DATA PRIVACY & GOVERNANCE HUB

UK Proposes Social Media Ban for Children Under 16

JULY 31, 2026

Key Takeaways

- The UK proposes to block social media platforms for individuals under the age of 16 starting in the spring of 2027.
- The proposed ban will initiate stronger online boundaries for children, along with tougher controls on contact with strangers.
- Privacy campaigners assert this ban will create more challenges when conducting age verification.

What Happened

In June of 2026, the UK government proposed blocking social media platforms for individuals under 16 years of age starting in the spring of 2027. The social media platforms discussed in the proposal include Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and X. This proposal would strengthen online safety for those underage and limit contact with strangers.

Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Facebook already require users to be 13 years of age; however, the UK urges the limit be raised to 16 years of age. Although WhatsApp already has an age limit for those over 16, the aforementioned platforms are mostly used by teens and those younger than 15. Statistics show that although most platforms have age requirements, six in ten children aged 8-12 have their own profile on large social media platforms.

While this ban will impose stricter controls on livestreaming, the possibility of contact with strangers, and strengthen online boundaries, privacy advocates argue that age verification can

be complex. This policy may affect adults, as it may require age and identity verification and documents or biometric data.

Privacy and Governance Concerns

Methods proposed for age verification could include mobile and network checks, age-estimation AI, government-issued ID, or bank and credit card checks. The proposal may incorporate device-level verification through operating systems, instead of placing responsibility on individual app developers, and protect adult privacy.

Privacy advocates argue the age verification process may be used for more than its intended purpose. Others argue some platforms that implement age verification can check even if rules don't require them to. Another concern involves data security and the potential for exposure of sensitive documents in breaches or leaks. Discord, a popular messaging and chat platform used by video gamers, may have been exposed after hackers compromised the company used for age verification checks. Government photo IDs were provided for verification, including 70,000 users who may have had their IDs exposed.

However, technology companies argue that the ban can restrict underage individuals from accessing useful information, especially for community support. Some younger individuals express that social media helps them stay in contact with friends and family and share interests and activities.

Why It Matters / Policy Considerations

The proposed ban for children under the age of 16 can help protect them from accessing harmful material as well as the impact on mental health. However, it also raises the possibility of several privacy violations. Current safeguards may not be sufficient to protect users' privacy, particularly regarding the extent of insight into how their information is used. With many age-verification methods requiring some form of personal ID, concerns have been raised about how this personal information can be used, shared, and stored.

Appropriate oversight mechanisms should be enforced by the government and entail stricter data protection guidelines. This includes following a comprehensive set of principles and a

framework about what personal information is necessary and whether such information will be deleted after the verification process.

Additionally, transparency can be strengthened by requiring platforms to clarify who has access to the information collected and how long it will be retained. Accountability measures can be strengthened by penalizing companies that fail to protect user data and those that don’t adhere to regulations.