

2.2 - Protecting the youth online

Australia's ban on social platforms for under-16s

Australia has enacted a world-first law, effectively banning children under 16 from holding accounts on major social media platforms. The law took effect on December 10th, 2025.

The decision **compels** platforms **to** take “reasonable steps” to prevent children from having accounts. The children and their families would not **be liable for** the creation of an account. Instead, the platforms would. They are now **held accountable for** the protection of the youth, through **age verification methods**. **Non-compliance** on their part would lead to fines.

Platforms like Meta have already announced that they deactivated under-16 accounts, although they affirm that they cannot **prevent** the use of VPNs and false statements.

Global trends

Elsewhere, the UK is currently debating a similar ban, while the EU is simply considering it, sometimes tying the ban with a strict control of mobile phone use in schools (France).

Broader restrictions of social media are debated globally: in 2025, the USA **contemplated the idea of** banning TikTok for reasons of national security, whereas Nepal shut down the platforms for disrupting the country's "social harmony". It led to demonstrations from Gen Z users, with clashes with the police causing 19 deaths. Some members of the government resigned and **the ban was lifted.**

Pros and cons: freedom v. security

In Australia, PM Anthony Albanese stated that the decision **aimed at** protecting the youth from **encountering** harmful content, cyberbullying and predators. In Europe and in the UK, other arguments may rely on mental health concerns (poor sleeping patterns, anxiety, depression, self-harm, addiction, the need for socialising experiences). The arguments are the same that are used by governments trying to ban, or having already banned, access to **adult content**.

Oppositions tend to argue that **workarounds** like VPNs are too easy to find and use, making the bans ineffective. Also, methods for age verification could expose young users to **phishing** and **identity fraud**. Besides, civil liberties group defend the youth's right to free speech and to access to information. Youth organisations worry bans could isolate the youth. Libertarian activists criticise the strong interventionism of "nanny states" and "bubble-wrapping societies, actively normalising surveillance.