

LEGISLATION & POLICY UPDATE



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Child protection online: Global legislative, regulatory and policy update

This update covers key global developments in online child protection from June to December 2024. Australia's social media restrictions for under-16s have influenced similar moves in Türkiye, while Malaysia and Uzbekistan have passed new child protection laws. Political shifts in North America delayed online safety legislation in the US and Canada.

Countries like Brazil and South Korea are addressing emerging tech risks, regulating AI and deepfakes, while the UK and Ireland have introduced new online safety codes. The first Global Ministerial Conference on Violence Against Children saw over 120 countries pledge action, and the UN Convention against Cybercrime now includes provisions on online child abuse.

Regional efforts include the African Union's Model Law on Child Online Safety and EU initiatives to combat child sexual abuse, though some face delays. Further updates are expected in 2025.

Please note this is not an exhaustive list of developments and is intended as a summary only.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS



Australia

In December, Australia's [Online Safety Amendment \(Social Media Minimum Age\) Bill 2024](#) was enacted, aiming to restrict social media use for children under 16s and hold platforms accountable for user safety. The legislation, set to take effect on 10 December 2025, requires age-restricted platforms like Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram to prevent under-16s from creating accounts. However, platforms with significant educational purposes, such as YouTube, will be exempt.

The Bill mandates that platforms take "reasonable steps" to enforce these restrictions, with non-compliance resulting in penalties ranging from \$9.9 million to \$49.5 million AUD for corporations. Importantly, the legislation avoids penalising children or their caregivers for accessing restricted platforms. While the Bill does not detail how platforms must enforce age restrictions, future regulations will clarify age assurance methods. The use of government-issued IDs for verification is prohibited, with guidance expected after the Age Assurance Technology Trial concludes in mid-2025.

Brazil

The Brazilian Senate approved [Bill No.2338/2023](#) in December, which proposes rules for the development and use of artificial intelligence (AI) in Brazil. If enacted, the Bill will adopt a risk-based approach to AI regulation, explicitly prohibiting systems deemed to pose an "excessive risk," including those that facilitate child sexual abuse and exploitation. The legislation also outlines the establishment of a regulatory body responsible for monitoring AI use and enforcing compliance with its provisions. This body will have the authority to impose penalties for violations of the Bill's requirements. The AI Bill has now advanced to the Chamber of Deputies (the Lower House) for further debate and a vote. If passed, it will mark a significant step forward in regulating AI technologies in Brazil.



Canada

Prime Minister Trudeau's resignation has halted the progress of Bill C-63 through Parliament, which sought to enact the Online Harms Act, mandating the reporting of child sexual abuse material and introducing a range of online safety measures, in doubt. As progress on the Bill stalled last year, in December the Government split the Bill into two parts: one focused on protecting children from online harms and establishing a Digital Safety Commission, and the other addressing amendments to the Canadian Human Rights Act and Criminal Code related to hate crimes. This division was seen as an attempt to expedite the passage of the less controversial provisions related to child protection while allowing further debate on contentious elements, such as free speech issues. The dissolution of Parliament leaves the future of Bill C-63 uncertain. Any attempt to re-introduce C-63 will require the Bill to begin again at the start of the legislative process.

Malaysia

Both Houses of the Malaysian Parliament passed the [Online Safety Bill](#) last December. The Bill aims to regulate harmful content (including child sexual abuse content which is categorised as "priority harmful content"). The Bill also imposes duties on applications service providers, content applications service providers and network service providers licensed under the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998, including for persons outside of Malaysia where service providers are based within Malaysia (under Article 3). In addition, Section 5 of the Bill affords additional powers to the Malaysia Communications and Multimedia Commission and establishes an advisory body in the Online Safety Committee (under Section 2 of the Bill) and an oversight mechanism, the Online Safety Appeal Tribunal (under Section 7 of the Bill). The Bill is currently awaiting Royal Assent and is expected to come into force in early 2025.

Republic of Ireland

In October Ireland's media regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, published its [Online Safety Code](#) which sets binding rules applying to video-sharing platforms who have their EU Headquarters in Ireland to protect people, including children, from harmful content. This includes provisions prohibiting the uploading or sharing of harmful content including CSAM, provisions to require platforms to use age assurance measures to prevent children from viewing pornography or gratuitous violence online and parental controls on content which may impair the development of children under 16-years-old.

Republic of Korea

In response to rising concerns over deepfake sexual exploitation targeting children and university students, South Korea's National Assembly has amended the Special Act on the Punishment of Sexual Crimes to include penalties for the possession and viewing of deepfake sexual exploitation material. Those found guilty may face up to three years imprisonment or fines of up to 30 million South Korean Won (approximately £20,500). The amendment also increases existing penalties for editing and distributing deepfake sexual exploitation material, raising the maximum sentence from five years to seven years imprisonment.

Amendments were made to the Juvenile Protection Act to criminalise the sextortion of children, and to the Sexual Violence Prevention and Victim Protection Act to clarify that the Government is responsible for removing non-consensual sexually explicit images and supporting victims. This includes the establishment of help centres for digital sex crime victims at both central and local government levels.



