The EU KIDS Act: Protecting Children in an Increasingly Digital World

Role: EU Child Online Safety Policy Analyst
Audience: EU policymakers and digital policy decision-makers

Summary

This policy brief examines the European Union's proposed KIDS Act and its role in protecting children online. The main research question is How can the EU make the digital world safer for children while allowing them to use online services responsibly? The analysis focuses on three key points. First, the proposal introduces age-based limits on children's access to social media. Second, it aims to make online services safer by limiting harmful features and improving the protection of young users. Third, it strengthens age verification and makes online platforms more responsible for children's safety. These measures could help reduce online risks, but their success will depend on how they are implemented and how children's privacy is protected. Therefore this policy brief recommends that the EU establish clear safety rules for digital platforms ensure privacy-friendly age verification and strengthen the enforcement of child protection measures across Member States.

KEY POINTS

1. Age-Based Access to Social Media

The proposed EU KIDS Act introduces age based limits on children's access to social media. Under the proposal children under 13 would not be able to access the social media services covered by the restrictions, while children aged 13–14 would use limited accounts managed by a parent or guardian. From age 15 they could manage their own accounts.

2. Making Online Services Safer by Design

The proposal aims to reduce risks by limiting features that encourage excessive use preventing unwanted contact from strangers and making children's profiles private by default. It also includes protections for children using AI companions and chatbots.

3. Age Verification and Platform Responsibility

The proposal requires stronger age checks while seeking to protect users personal data. It also shifts more responsibility to online platforms to demonstrate that their services are safe for children.



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Age-Based Access to Social Media

The European Commission proposed the EU KIDS Act on 17 September 2026 to improve children's safety online. Under the proposal, children under 13 would not be allowed to have social media accounts. Children aged 13–14 could use limited accounts managed by a parent or guardian, with a daily time limit of one hour. From age 15, young people could manage their own accounts. The Commission argues that common rules are needed because different national approaches could leave children with different levels of protection across the EU. If adopted, the proposal would establish a more consistent approach to children's access to social media in all Member States.(1)



Making Online Services Safer by Design

Age restrictions alone may not be enough to protect children if online platforms continue to encourage excessive use. The proposed EU KIDS Act would require services used by minors to provide stronger protection by default. Measures include limiting features such as infinite scrolling and notifications during sleeping hours, preventing unwanted contact from strangers and making children's profiles private by default. The proposal also addresses AI chatbots and companions that could encourage emotional dependency among young users. These rules would place greater responsibility on digital companies to design services with children's safety in mind. For the EU this would mean focusing not only on children's behaviour online but also on the way digital services are designed.(2)

Age Verification and Platform Responsibility

Age limits will only work if platforms can check users' ages reliably. Under the proposed EU KIDS Act, social media services and video-sharing platforms would have to verify users' ages when new accounts are created. The proposal also aims to protect personal data by allowing privacy-preserving verification tools, such as the EU age verification solution. In addition, platforms would have greater responsibility for showing that their services comply with child-safety requirements. The European Commission and national authorities would play roles in enforcing the rules building on existing EU digital legislation. This approach could help the EU protect children more consistently while reducing unnecessary collection of personal information.(3)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The European Union should take three main steps to make the digital world safer for children. First, the EU should establish clear age rules across all Member States and ensure that social media platforms apply them consistently. Parents should also receive clear information about the restrictions and the tools available to protect their children. Second, online platforms should be required to make child safety a priority in their design. Features that encourage excessive screen time should be limited, children's profiles should be private by default, and children should be protected from unwanted contact and harmful AI interactions. Third, the EU should promote reliable age verification systems that protect users' personal data. Platforms should not collect more personal information than necessary to confirm a user's age. The European Commission and national authorities should monitor compliance and take action when companies fail to meet their responsibilities. Although the EU KIDS Act is still a proposal, these measures would help create a more consistent approach to online child safety across Europe. The EU should therefore combine clear age restrictions, safer platform design and strong privacy protection rather than relying on age limits alone.

FOOTNOTES *

1.European Commission. (2026, September 17). *EU KIDS Act: Helping children navigate a safer online world*.

https://commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/eu-kids-act-helping-children-navigate-safer-online-world-2026-09-17_it?prefLang=it

2. European Commission. (2026, September 17). *Proposal for EU KIDS Act—"EU Keeping Internet Digital Spaces Accountable and Trustworthy."* Shaping Europe's Digital Future

https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/proposal-eu-kids-act-eu-keeping-internet-digital-spaces-accountable-and-trustworthy

3. European Commission. (2026, September 18). *KIDS Act*. Shaping Europe's Digital Future. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/kids-act



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The content of this policy brief lies entirely with the author. It does not reflect the official opinion of Çağ University.