



Child protection online: global legislative, regulatory and policy update

Dear Gina,

Between **March and September 2026** there was significant acceleration in children's online safety regulation worldwide. Governments across multiple regions continued to move from a voluntary approach towards statutory requirements, with a growing focus on **age assurance**, **safety by design** and **platform accountability**.

In addition, we see **four emerging trends**:

- Age-based access restrictions continue to expand beyond social media, with several jurisdictions introducing or considering measures covering gaming services, AI companions and other digital services used by children.
- Age assurance has increasingly become a core regulatory expectation, with policy makers exploring a range of approaches including digital identity, facial age estimation and app-store based verification.
- Governments and international bodies have strengthened responses to AI-enabled harms, including AI-generated child sexual abuse material and so-called 'nudification' technologies.
- There is evidence of growing international convergence around safety by design, mandated risk assessment and child-centred service design.

While regulatory approaches continue to differ across jurisdictions, the overall direction of travel seems clear: policy makers are placing greater responsibility on digital services to assess, mitigate and prevent risks to children online.

These developments demonstrate growing consensus around the need for stronger protections for children online and highlight the importance of international cooperation to ensure that regulatory, technical and operational responses keep pace with evolving risks. As these measures move from proposals to implementation, the implications for technology companies, regulators and civil society are significant.

Please note that this is a briefing produced for WeProtect Global Alliance members and not an exhaustive list of developments. This briefing is intended to be a summary only.



NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Australia

In June 2026, the Australian Government announced legislation to double the maximum penalty for breaches of its social media minimum age legislation from A\$49.5 million to A\$99 million, bringing the penalty in line with those available under competition and consumer law. The proposed legislation, entitled the '[Online Safety Amendment \(Strengthening Enforcement for the Social Media Minimum Age\) Bill 2026](#)', will also strengthen the eSafety Commissioner's information-gathering powers, enabling the regulator to compel social media companies to provide evidence of the steps they have taken to prevent under-16s from accessing accounts. The enhanced powers include the ability to demand information and documents from third parties, such as age-assurance providers and app stores, to validate or test claims made by platforms. The Bill is currently under consideration by the Senate, having passed through the House of Representatives on 1 July 2026.

Separately, the eSafety Commissioner published guidance on assessing the application of Online Safety Codes and Standards under the Online Safety Act 2021. The guidance provides a structured process to assist electronic service providers in identifying which obligations apply to their services in relation to unlawful material (class 1A and class 1B) and age-restricted material (class 1C and class 2).

Austria

From 27 July to 21 September 2026, the Federal Chancellery of Austria held a consultation on draft amendments to the [Audiovisual Media Services Act](#) and [KommAustria Act](#) concerning access by children under 14 to video-sharing platforms where specified child-protection measures are not in place.

Brazil

Brazil's comprehensive framework for the protection of children online, [Law No. 15,211](#) ECA Digital, entered into force on 17 March 2026. The legislation, passed in August 2025, mandates safety-by-design measures across digital services, requiring providers to mitigate risks of children's exposure to inappropriate content, products and practices. Services legally restricted for children must implement robust age-verification mechanisms, and social media platforms must link accounts belonging to children under 16 to those of legal guardians. The legislation also introduces duties of prevention, including investment in digital literacy, bans on loot boxes and Portuguese-language parental controls, alongside mandatory reporting and content removal obligations. Enforcement powers rest with the National Data Protection Agency, with penalties including fines of up to 10% of Brazilian revenue, service suspension and prohibition of operations.

Implementation has already resulted in regulatory enforcement activity. In one of the first major tests of the law, Brazil's National Data Protection Authority suspended certain livestreaming functionalities on Discord following concerns regarding child safety risks. In parallel, the Authority announced a monitoring exercise focused on app stores and operating system providers to evaluate measures protecting children and adolescents in digital environments.

Canada

Canada introduced two significant legislative initiatives during the reporting period. In June 2026, the Government introduced [Bill C-34](#), a new Online Harms framework building on earlier legislative proposals. The proposed legislation would establish new obligations on platforms regarding harmful content, including content affecting children, and create mechanisms for regulatory oversight and enforcement. The Bill completed its first reading in the House of Commons on 10 June 2026, and has progressed to second reading.