Türkiye

On 17 December 2024, Türkiye's Minister of Family and Social Services, Mahinur Özdemir Göktaş, announced plans to prohibit the use of certain social media and digital gaming platforms for children under 16. While further details on the upcoming legislative amendments were not provided, the announcement follows earlier reports from November 2024 that the country's Information and Communication Technologies Authority was considering restricting social media use for children under 13.

United Kingdom

On 16 December 2024, Ofcom published its [Illegal Harms Codes of Practice and Risk Assessment Guidance](#) following the passage of the Online Safety Act 2023. Providers must complete their Illegal Harms Risk Assessments by 16 March 2025, with obligations to protect users taking effect from 17 March 2025, pending parliamentary approval of the Codes.

In early 2025 Ofcom entered phase two of its Online Safety Act implementation, focusing on preventing children's access to pornography with the publication on 16 January 2025 of Ofcom's [Age Assurance and Access Statement](#). This guidance mandates that all services which allow users to access pornography must implement highly effective age assurance to ensure that children are not normally able to access pornographic content by July 2025, at the latest. Further guidance on material related to suicide or self-harm is expected to be published in the coming months, and the Final Codes and Guidance on the Protection of Children are expected in April 2025.

United States of America

The Kids Online Safety and Privacy Act (KOSPA) failed to reach a vote in the US House of Representatives before the 118th Congress ended on 3 January 2025, despite strong bipartisan support. While S.1409 had passed the Senate with a 91–3 vote, both KOSPA bills will now need to be reintroduced in the 119th Congress to progress. The Act aims to establish minimum federal standards for holding social media companies accountable for children's online safety. Similarly, the TAKE IT DOWN Act (S.4569 and H.R. 8989), which sought to require platforms to remove nonconsensual intimate visual depictions, including deepfakes, did not pass through the House before the end of the session.

Uzbekistan

In August 2024, the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan passed the [Law on Ending all Forms of Violence Against Children](#). The law was subsequently signed into force by the President on 14 November 2024. The law for the first time provides a clear definition of violence against children,¹ puts in place multi-sector supports for child victims and their families and mandates educational programmes to prevent violence in schools. The law will enter into force on 15 May 2025.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS



African Union

The African Union Commission is reviewing a model law on child online safety, drafted by ChildFund International and the African Child Policy Forum. The law was developed following consultations with African and global child protection experts, children, youth, and survivors throughout 2024. Once the AU's review is complete, the final version will be shared with Member States for feedback, with a validation workshop to be held before its adoption.

European Union

In February 2024, the European Commission proposed a revision to Directive 2011/93/EU to include expanding the definition of offences to cover those enabled by new online tools like AI, increasing penalties for offenders, and introducing more specific requirements for member states on prevention and victim support. In December 2024, the Justice and Home Affairs Council agreed on a General Approach to the Directive, setting the stage for negotiations with the European Parliament.

In addition to the [revised Directive](#), the European Union has been working on a Regulation to prevent and combat child sexual abuse, initially proposed in May 2022. The latest compromise text, circulated in early December 2024, was discussed but not approved by the Justice and Home Affairs Council. Eleven EU states abstained from voting, and as such the the Presidency concluded that more work will be needed to progress the Regulation in 2025, as the Regulation now passes to the Polish Presidency of the European Union.

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS

1st Global Ministerial Conference on Violence Against Children

Last November the [first Global Ministerial Conference on ending Violence Against Children](#) was held in Bogotá and focused on three breakthrough areas: parent and caregiver support, safe school environments, and response services. Ahead of the event, 120 governments made pledges to act on various issues, including advancing legislative frameworks.

Notable pledges included Burundi's commitment to review its Penal Code to address all forms of child sexual exploitation by 2028, Spain's promise to draft a new law for children's protection in the digital environment, and several countries, including Guatemala, Nepal, Pakistan, Mongolia and Zambia, pledging to review their child sexual exploitation laws.

The conference concluded with a [Call to Action](#), which includes updating national legislation to criminalise abuses in the digital environment and integrating online risks into violence prevention and response efforts.

UN Convention against Cybercrime

On 24 December 2024, the UN General Assembly adopted the [UN Convention against Cybercrime](#), marking a milestone in international criminal justice. The treaty includes provisions on child sexual abuse online, grooming, and non-consensual image dissemination. It will open for signature in Hanoi in 2025 and take effect 90 days after ratification by the 40th signatory. WeProtect Global Alliance has [published a blog highlighting the treaty's potential](#) to strengthen legal frameworks and international cooperation in addressing online child sexual abuse.



Global Online Safety Regulators Network

The Global Online Safety Regulators Network has published its first three-year [Strategic Plan](#). The network now has 25 members and observers from six continents. The Plan outlines three key

priorities: building regulatory coherence across jurisdictions, enhancing the evidence base for online safety, and promoting information sharing for compliance. It also highlights two cross-cutting priorities: effective communication of our work and fostering global partnerships.

Model National Response framework to aid country-responses to online child sexual abuse

WeProtect Global Alliance advocates for a comprehensive Model National Response to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse online. The [Model National Response](#) framework equips countries with the tools and strategies necessary to implement effective responses tailored to their unique contexts.

GOT SOMETHING TO SHARE?

If you'd like us to include an update in the next issue or have any questions, please contact katie@weprotectga.org

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