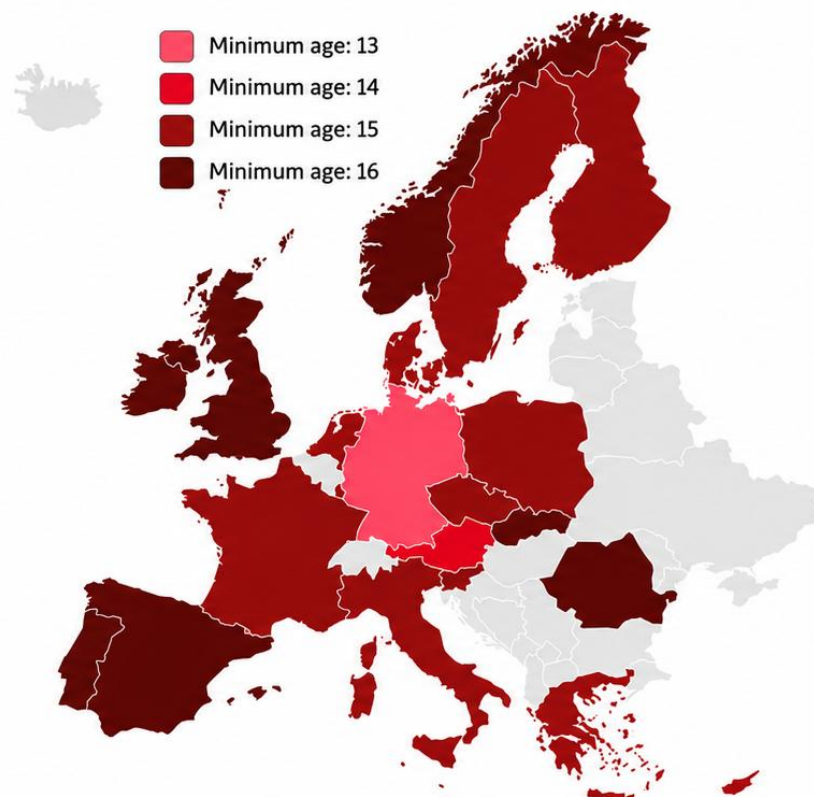


Information paper on the discussions regarding minimum age and age verification for digital services

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The question of a minimum age and associated age verification for digital services is currently the subject of wide-ranging debate both within and outside the EU. The focus here is particularly on social media services and platforms offering pornographic content.

With this information paper, eco – Association of the Internet Industry (eco) aims to provide an illustrative overview of existing regulations and guidelines relating to age restrictions, as well as regulatory initiatives currently under discussion. Furthermore, eco aims to highlight the challenges arising in connection with age restrictions for certain services or content.



Country	Current status of regulation / requirements	Age verification/verification methods
Germany	- Developmentally-impairing content (Section 5 of the German Interstate Treaty on the Protection of Minors in the Media (JMStV)) must be protected by appropriate measures to ensure that such content is not normally accessible to minors in the relevant age groups (6, 12, 16, 18) – e.g. technical or other means that at least significantly impede the access of the relevant age group to the content, age verification, and labelling for recognised youth protection programmes. - Content harmful to young people (Section 4(2) of the German Interstate Treaty on the Protection of Minors in the Media (JMStV)) may only be accessible to adults and must be protected by mandatory measures (closed user group, age verification). - Many social media platforms in Germany allow use from the age of 13, based on voluntary provider guidelines. There's currently no specific legal obligation to carry out age verification in this regard. Federal Minister for Family Affairs Prien is campaigning for a statutory minimum age of 13 for the independent use of social networks. Child-friendly and low-risk services are to be exempt from the minimum age requirement. Compliance with the minimum age is to be ensured through mandatory age verification. Minister Prien is therefore calling for a uniform, EU-wide regulation. At the same time, she is seeking a national transitional arrangement in the event that no rapid EU regulation is put in place. As part of the political debate, the Expert Commission “Protection of Children and Young People in the Digital World” and the German Ethics Council had previously addressed the issue of age restrictions for social media. The expert commission has proposed two alternatives for legally regulated age restrictions. Option 1 provides for the independent use of social media from the age of 13 (= statutory minimum age). It combines the minimum age with a requirement for parental consent for access by under-13s to services that are demonstrably child-friendly and low-risk, as well as tiered protection standards for the age groups 13 - 16 and 16 - 18. Option 2 does not specify a minimum age and follows a purely risk-based approach. Access to a service is not restricted across the board; instead, providers restrict only individual functions or accounts that pose a particularly high risk in an age-appropriate manner. The service's risk assessment should determine the age limit in each case. Both options are accompanied by new requirements for age verification. The Ethics Council has spoken out against a general minimum age and in favour of “a three-tier, risk-based model for the technical protection of children and young people”.	- In the case of closed user groups (Section 4(2) of the German Interstate Treaty on the Protection of Minors in the Media (JMStV)): Age verification, in particular via age verification systems/ systems for ensuring closed user groups (AVS) that comply with the requirements of the Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Media (KJM) and the voluntary self-regulation bodies, and which have been recognised by a voluntary self-regulation body Methods previously assessed positively (extract): ID verification via post, selfie or video identification; eID (online ID function); account identification (bank or credit card, provided the holder's age has been reliably verified); reliable biometric facial age estimation (e.g., services provided by Yoti) - In the case of technical or other measures designed to hinder or prevent access to developmentally-impairing content (Section 5 of the German Interstate Treaty on the Protection of Minors in the Media (JMStV)), here too, age verification methods that meet the requirements of the Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Media (KJM) and the voluntary self-regulation bodies , and which a voluntary self-regulation body has recognised, play an essential role - Under discussion in the context of minimum age requirements for social media: Verification of the statutory minimum age via/using the EUDI Wallet

