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Child protection online: Global legislative, regulatory and policy update

This update covers key global developments in online child protection from January to June 2025.

In the first half of the year national legislatures around the globe have been busy drafting new legislation to protect children from online child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Legislators have continued working to close existing loopholes in legal frameworks to keep pace with technological advancement and new and emerging threats, with new legislation or amendments specifically criminalising AI generated sexual abuse material emerging in the EU, UK and USA. Conversations around age restrictions for use of social media also continue in various jurisdictions with particular focus in Australia and New Zealand.

In terms of secondary legislation, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya and the UK have all developed Guidelines to strengthen existing legislation and further regulate to ensure all children remain protected. Several sub-national developments have also taken place at State level in many jurisdictions, such as Germany and the USA.

At a regional level, the re-cast Directive on child sexual abuse recently passed through the European Parliament and the European Commission published draft Guidelines on the Protection of Minors Online under the Digital Services Act. Internationally, notable developments include the March publication of the Second Edition of the Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and the upcoming plans for the signing ceremony of the UN Cybercrime Convention, taking place in Viet Nam, which would open the treaty for ratification from the end of October 2025.

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

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS



Ethiopia

In March 2025, Ethiopia's Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, in collaboration with UNICEF Ethiopia, Safe Online and Child Fund Ethiopia, published a [Prevention and Response to Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Ethiopia Training Manual](#) for law enforcement, child protection professionals and policy makers. The Manual contains modules on prevention, practical measures for law enforcement officers and WeProtect Global Alliance's [Model National Response](#) framework.

The Government of Ethiopia and UNICEF Ethiopia also published [Standard Guidelines for Preventing and Responding to Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) in March, aimed at the identification of online exploitation cases, providing an overview of the legal basis for prosecution of such cases and clear recommendations both related to prevention and supporting victims/survivors.

Germany

On 19 May 2025, the state government of Lower Saxony adopted the [Child Protection Plan](#) (2025 to 2030). This State strategy sets out both statutory and non-statutory measures designed to strengthen child protection and to increase interdisciplinary collaboration between different state institutions and professionals responsible for children's protection. The strategy includes plans to increase funding for the provision of psychosocial support to survivors of violence and abuse and plans to further strengthen the participation of children in the criminal justice process through increased use of audio-visual aids to facilitate virtual testimony in criminal proceedings.



Guatemala

In February, Guatemala's Secretariat against Sexual Violence, Exploitation and Trafficking in Persons launched a new '[Digital Mode' Strategy](#) which aims to raise awareness amongst children and parents of the risks of online child sexual abuse. As part of the Strategy the Government launched four main initiatives: a counselling chat service for children and parents; a cyber guardians programme; prevention guidelines; and the launch of UNICEF's U-Report child participation platform in the country.

Indonesia

On 17 March, the Government of Indonesia passed a [Regulation on child protection in the Digital Environment](#) (GR 17/2025), which is the implementing regulation of Article 16A(5) and Article 16B(3) of the amended Law No. 7 of 2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions. The Regulation requires electronic system operators (ESOs) to take measures to protect children's privacy and safety on services likely to be accessed by children under 18, and to ensure children's use of the digital

environment is appropriate for their developmental age. The Regulation sets out several obligations for ESOs: platforms require parental consent for under 17s and age verification of users is mandated to enforce this; ESOs must have clear reporting pathways when children's rights are violated online; and ESOs are required to evaluate the risk of their platforms to children (including risks of sexual exploitation or exposure to child sexual abuse material and take measures to mitigate those risks. The Regulation is expected to fully come into force two years after its enactment, in March 2027.

Jersey

In February, the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs, Mary Le Hegarat, announced several proposed legislative reforms related to the protection of women and girls, in response to the [77 recommendations](#) put forward in November 2023 by the country's Violence Against Women and Girls Taskforce. In June the Government also released its [Annual Progress Report \(2025\)](#) setting out proposed next steps against the recommendations.

The Government of Jersey has notified the UK Home Office of its [intention to seek an extension of the Istanbul Convention to Jersey](#) and the UK Government has assured it would be supportive of this, on the understanding that steps are underway to meet the requirements of the Convention.

The Justice and Home Affairs Department of the Government of Jersey is [currently drafting new standalone law](#) to address stalking and cyber-stalking

In addition, discussions are underway regarding potentially extending the enforcement powers of the Information Commissioners Office to protect women from non-consensual intimate imagery being shared online, particularly in cases where platforms do not take action to remove reported intimate imagery in a timely manner.

