

Impact of social media and the online environment on young people

2025/2081(INI) - 17/09/2026 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 395 votes to 136, with 80 abstentions, a resolution on the impact of social media and the online environment on young people.

Parliament stressed that addressing the impact of social media on young people requires an integrated European strategy, which:

- combines safety and privacy-by-design, safety by-default, age-appropriate design, algorithmic transparency and privacy-first age verification mechanisms;
- strengthens mental well-being, digital and media literacy;
- involves families, schools and stakeholders in the education system.

Legal framework of the Union

Parliament stressed the importance of ensuring the effectiveness and consistency of the implementation, enforcement monitoring, coherence, and complementarity of **the EU's key legal instruments**, such as the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Digital Services Regulation (DSA), the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive, the Artificial Intelligence Act, and the future Digital Fairness Act, in order to build an integrated framework for the protection of children online. It called for **the alignment of national measures** to avoid fragmentation of child protection in the EU, and to strengthen cooperation and information sharing between national competent authorities and the Commission.

Members called on the Commission, in the context of the **future digital fairness act**, to identify and close existing relevant regulatory gaps, particularly with regard to addictive and deceptive design features of digital services, including dark patterns, personalised advertising practices, neuromarketing, loot boxes, in-app currencies in video games and unfair business practices by influencers.

Parliament called on the Commission to enforce the AI Act's obligations, specifically on transparency, including by watermarking and **labelling AI-generated content**. It called on online platforms to implement swift procedures for the removal of falsified or harmful content.

Member States and online platforms are urged to ensure that AI product evaluation and labelling frameworks adequately reflect the impact on the rights and **mental health** of young users. The resolution underlined the need for clear regulations and binding ethical standards regarding the design and use of **AI companions** capable of employing manipulative techniques or exploiting the emotional vulnerabilities of minors. It warned that interactions with these tools have, in a number of cases, contributed to suicides.

Gender bias and discrimination in AI systems

AI training datasets often reflect entrenched stereotypes, resulting in biased recommendation algorithms and content-ordering systems, including the promotion of misogynistic communities, sexualised AI-generated images, pro-anorexia and self-harm content. Parliament called for the **systematic auditing of training data and algorithmic outputs** using gender-sensitive indicators, as well as for scenario testing

to examine how recommender systems expose minors to such content, and for platforms to demonstrate measures that prevent harmful content escalation.

Parliament recommended, *inter alia*:

- developing **guidelines** on the use of AI systems impacting children;
- strengthening mitigation measures against **scams and fraud**, including specific measures against celebrity scams;
- explicitly prohibiting AI systems that generate, manipulate or modify **realistic images or videos depicting sexually explicit activities** or the intimate parts of an identifiable natural person without that person's consent, as well as artificial content relating to child sexual abuse;
- explicitly banning of AI systems generating, manipulating or altering **realistic images or videos depicting sexually explicit activities** or intimate parts of an identifiable natural person without that person's consent, and synthetic child sexual abuse material;
- ensuring that online platforms are held responsible for preventing and countering **cyberbullying** and mitigating the impact of addictive and persuasive design features by implementing risk-based safeguards for recommender systems, and measures to ban the most harmful addictive practices;
- developing an **EU-wide code of conduct for influencers**, including commitments to advertise responsibly towards minors and to establish a harmonised definition of 'influencer marketing'.

Harmful content, age verification, and protection of minors

Members regretted the fact that several mechanisms used by online platforms to control access to their services, such as self-declaration, are easily bypassed, and that minors still have widespread access to age-inappropriate content. They stressed the need for effective, privacy-preserving age and child-rights compliant verification tools to **verify a user's age** when required, without the collection or retention of personal data.

Parliament welcomed the favourable consideration expressed by the Commission President regarding the introduction of a **harmonised, EU-wide minimum age limit** for access to social media (a minimum digital age). It stressed the need for a harmonised EU approach to establishing a minimum digital age.

Education, digital skills and media literacy

Members stressed the key role of both formal and non-formal education in equipping children and young people with the digital, media and AI literacy skills needed to navigate social media and online environments safely and effectively. They called on the Member States to consider introducing clear rules on the use of mobile devices in schools, particularly at early and primary education levels, which may include exceptions for educational purposes.

Stressing the need for increased transparency around social media algorithmic systems, Parliament expressed support for the introduction for online platforms of a 'youth mode', disabling targeted advertising and limiting addictive design features for minors.