Danish Presidency
Council of the European Union

The Jutland Declaration: Shaping a Safe Online World for Minors

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A pressing need to protect minors in the digital environment

Minors are exposed to severe dangers and risks in the online world and are spending more and more time in front of screens, instead of actively interacting with friends, family, and the offline world around them. Addictive designs keep them hooked. Every day, they are at risk of facing illegal, harmful and extremist content and are exposed to inappropriate contact on for instance social media.

A study conducted in 2024 by the WHO showed that problematic use of social media among adolescents increased from 7% in 2018 to 11% in 2022. It highlights the negative effects on mental health, sleep, well-being, and academic performance. This calls for stronger and decisive action to create a safer and age-appropriate digital world for all minors in Europe, promoting their mental, social and physical health and wellbeing. This is imperative in order for minors to continue benefitting from the many aspects of the digital transformation including opportunities for education, creativity, civic engagement and social participation.

In the EU, we have taken major regulatory steps to shape the digital environment in accordance with our values and principles. In this context, we welcome legislation such as the Digital Services Act (DSA), the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) and the Artificial Intelligence Act (AIA). These are key instruments for protecting, empowering, and respecting minors, and we are committed to leveraging these key instruments to achieve progress. Nevertheless, many challenges remain.

Effective implementation and enforcement of the existing regulatory framework

Protecting minors online requires continuous attention, cooperation, and the willingness to act decisively. Legislation must be effectively implemented and adapted to new digital developments and new technologies. Only through *effective* regulation, *strong* enforcement and *shared* responsibility can we create and promote a safer digital environment for minors.

A continued firm stance on the effective and consistent enforcement of legislation that protects minors must therefore continue to be a priority. Thus, we are dedicated to the enforcement of the DSA at the national level and will continue to engage in close cooperation with the European Commission, including through our national regulators, in its efforts to enforce the rules.

We welcome the European Commission's guidelines on protection of minors online adopted under the DSA in July 2025. Together with Article 28(1), these guidelines are the heart of the DSA's approach to the issue and constitute a major step towards ensuring that providers of online platforms accessible to minors implement appropriate and proportionate measures to ensure a high level of privacy, safety, and security for minors using their services. The guidelines target the role of platforms in particular, but the basic principles and many of the envisioned measures could also serve as an inspiration for improving the safety of other services and for other user groups.

While we generally need stronger efforts to simplify the existing legislation and reduce the regulatory burden to ensure that Europe is both competitive and innovation-friendly, there is an exceptional need to protect our minors online. Thus, there is a need to explore whether further measures are required to complement the DSA in order to strengthen the protection of minors online. This is also due to the fact that the scope of the DSA is limited to intermediary services.

Towards stronger online protection for minors

As a particularly vulnerable group in the digital environment, minors require stronger and more targeted protection. Therefore, we call for an ambitious approach to safeguarding minors online in the upcoming work on the digital agenda, including the review of the AVMSD as well as other relevant files and reviews.

If providers are to ensure privacy, safety and security for minors online with age-appropriate content and interfaces, those providers must take all necessary measures to achieve a high level of protection and implement safety by design. This includes, where necessary, appropriate and proportionate, having a firm awareness of the age group of their users.

Thus, there is a need to require effective and privacy-preserving age verification on social media and other relevant digital services that pose a significant risk to minors. Effective age verification is one of the essential tools to mitigate the negative impact of illegal and age-inappropriate content, harmful commercial practices, addictive or manipulative design elements, and excessive data harvesting, especially on minors.

In the offline world, age checks are standard for age-restricted goods and services. So, it is reasonable to expect similar safeguards online, where the risks — especially for minors — are significant and well-documented. Without proper and trustworthy age verification, it is difficult to prevent for example social media from targeting minors with content and features designed for adults, putting their wellbeing at risk.

In addition, assessments on a digital majority age could help point to the age at which minors should be allowed access to social media and other digital services – giving them more time to enjoy life without an invasive online presence. In this regard, we support President von der

Leyen's initiative to convene an expert panel to provide advice by the end of this year on the best approach for Europe. It is crucial to deepen our understanding of the digital environment's effects on children's health. We cannot leave it to social media to decide the age limits.

From a technical perspective we are already making great progress. Thus, the upcoming age verification apps in line with the EU approach to age verification and the voluntary European Digital Identity (EU-DI) Wallet can provide commonly available, interoperable, seamless and privacy-preserving ways to verify age. It will minimize friction especially if the verification methods are broadly adopted and thus familiar to all users.

In addition to age verification, it is necessary to ensure the highest level of privacy, safety and security "by design" and "by default" for minors and to gradually adapt features to their growing abilities. It is necessary to address addictive and manipulative design practices such as dark patterns, infinity scroll, auto play, streaks and notifications about "missing out". Harmful features such as certain loot boxes in videogames and micro-transactions, pay-to-win systems or digital coins in games should also be better regulated.

Ensuring minors' digital safety requires not only regulation but also preparing and involving parents, legal guardians and teachers. Teachers play a crucial role in the education of minors, while parents and legal guardians play a key role in shaping their children's digital experience. Thus, they should be provided with clear and coherent information and the appropriate tools. In this regard, free, enabled by default parental control software on smartphones and other relevant devices could strengthen their agency. It is important, however, that the responsibility is not transferred to parents and legal guardians. In addition, awareness-raising campaigns, support for digital literacy programmes and media competence, and close cooperation with health and education sectors could further empower minors to be able to critically assess potential risks.

With the adoption of this declaration, we aim to foster a digital environment that ensures greater safety and security for minors. Our goal is to ensure the protection of minors while guiding them to grow into responsible and respectful individuals. This requires us to work across sectors and borders to coordinate our efforts. By sharing information, aligning efforts, and considering the broader context of minors' lives, regulations can be designed to offer better protection and support while minimizing gaps and inconsistencies.

We also consider it important to promote regular policy impact assessments to ensure a proportionate balance between digital inclusion, safety and fundamental rights, especially given the rapid pace of technological development.

Finally, the work must include the meaningful participation of young people themselves in the design and evaluation of digital protection measures. By actively consulting with minors

and incorporating their perspectives, experiences, and needs, we can ensure that protective policies are both effective and respectful of their agency and rights as digital citizens.

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