Finally, the Government of Jersey has proposed amendments to the Sexual Offences (Jersey) Law 2018 to strengthen the existing legislative framework related to technology facilitated abuse. Under the first draft of the proposed amendments the production and distribution of intimate images without consent would be criminalised, as would threats to make such material (both real and digitally generated materials). In addition, the unsolicited sending of explicit imagery would be a specific offence.

Kenya

In April, the Communications Authority of Kenya published [Industry Guidelines for Child Online Protection and Safety](#). The Guidelines aim to minimise risks to children in the digital environment, provide clear guidance to the private sector on the identification, prevention and mitigation of the adverse impacts of their services on children's rights, operationalise child safety measures and facilitate reporting of online harms, and embed safety-by-design principles in the development of technologies. The Guidelines are comprehensive, and require, amongst other measures, that licensed ICT providers as well as all vendors, product developers, and service providers involved in Kenya's ICT value chain, have child online protection policies and strategies. The Guidelines also require age verification both within apps and for registration of new SIM cards, and that all mobile phones should be sold with child-safe design settings by default. The Guidelines are expected to be enforced from October 2025, with the Authority monitoring compliance with Guidelines and reporting on companies' compliance status on a quarterly basis.



New Zealand

In New Zealand, a draft Bill has been proposed by Catherine Wedd MP, and supported by the Prime Minister, to mandate private sector companies to introduce age assurance measures to prevent children under 16 years old from using social media. This proposal follows the enactment of neighbouring Australia's Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill in December 2024, which sparked renewed conversations about age restrictions on social media access for children. The New Zealand legislation is yet to be introduced in the country's Parliament.

Spain

On 25 March, Spain's [Draft Organic Law on the Protection of Minors in Digital Environments](#) was [approved by the Council of Ministers](#) (in the second round) and the proposed legislation passed to the Spanish Parliament for consideration. The Draft Law includes provision for parental-controls by default on new devices, regulates the use of so-called 'random reward mechanisms' (also known as '[loot boxes](#)') on gaming platforms and provides victims of technology-facilitated child sexual abuse with greater access to information, counselling and psychological services, social services and legal support. The law, if passed, would also [require public authorities to develop a National Strategy on the Protection of Children and Adolescents in the Digital Environment](#), including steps to prevent child sexual abuse online and protect children's digital wellbeing.

The legislation makes provision to strengthen restrictions on non-compliant social media companies by providing for judicial intervention in the enforcement of a temporary interruption of a digital service that is offering inappropriate content to minors, including allowing the court to mandate the removal of such content.

In addition to these provisions, the Law would make four amendments to the existing Penal Code, including criminalising perpetrators communication with victims online, adding the creation of AI-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM) as a crime 'against moral integrity' under Spanish law and classifying the creation of fake child profiles by an adult as an aggravating circumstance in prosecutions. Finally, the draft law amends the General Law on Audiovisual Communication to mandate very large online platforms (VLOPs) to have reporting channels for content inappropriate for children and age verification for content harmful to minors.

The draft law is currently sitting with the Justice Commission of the Spanish Congress of Deputies (Lower House) for consideration and amendment.

Thailand

In March 2025, the Thai Council of Ministers approved, in principle, [amendments to the Thai Penal Code](#) related to online child sexual exploitation and abuse offences proposed by the country's Justice Ministry. The amendments to the Code will impose stricter penalties for six offences: the production and dissemination of child sexual abuse material; grooming of a child; unwanted 'sexting'/exchange of sexual messages or images; the sexual extortion of children; stalking (both online and offline); and cyberbullying. The amendments also propose firmer penalties for acts committed using ICTs and for acts committed against children under 15 years old. An unofficial translation of the amended Code is

[available in English here.](#)

The amendments to the Penal Code are currently under technical review by the Council of State, following which it requires reapproval by the Council of Ministers before passing to the National Assembly for debate and passage, before being formally signed by King Vajiralongkorn.



United Kingdom

On 25 February 2025, the [UK Crime and Policing Bill](#) was introduced in the House of Commons. [The Bill intends to tighten existing legislation](#) on the protection of children against AI-facilitated child sexual abuse, including closing a loophole on AI-CSAM manuals and for the first time criminalising AI models optimised to create child sexual abuse material. The proposed legislation will also criminalise moderators and administrators of websites that host child sexual abuse material, grant Border Force officers (i.e. immigration officials) powers to search digital devices, introduce a new duty for certain workers to report abuse and create new offences criminalising taking or recording intimate material without reasonable belief in consent. The Bill is [currently in its Second Reading](#) in the House of Lords, having passed through the House of Commons.