Separately, in June Parliament adopted reforms to the Criminal Code through the [Bail and Sentencing Reform Act](#) (Bill C-14) expanding investigative and prosecutorial tools available to law enforcement in relation to online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

France

On 21 July 2026, the French Assemblée Nationale and Sénat adopted [legislation](#) prohibiting access to social media services for children under 15, subject to age-verification requirements and limited exceptions. However, on 14 August 2026, the Constitutional Council, through [Decision No. 2026-911](#) DC, struck down the legislation. The Court concluded that the blanket restriction placed a disproportionate limitation on minors' freedom of expression and access to information and failed to adequately differentiate between platforms presenting different levels of risk.

France also expanded restrictions on use of mobile phones in schools. [Law No. 2026-813](#) of 24 August 2026 amended the country's Education Code, including provisions in Article L.511-5 governing mobile phone use in schools, with the measures taking effect from the start of the 2026–27 academic year.

Additionally, cross-party legislation introduced in April 2026 ([Proposition de loi n°2654](#)) seeks to strengthen the criminal-law framework for tackling online child sexual abuse and protecting minors. Separately, a [Senate proposal](#) would expressly criminalise the creation and dissemination of AI-generated sexual material depicting minors, as well as the provision of AI models designed to generate such material. Following the [Lyhanna case](#), parliamentary attention has also intensified around a broader package of measures addressing sexual and gender-based violence against women and children, including harms occurring in digital environments.

Gabon

In April 2026, Gabon legislated to restrict access to social media for children, making it the first African country to pass age-based restrictions on access. The law sets the digital age of majority at 16 and prohibits children under 16 from creating accounts on social media and other digital platforms, subject to limited educational exemptions and parental consent provisions. It also requires platforms to implement age assurance, restrict certain interactions involving minors, undergo technical audits and report on measures taken to identify and manage underage accounts. The provision is tabled in the country's [official journal](#) as Order No. 0011/PR/2026 (dated 26 February 2026 but not published until 8 April 2026).

Germany

On 11 September 2026, the chairs of Germany's independent Expert Commission on Child and Youth Protection in the Digital World presented their final report to Karin Prien, Federal Minister for Family Affairs. The [report](#) contains 56 evidence-based recommendations covering online

child safety, media literacy, artificial intelligence and digital wellbeing. Amongst its recommendations are stronger safety-by-design requirements, age-appropriate digital services, safer default settings, improved reporting and complaints mechanisms, strengthened protections against online risks such as grooming and online child sexual exploitation, and greater accountability for digital platforms. The report is intended to inform future policy development on children's online safety at both federal and European levels.

From April to May 2026, the German Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection launched a consultation on its draft Act Against Digital Violence addressing digital harms including hate speech, cyberstalking, non-consensual intimate imagery, online harassment and AI CSAM.

Holy See

On 25 May 2026, Pope Leo XIV published his first encyclical, '[Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence](#)'. The encyclical addresses the implications of AI for human dignity, work, truth, freedom and social relations, and calls for responsibility, transparency and governance in its development and use.

Malaysia

Under new rules from the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) effective from 1 June 2026, under the 2025 [Online Safety Act \(Act 866\)](#), children under 16 can no longer register for new social media accounts. The proposals form part of a wider package of child online safety reforms which became effective from 1 January 2026 and specifically target platforms with over 8 million Malaysian users.

Mauritius

In June 2026, the Mauritius Ministry of Information Technology and Communication [announced plans](#) to consult on the introduction of identity verification measures for social media users as part of wider efforts to address cybercrime, fraud and online harms. To inform this consultation, a committee was also established, chaired by the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation.

New Zealand

On 23 August 2026, New Zealand's Government introduced the [Online Safety \(Minimum Age and Child Safety Risk Assessment\) Bill](#), which would restrict children under 16 from accessing high-risk online platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and Facebook, and bring AI companions within scope. If passed, the Bill would require platforms to take reasonable steps to verify users are aged 16 or over, using measures such as existing account information, facial age estimation, digital ID services or formal identification. Platforms would also be required to conduct regular risk assessments and report on measures to identify and reduce risks. Non-compliance could result in penalties of up to 10% of a platform's global revenue, with enforcement overseen by a new online safety regulator within the Department of Internal Affairs. The Bill is currently having its first reading in the House of Representatives.

Nigeria

Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy presented in June the results of their [nationwide consultation](#) on social media age restrictions which began in March 2026. Media reports suggest that the consultation results highlighted that more than 80% of respondents supported some form of age restrictions, while 64.5% favoured a minimum social media age of either 16 or 17. The consultation is expected to inform the Government's further consideration of social media age restrictions, but no concrete proposals have yet been drafted.