Denmark	- A minimum age of 15 for social media is to be introduced. - However, parents can allow their children to sign up to these networks from the age of 13.	- Age verification based on government digital identity systems - Cyprus, Spain, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland and Italy are trialling the EU's age verification system.
Finland	A statutory minimum age of 15 for using social media is under discussion	
France	- The SREN Act ("<i>Sécuriser et Réguler l'Espace Numérique</i>") mandates age verification for platforms containing sexual content (e.g., porn sites). Operators must ensure that only those aged 18 and over have access, including through certified age verification services. - In June 2025, major international porn platforms (including Pornhub, YouPorn and Redtube) voluntarily blocked access from France. - President Macron is campaigning for a statutory minimum age of 15 for the use of social media. A corresponding law, which was due to come into force on 1 September 2026, was blocked by the Constitutional Council in mid-August. President Macron has initiated the drafting of a new bill. - France is also campaigning for this minimum age at EU level; access to social media is to be prohibited for those below this age limit. The initiative is supported by Greece, Spain and Ireland.	- SREN's double-anonymity principle for age verification: Verification takes place once via a neutral service that issues an anonymous age certificate/token. Neither the website nor the verification service receives complete user or behavioural data. - Cyprus, Spain, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland and Italy are testing the EU's age verification system.
Greece	- Plans are in place to introduce a statutory minimum age of 15 for the use of social media/networks, which is due to come into force on 01/01/2027. - At the same time, Greece is campaigning for uniform European regulation. - In addition, content relating to gambling, tobacco, alcohol, adult content and dating (e.g. Tinder) will be blocked for under-18s. - Greece is thus relying not only on platform obligations but also on blocking at the device level, even without a user account.	- The government app "Kids Wallet" will implement these blocks, preventing access to platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and X on devices registered as belonging to minors. - Cyprus, Spain, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland and Italy are trialling the EU's age verification system - A system for digital age verification in relation to the sale of tobacco and alcohol has already been introduced (as of March 2026)
Ireland	- In 2024, the Protection of Children (Online Age Verification) Bill, aimed at ISPs and app stores, failed to pass; a new draft is expected. - The national GDPR minimum age ("<i>Digital Age of Consent</i>") is 16; parental consent is required for younger minors. - The <i>Online Safety Code</i> is designed to protect children and young people from harmful content and is aimed at video-sharing platforms. Under this code, age verification measures must also be put in place, for example, to prevent children from accessing pornography. - Officials have announced that work is underway on legislative proposals setting a national minimum age of 16 for the use of social media. The adoption of an Irish	Cyprus, Spain, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland and Italy are testing the EU's age verification system.

