fact they will be denied access to important learnings, skills and experiences. Rather than incentivising or mandating platforms to have age appropriate experiences, any ban will push minors into circumventing mandated barriers to access unregulated or online environments, where there are no protections, parental controls or supervision.

Crucially, a ban would also deny minors the opportunity to learn, build digital resilience, and acquire essential life skills in an increasingly connected world. It would also strip away access to protective mechanisms, positive online communities and experiences. **Thus *"Protection, empowerment, and participation should always be considered together"* in any policy regarding online safety.**

<u>Key principles to be considered</u>
With these issues in mind it is important that in any discussions around this topic, the following points should be factored into any debate:

Unintended consequences: Policies that could impose broad age bans are not a simple solution to a complex issue. Conversely they could in fact push children toward unsupervised,

unmoderated, or online spaces outside of current legislative oversight, ultimately increasing their vulnerability.

Enforcement of existing legislation: . During 2024 and 2025 the EU and the UK have implemented the most stringent online child protections in the world (DSA & OSA) which set clear requirements and enforcement mechanisms related to age appropriate design, content moderation, age verification, risk assessments and parental controls. Rather than creating additional new legislation, *existing laws and regulations need to be fully applied and rigidly enforced on all platforms.*

Parental involvement & consent: A ban fundamentally limits the opportunity for positive parental involvement, guidance and the ability to consent in decisions regarding their children's educational and social development.

Rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Any ban may affect a minor's rights to access and participation and freedom of expression (article 13.1). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child states that 'national policies should be aimed at providing children with the opportunity to benefit from engaging with the digital environment and ensuring their safe access to it.'

Access to key online resources: A ban would impede access to key resources including educational content, mental health support, and block access to online communities, which are often a lifeline, particularly for marginalised or vulnerable groups.

Privacy & security risk: For a ban to be implemented, an accurate age assurance regime will be needed, which presents a wide range of privacy, legal, practical and cultural risks for all users regardless of age. This could also require the collection of sensitive personal data on a massive scale which could conflict with data protection legislation.

Industry off the hook: If a ban on minors is implemented, online providers could argue they are no longer responsible for minors' safety and subsequently discontinue dedicated child safety measures & support. Minors who circumvent the ban will be exposed to greater risk and will be reluctant to report issues for fear of being permanently excluded, leading to unreported problems that worsen.

Recommendations

Throughout the history of human behavior it has been shown that the imposition of prohibition or the banning of an activity is counterproductive (The Streisand effect) where the result is often the opposite to what was intended. So rather than focussing on any crude ban type regulation we strongly encourage policymakers to focus effort on what we know works, which is the full, rigorous, and rapid application of existing comprehensive safety legislation. The path to genuine online child safety is not through exclusion by just banning minors, but through a multi-faceted approach that focuses on:

1. Strict enforcement of current EU legislation including 'Safety by Design'.
2. Digital literacy education, building skills and resilience in young people.
3. Empowering and supporting parents with tools and information.
4. Investing in mental health support that spans both online and offline environments.

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