On 24 April 2025, Ofcom, the UK's communication services regulator, published the [Protection of Children Codes and Guidance](#) for child safety online, following the passage of the UK Online Safety Act 2023. From 25 July 2025, platforms will have to comply with the Codes, and prior to that date will have to complete and record children's risk assessments in relation to the Codes.

United States of America

On 19 May 2025, the [Take It Down Act](#) (Public Law No: 119-12) was officially signed into law by US President Donald Trump, following the Bill's bipartisan [passage through the US Congress](#), with unanimous support in the US Senate (S. 146) and 409-2 vote approval in the House of Representatives (H.R. 633).

The legislation prohibits the sharing of 'intimate visual depictions' of children and adults which are digitally generated and establishes criminal penalties for individuals who intentionally disseminate this material, as well as those who threaten to distribute such material. The Act requires 'covered platforms' to establish clear reporting mechanisms and to remove such content within 48 hours.

At State level, there have also been several notable legislative developments in the past six months related to age verification:

- Alabama: Proposed [H.B. 235](#) mandating age verification for social media users and prohibiting the creation of social media accounts for children under 16 years old. The Bill is currently stalled in the House Children and Senior Advocacy Committee.
- Georgia: [S.B. 351](#), was enacted in April 2024, mandating universal age verification and similarly to Alabama, prohibiting social media use for under 16s. The Bill was due to come into force on 1 July, but was blocked by the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia on 26 June.

- South Carolina: Proposed Bill [[S.B. 268/H.B. 3431](#)] which has passed through the State Senate (Age-Appropriate Design Code) and remains at Committee stage in the State House of Representatives. The Act aims to regulate children's use of social media. In order for the Bill to pass it would need House approval and signature by the State Governor.
- Utah: The App Store Accountability Act ([S.B. 142](#)) was signed into force by the State Governor on 26 March 2025, requiring app store providers to verify the age of users and obtain parental consent for those under 18. From 7 May 2025, the law mandates that minor's accounts be linked to a parent or guardian before downloading apps or making in-app purchases.
- Virginia: Enacted the Consumer Data Protection Act ([S.B. 854](#)) on 2 May 2025, requiring social media platforms to verify users' ages and limit usage of social media to one hour per day (per platform) for those under 16 without parental consent.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS



European Union

On 17 June, the European Parliament passed the re-cast Directive on Combating child sexual abuse ([Directive 2011/93/EU](#)) by a vote of 599 MEPs in favour to 2 against and 62 abstaining. The Directive is intended to expand the definition of offences to cover those enabled by digital tools such as generative AI, increasing penalties for offenders, and introduces more specific requirements for member states on prevention and victim support. The text has undergone [several rounds of revision](#) and amendment during its [passage through the Parliament](#) and is now expected to progress onto trilogue negotiations (to find a compromise text between the Council of Ministers, European Parliament and European Commission) as part of the ordinary [legislative procedure](#).

Meanwhile, proposed [EU Regulation to prevent and combat child sexual abuse](#), initially proposed in May 2022 has faced limited support. The revised text advanced under the Polish Presidency has had limited support, therefore, responsibility for the Regulation will pass to the Danish Presidency of the Council (July – December 2025). The interim Regulation expires in April 2026.

The European Commission also published [draft Guidelines on the Protection of Minors Online under Article 28\(4\) of the Digital Services Act](#) for public consultation. The finalised Guidelines are expected in summer 2025.

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS

Second Edition of the Terminology Guidelines

The [Second Edition of the Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) (formerly known as the Luxembourg Guidelines) was published in March 2025. The Guidelines were developed by ECPAT International, who led the Core Group alongside

WeProtect Global Alliance, Childlight and Safe Online, and supported the global Interagency Working Group of 40+ members. The revised guidelines provide updated, survivor-centred, and precise language to describe sexual exploitation and abuse of children with the aim of helping professionals, policymakers and the media use words that protect children rather than harm them.

UN Convention against Cybercrime

The Government of Viet Nam have announced that the [signing ceremony of the UN Convention Against Cybercrime](#) will take place in Hanoi on 25-26 October 2025. It is understood from the announcement that the ceremony will be co-chaired by Vietnamese President Luong Cuong and UN Secretary-General António Guterres, and that all Heads of State of UN member countries will be invited to the signing.

The Convention will take effect 90 days after ratification by the 40th signatory. As outlined in [WeProtect Global Alliance's blog on the treaty](#), the Convention contains key provisions on child sexual abuse online, grooming and non-consensual intimate images.



HAVE 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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