[PT] Portugal to ban social networks for children under 16

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The ruling party in Portugal wants to prevent teenagers under 16 from freely accessing social networks. A law proposal was debated and approved at the Parliament last February. The bill will now go to committee for detailed debate.

With the votes of the majority of the parties (except the far-right and Christian parties), the bill states that children aged 13 or older would only be able to access social networks with the express and verified consent of their parents or legal guardians.

Creating a new account for children under the age of 13 would not be possible and, according to the bill, access for those aged between 13 and 16 would require a mechanism, such as a Digital Mobile Key linked to their identity card, “that allows the minor to be identified, while only displaying his/her age.”

Access restrictions would cover social networks such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Online video games and gambling sites are also included in the restrictions. WhatsApp, a popular platform for communication between parents and their children, would not be included in the range of limited networks.

The platforms would have to ensure safe use, meaning that networks accessible by minors aged between 13 and 16 would have to guarantee that they “have certain features to prevent exposure to violence, age-appropriate sexual content, addictive games, manipulated videos, and manipulated images”. Also, platforms should include features that allow parents to control usage time and monitor potentially dangerous interactions.

The bill also bans autoplay features, infinite scroll mechanisms, gamification designed to prolong use, non-essential notifications, systems for creating fake images or videos and loot boxes or equivalent mechanisms on accounts belonging to children under the age of 16.

The national regulatory authority (*Autoridade Nacional de Comunicações*) and the Portuguese data protection authority (*Comissão Nacional de Protecção de Dados*) would ensure compliance with the measures and impose significant fines (up to EUR 2 million) or up to 2% of the networks' annual global revenues) for harmful actions against children.

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This initiative is supported by scientific studies and reports from international organizations that raise several concerns over the well-being of children and adolescents who regularly use social networks. It also follows cases of other European countries which have limitations on the use of social networks, and the recent example of the Australian Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024.

Bill to limit access to social networks

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