Norway

Norway's Prime Minister announced [new restrictions](#) on the use of artificial intelligence in primary education (for children aged 6 to 13) starting in August 2026, alongside broader reforms intended to reduce children's reliance on digital devices in schools in a national newspaper. Following this, the Minister of Education and Science instructed the Directorate of Education to issue age-appropriate national recommendations on AI usage, recommending that it is introduced 'gradually and cautiously' from the age of 13, and then in upper secondary education it is introduced into the classroom appropriately, with students educated on its use.

Philippines

The Philippines has advanced legislation to strengthen its legal framework on online child sexual exploitation and abuse. [House Bill No. 9461](#), the Child Online Safety and Protection Act of 2026, would repeal and replace Republic Act No. 11930, the Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials (CSAEM) Act of 2022, and expand existing provisions to address online grooming, sexual extortion of children, luring, image-based sexual abuse and livestreamed child sexual exploitation, as well as AI-generated, synthetic and digitally manipulated material involving children. The Bill would also introduce strengthened obligations for online platforms and financial institutions and measures to disrupt services and infrastructure used to facilitate offences.

The House of Representatives approved the Bill on third reading on 2 June 2026, and it was transmitted to and received by the Senate on 8 June 2026, where it remains under consideration in Committee.

Poland

On 30 July 2026 the Polish President signed into law [two amendments](#) to the country's Law on Education, prohibiting the use of mobile phones in both public and private pre-schools and primary schools. The law went into effect from 1 September 2026, and schools will have until 31 December 2026 to adapt their statutes to reflect the legal change.

Singapore

On 29 June 2026 [Singapore's Online Safety Commission](#) began operations under the Online Safety (Relief and Accountability) Act 2025, which was passed by Parliament on 5 November 2025. The Commission provides victims of specified online harms with an avenue to seek relief without going to court and has powers to issue directions addressing harmful content and accounts. Its remit includes image-based child abuse, alongside other specified online harms.

As well as the establishment of the Commission, on the same day, specified provisions on the statutory torts under the Act which give remedies from the Courts to victims and survivors also came into effect.

Türkiye

On 1 May 2026 Türkiye [gazetted](#) the Law on Amendments to the Social Services Law and Certain Other Laws (Law No. 7578). This, amongst other measures, under Articles 21-23 amended Law No. 5651 on the Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Combating Crimes Committed through Such Publications, prohibiting social network providers from offering services to children under 15 and imposing strict compliance mandates on social networks and digital gaming platforms, with implementation expected from 1 November 2026.

United Arab Emirates

On 17 June 2026 the United Arab Emirates (UAE) issued [Cabinet Resolution No. 106 \(2026\)](#), introducing a national social media age threshold of 15 years old. Under Article 3 of the Resolution, children under 15 are prohibited from 'creating, using, or operating' a personal account on a social media platform and children aged 15-16 also have additional restrictions placed on their use of social media. The Resolution also sets out age verification measures and

obligations of social media platforms and parents/caregivers. In passing this resolution, the UAE became the first country in the Arab region to adopt a formal minimum age requirement for social media access.



REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

African Union

On 28 July 2026, African Union Member States adopted the [Common Africa Position on Ending Violence Against Children \(CAP-EVAC\)](#) alongside the AU Model Law on Child Safety Online, during the Sixth Ordinary Session of the AU Specialized Technical Committee on Social Development, Labour and Employment in Namibia.

CAP-EVAC establishes a common continental framework across six areas, including prevention and response, legal and policy systems, sustainable financing, child and survivor participation, humanitarian contexts, and data and evidence. The framework also addresses emerging risks, including AI-enabled harms, while the accompanying Model Law provides a framework specifically addressing child safety online.

European Union

On 17 September 2026, the European Commission proposed the [EU Kids Act](#), establishing an EU-wide approach to children's access to social media and strengthening safety by design. Under the proposal, under-13s would not have access to social media, except for appropriately designed services under parental supervision, while 13- and 14-year-olds could use restricted accounts with parental controls and safeguards including limits on contacts and screen time. From age 15, teenagers could manage their own accounts, subject to safety-by-design requirements. The proposal would also introduce broader safety-by-design and age-assurance requirements for services used by minors, including restrictions on addictive design features and unsolicited contact, with app stores playing a role in age verification. This followed the publication of the European Commission Special Panel on Child Safety Online Report which recommended an EU-wide framework that includes a minimum age of 13 for access to social media, privacy-preserving age assurance and harmonised safety-by-design requirements for digital services.