	law is subject to the proviso that no corresponding uniform regulation should be introduced at European level.	
Italy	- Providers of pornographic content must introduce age verification systems to continue distributing their content in Italy. - In the event of non-compliance with this obligation, the competent public authorities will initially issue a warning to the concerned provider. If the provider fails to comply with the request, penalties of up to EUR 250,000 may be imposed. - A draft bill provides for a minimum age of 15 for the use of social media.	- Double anonymity principle for age verification: independent, certified third-party providers should/must confirm that the user has reached the age of majority. The use of specialised apps on smartphones or other devices is also possible, such as apps for digital identity portfolios. The “double anonymity principle” mechanism prevents verifiers from knowing for which service the age confirmation is being issued. At the same time, the age verification transferred to the website or platform does not contain any of the user’s personal data. - Age verification is to be carried out via eID. - Cyprus, Spain, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland and Italy are testing the EU’s age verification system.
Luxembourg	- Lawmakers are discussing a statutory minimum age of 16 for the use of social media. - The primary aim is to find a European solution. However, officials have announced that national regulations will be introduced if no uniform European solution for a minimum age for social media has been established by the end of 2026.	
Netherlands	- Parliament has come out in favour of a minimum age of 15 (01/03/2025); the coalition government that has been in office since early 2026 also supports this stance. - A uniform European regulation on a minimum age for social media is preferred. - In addition, a recommendation (<i>Guideline for Healthy Screen Use; Richtlijn gezond schermgebruik</i>) was issued in 2025 stating that minors should only use social media from the age of 15.	
Austria	- Political agreement has been reached on a minimum age of 14 for the use of social media; the corresponding legislative process is underway. The minimum age is to apply from 2027. - However, a European solution is still desired; the national regulation is therefore intended to serve as a transitional measure.	The planned national regulation provides for a “zero-knowledge proof” approach, either via ID Austria or certified third-party providers.
Poland	- Age verification for online purchases (alcohol, tobacco) via a tick box or ID verification upon delivery (e.g. DHL). Discussion or regulation? - Discussions are currently underway regarding a minimum age of 15 for the use of social media.	The EUDI Wallet could verify the minimum age.

	In addition, lawmakers are considering proposed legislation that aims to prevent children from accessing pornographic websites through the introduction of age verification systems.	
Portugal	Legislative proceedings are underway to introduce a minimum age of 16 for the use of social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. However, minors aged 13 - 16 will also gain access to social media, provided that verified parental consent is in place.	Age verification is to be carried out via the national digital identity system, “Chave Móvel Digital”.
Romania	- Legal age of majority and minimum age in the digital sphere: 16 years - The so-called draft <i>Digital Age of Majority Law</i> is intended to protect minors under the age of 16 from harmful online content. It’s therefore proposed that minors below this age should, for example, only be able to set up personal accounts on online platforms with the express consent of their parents. - Under this draft law, parents would also be able to restrict their children’s accounts, report content, and request the removal of harmful posts. - Digital service providers would be obliged to implement additional protective measures for underage users.	
Sweden	A government-appointed commission has recommended introducing a statutory minimum age of 15 for the use of social media.	
Slovakia	- A draft act setting a minimum age of 16 for the use of social media has been passed by the government; it is due to come into force in 2027. - Planned safeguards also include additional protections for young social media users.	
Slovenia	A draft act is being prepared to introduce a minimum age of 15 for the use of social media.	
Spain	- A minimum age of 16 for the use of social media is planned; the relevant legislative process is under way. - Together with France and Greece, amongst others, Spain is emphasising the call for a mandatory minimum age for social media in the EU debate.	- To enforce the age restrictions technically, Spain plans to introduce an electronic age verification system called <i>Cartera Digital Beta</i>. Users will be required to verify their identity digitally before they can access sensitive online content. - The MiDNI app carries out digital identification. In particular, it includes the option of age verification. - Cyprus, Spain, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland and Italy are trialling the EU’s age verification system.
Czech Republic	A statutory minimum age of 15 for the use of social media is under discussion	

Cyprus	- Cyprus is pushing for an EU-wide mandatory minimum age and compulsory age verification for social media to better protect children. - At national level, Cyprus is planning or preparing a statutory minimum age of 15 for the use of social media.	Cyprus, Spain, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland and Italy are trialling the EU's age verification system.
Across the EU	- The Digital Services Act (DSA) provides for age verification as a risk mitigation measure for very large platforms. Furthermore, all providers of online platforms must take measures to protect minors. In this respect, the Guidelines on the Protection of Minors assign a central role to age verification. - The EU Digital Identity Wallet (EUDI Wallet) could play an essential role in age verification. It's due to launch in 2026, initially as an app for age verification with data minimisation, for use across Europe; a pilot phase has been running since 15/07/2025 in Denmark, France, Greece, Italy and Spain, amongst others. - Minimum age: There's no specific, EU-wide regulation on the minimum age for using social media. However, several EU Member States – in particular France (supported by Spain, Greece, Slovenia, Cyprus and Denmark) – are now calling for an EU-wide minimum age of 15. The European Parliament is also discussing the issue of a minimum age. - The findings of a commission of experts set up by Commission President von der Leyen which examined the issue of the protection of minors on the Internet, were published in July 2026. The report recommends a statutory minimum age of 13 for the use of so-called "Social Media+" services.	From 2026, there is to be an EU-wide digital age verification solution (eID Wallet): a voluntary, standardised digital identification document that EU citizens can use on their smartphones to prove their age with data minimisation.
Norway	A draft bill has been announced which aims to introduce a minimum age of 16 for the use of social networks. A key feature is that permission to use such services will apply from 1 January of the year in which the person turns 16.	Discussions are taking place regarding age verification via BankID, future European verification solutions and digital ID wallets
UK	- Platforms featuring risky content (e.g. pornography, violence, self-harm) must ensure that children cannot access them (<i>Online Safety Act</i>). - Pornhub and other major platforms have now introduced strict age checks. The government has announced the introduction of a statutory minimum age of 16 for the use of social media, due to come into force in 2027. The minimum age is to be accompanied by mandatory safeguards for 16- and 17-year-olds. In addition, certain AI chatbots will in future only be accessible to those aged 18 and over. These include, for example, AI chatbots that may suggest sexual relationships.	- Under the Online Safety Act, reliable proof of age is mandatory – simple self-declarations are not sufficient. - These may include uploading ID, age estimation via facial recognition or email, payment methods/credit cards, mobile network providers, digital IDs, etc. - Details regarding the planned age verification within the framework of a statutory minimum age are not yet known.

