

Connect Europe's Reflections on Age Verification Measures

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Today's online world offers considerable benefits and opportunities for children, but also comes with risks that cannot be ignored. Within this context, discussions around age verification – particularly with regards to the EU Kids Act proposal, the anticipated Digital Fairness Act and the recent report published by the special panel on child safety online¹ – reveal how complex this issue is, and substantial food for thought on how all stakeholders involved should address it.

Connect Europe, representing Europe's connectivity providers, is engaged in efforts to protect against many of the risks that children face online, and is committed to playing our part in ensuring the safety of the digital ecosystem. While children should continue to have access to smartphones for their daily uses, giving them the ability to keep in touch with their family or for accessing transport, **we support the European Commission's overarching goal to target problematic practices online. We believe that policy responses should evolve alongside the digital environment to tackle issues like dark patterns and addictive design of digital products, particularly where they affect minors. We therefore welcome the recently proposed EU Kids Act, which aims to establish a harmonised EU framework placing the primary responsibility for safe design on the providers of the digital services and systems that create or control the relevant risks.**

In that regard, we elaborate on foundational principles for policy related to age verification below.

Targeted, risk-based measures are key

As recognised in the special panel's report, children should have the right to grow up in an environment that is safe and that favours their development, both online and offline. **Harmful online experiences should be prevented, and we welcome the promotion of safe digital habits among children and families.** Current online design features can result in issues like excessive screen time, dissemination of harmful material, radicalisation and extremism. Accordingly, we welcome the European Commission's efforts to address these issues and consider that, while age verification and age assurance tools can play an important role in protecting minors online, they should not be viewed as a standalone solution, or "silver bullet". In this regard, we are aligned with the measures proposed by the EU Kids Act on age limitation, which combine delayed account access and binding safety-by-design requirements.

Effective child protection requires a broader risk-based approach that combines age assurance measures with safety-by-design services, digital literacy initiatives, parental empowerment and effective enforcement of existing legislation, while duly taking into account the different roles of each actor within the ecosystem. Measures related to age verification should therefore be tied to the level of risk related to the specific scenario and services that are creating risks, reflecting a "closest to source" approach and complemented by other appropriate safeguards in order to bolster the goals of protecting minors online. Higher-risk services that offer public channels, algorithmic recommendations, user-discovery or comparable social media functionalities should be the target of proportionate measures.

Additionally, and to maintain consistency with the risk-based approach, **we believe that a "closest to source" principle should be employed for age verification measures to be truly successful.** Therefore, we welcome the recommendation of the **special panel on child safety online**, which

¹ [Special panel - European Commission](#)

specifically calls for shifting the burden of proof to social media and other digital services providers to demonstrate that their products and services are safe for minors. Age assurance solutions should be mandatory for digital platforms offering products and services with minimum age requirements and for those that cannot mitigate by less restrictive means one or more of the OECD's 5Cs risks (Content, Conduct, Contact, Consumer, and Cross-cutting risks)². The EU KIDS Act proposal's distinction between age verification and broader age assurance should therefore be preserved.

Future-proof approach

Policy measures should also take into account the European Commission's overall goal of simplifying and harmonising the complex regulatory framework faced by businesses today. **Successful measures related to age verification should contribute to a simpler and more harmonized horizontal framework that could be reinforced with common European standards and interoperable solutions that should be adopted consistently by online digital platforms across Member States.** We welcome that the proposal is designed as a directly applicable Regulation, specifies and complements the targeted approach also evident in the DSA, and the AI Act, and relies on existing enforcement structures. The legislative process should preserve full harmonisation, avoid overlapping or divergent national requirements and ensure consistent implementation through common EU criteria, certification and interoperable age signals.

Lastly, another key element of ensuring the long-term sustainability and future-proof framework, is ensuring that age assurance solutions preserve users' privacy and trust. Any age assurance framework should be privacy-preserving by design based on the principles of data minimisation and only disclose the information necessary to confirm age or age range, without requiring the excessive collection, storage or sharing of personal data. This is essential both to safeguard users' fundamental rights and to foster trust in age assurance solutions.

Conclusions

We look forward to seeing how the debate on age verification will evolve further. Striking the right balance between allowing young people to engage meaningfully online while also protecting them sufficiently from harm is challenging, but we believe that a progress can be made in an effective way through risk-based, harmonised measures that contribute to the protection of children online. With the right approach, children can have a safer online environment that still allows them to reap the benefits that connectivity provides. Finally, as noted above, we support the legal tool of a regulation as the appropriate legal instrument. For the forthcoming legislative negotiations, there should be a particular focus on maintaining a targeted scope, clear allocation of responsibilities, coherence with the DSA, the AI Act, the AVMSD and consumer law. These elements are necessary to ensure that the new framework is effective for children, workable for providers and genuinely harmonised across the Single Market.

² [Children in the digital environment | OECD](#)