The European Union extended the temporary derogation from certain provisions of the ePrivacy Directive that permits providers of certain communications services to voluntarily detect, remove and report online child sexual abuse material. Regulation (EU) 2026/1881 entered into force on 31 July 2026. The new temporary derogation will apply until 3 April 2028.

On 22 June 2026, the European Parliament and Council reached a political agreement on the [recast of the Directive on combating child sexual abuse and exploitation](#), marking a major step forward in strengthening the protection of children.

The agreed text addresses new challenges, improves investigation and prosecution, strengthens prevention and assistance to victims and promotes better coordination in the fight against child sexual abuse. The key points of the updated common rules are:

- **First EU-wide definition of consent:** The text introduces a definition of non-consensual sexual acts, strengthening the protection for children who have reached the age of sexual consent. Consent must be freely given, voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any time before or during the act. The silence or passivity of the victim can never be treated as consent.
- **New offences addressing technological developments:** The new rules criminalise emerging forms of child sexual abuse facilitated by technology, such as the production and sharing of AI-generated material and deepfakes, the livestreaming of child sexual abuse, sexual extortion, instruction manuals for offenders, and AI systems designed or adapted specifically to produce child sexual abuse material. Protection against grooming for the purpose of obtaining child sexual abuse material is extended to children who have reached the age of sexual consent in cases involving coercion or threats, or where the offender impersonates a peer.
- **Extended limitation periods:** The new rules give victims more time to report child sexual abuse and exploitation to the authorities and seek justice, recognising that many victims disclose the abuse only years later. For the most serious offences, such as rape, the limitation period will extend until the victim reaches the age of 50. For other serious offences covered by the Directive, it will extend until the victim reaches between 33 and 38 years of age, depending on the offence.
- **Reinforced rules on prevention:** The text introduces mandatory criminal-record checks for professional and organised voluntary activities involving direct and regular contact with children. It also requires professionals to report cases where a child is in serious and imminent danger and strengthens child protection measures in schools, sports clubs, and religious, healthcare, and social care settings.
- **Stronger support for victims:** The new rules ensure that child victims have access to targeted, age-appropriate support, including healthcare, helplines and referral centres. They also strengthen victims' right to claim full compensation for the harm suffered.

The revised Directive must now be formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council before entering into force.

The European Parliament has also approved amendments to the [EU AI Act](#) (Regulation 2024/1689), including a prohibition of AI systems used for so-called 'nudification'. The Parliament approved the measures in June 2026 as part of a wider package of amendments to the AI Act, with companies given until 2 December 2026 to bring relevant systems into line with the requirements.

Council of Europe

On 3 June 2026, the Lanzarote Committee adopted a [compliance report](#) on the protection of children against ICT-facilitated sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, assessing implementation of its 2022 recommendations across 43 States. The report identifies progress in areas including investigations, specialist training and victim support, while highlighting continuing gaps concerning self-generated sexual images and videos and access to longer-term support for victims.

Separately, on 2 June 2026, the Lanzarote Committee and Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY) adopted their first [joint statement](#) on AI-generated or altered child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse material. The Committees confirmed that the criminalisation provisions of the Lanzarote and Budapest Conventions are technology-neutral and apply to AI-generated and AI-altered material.



GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS

G7

On 29 May 2026, the G7 Digital and Technology Ministers agreed the G7's first [common set of principles](#) for protecting children and young people online. The Declaration calls for safety- and privacy-by-design, effective risk assessment and mitigation, privacy-preserving age assurance, safer recommender systems and measures to address the risks associated with AI, including the generation and distribution of child sexual abuse material. Ministers also called for greater digital literacy and cooperation between digital service providers, children, parents and guardians.

On 17 June 2026, G7 Leaders subsequently issued a [Call for a Safer Digital Space for Minors](#), reinforcing commitments to age-appropriate, safe-by-design digital services, effective age assurance and risk management, and greater controls for children and parents. The statement was also supported by the Governments of Brazil, Egypt, India, Kenya and the Republic of Korea.

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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WeProtect Global Alliance, 16 Upper Woburn Place, London, WC1H 0AF, United Kingdom