Australia	• A statutory minimum age of 16 for the use of social media (<i>Online Safety Amendment Act</i>, effective from 10/12/2025) – it is the first law of its kind worldwide. • Platforms must ensure that no one under the age of 16 can have an account – this applies to both new registrations and existing accounts. • In 2026, the scope of the minimum age requirement was revised so that platforms are now defined more strictly by their design.	• Multi-layered age verification (including biometric estimation and account assurance); ID alone is not sufficient. • Combined verification methods are intended to balance security, protection against manipulation and data protection.
Indonesia	• Since 01/03/2026, a minimum age of 16 has applied to high-risk social media platforms. This affects platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Low-risk platforms or services may be used before the minimum age is reached, provided parental consent is given.	
Japan	• Lawmakers are currently discussing stricter protective measures and age restrictions on the use of social media.	
Canada	• The <i>Safe Social Media Act</i>, “Bill C-34”, has been tabled as a draft bill in the Canadian Parliament. It proposes a minimum age of 16 for the use of social media. Exceptions to the minimum age may be granted upon application if it can be demonstrated that appropriate protective measures for children are in place. The draft bill also sets out standards for AI chatbots and provides for age verification for the use of services containing pornographic content.	
New Zealand	• A draft act to introduce a minimum age of 16 for the use of social networks is currently going through the parliamentary process. The Online Safety (Minimum Age and Child Safety Risk Assessment) Bill; AI chatbots are also covered.	• Discussions are taking place regarding account details, age estimation, digital identities and official identification documents
USA	• Data collection from children under 13: operators may only collect data with parental consent, must protect this data and act transparently. • There's no mandatory age verification – however, providers must ensure that they do not knowingly collect data from children under 13 • There's no mandatory minimum age for using social media under federal law, although some state regulations create an inconsistent situation overall. • In certain states, laws also require providers of pornographic content to carry out age verification.	• Methods of age verification for pornographic content vary and may, for example, be carried out using official ID documents.

The aim of the various national regulations and considerations is to ensure effective protection of children and young people, to establish clear and transparent guidelines on minimum age requirements and age verification mechanisms, and to develop workable solutions that are politically viable and can be implemented in the short term.

From eco's perspective, the following key challenges must be taken into account in the ongoing debate on age restrictions, particularly in light of internationally operating companies and the different types of providers and their respective spheres of influence:

Challenges in the implementation of age verification	Challenges in introducing a minimum age
Data protection and fundamental rights • Processing of sensitive / biometric data • Loss of anonymity • Surveillance concerns Technology and implementation • Who's responsible for age verification? • Relationship to parental rights and coordination with specific decisions/consents given by parents Ensuring consistency and international compatibility • Overblocking/restriction of access to legitimate content • DSA obligations – issues of competence • National vs. EU regulations User perspective • Poor user-friendliness	Fundamental rights and proportionality • Proportionality of minimum age limits • Children's rights and digital participation • Freedom of expression and information Enforcement and Consequences • Enforcement requires age verification • Resulting risks to data protection and fundamental rights Regulatory scope and international compatibility • National regulations/unilateral measures regarding platforms operating internationally • Priority of application and fully harmonising effect of the DSA • Country-of-origin principle Ensuring media literacy • Risk of blanket bans rather than differentiated protection approaches • Unprepared exposure to digital services upon reaching the minimum age

• Deterrent barriers to access • Interference with freedom of expression	• Media literacy and platform design as possible alternatives to strict bans
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