

Publication of the report from the European Commission's Special Panel on Child Safety Online's

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On 13 July 2026, the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the delivery of a highly-anticipated report by the Commission's Special Panel on *Child Safety Online*. She underlined how important the protection of children online is and how she considered it to be one of the greatest challenges that today's governments face.

The panel, co-chaired by Dr. Maria Melchior and Prof. Dr. Jörg M. Fegert brought together young people and experts from across the EU, discussing how to better support parents and caregivers and highlighting key lessons and good practices from across the EU and beyond.

The report makes recommendations on age-appropriate use of social media and other digital services, recommending that screens and social media be avoided altogether under 2 years of age. From 3 to 12, it recommends only supervised use of internet-enabled devices, with parents and caregivers gradually ensuring digital autonomy with regard to age-appropriate social media and other digital services. From 13 to 18, it recommends an evolution towards autonomous use of age-appropriate social media, starting at 16 years of age. It notes that until social media and devices are developed with a "safe by default" approach, adolescents should only have access to age-appropriate social media and digital services. Parents and caregivers of adolescents above 16 are urged to keep engaging with them with regard to their online experiences, as the greater autonomy they will enjoy will be accompanied with higher risks related to them being exposed to potentially harmful content.

In addition to the above, the report also makes a series of recommendations to protect children and adolescents online and to empower them. To that end, the report argues that a harmonised EU-wide access restriction to social media and other digital services for children under 13 is necessary, to facilitate the implementation of proportionate and rights-respecting age assurance and to encourage safety by design requirements for social media and other digital services providers. The report also recalls the importance of effective and accurate age assurance systems, indentifying them as underpinning safety-by-design and age-appropriate approaches. The report also calls for an extended and harmonised set of rules on key safety features in the design of social media and

other digital services. Additionally, the panel considers that the burden of proof should be shifted to social media and other digital services providers, to demonstrate that their products and services are safe for minors.

Other recommendations include

strengthening enforcement and evaluation capacities, to avoid inconsistencies and to ensure a predictable and effective legal environment; the swift adoption of measures to ensure social media and other digital services providers have clear obligations to prevent, detect, report and block child sexual abuse online; and it argues in favour of member states introducing further precautionary access restrictions for adolescents above 13 years of age, in addition to an EU-wide restriction.

Special panel report on child safety online, Protecting and empowering minors in a digital world, 13 July 2026

https://commission.europa.eu/digital-life/protecting-children-online/special-panel_en

