FORUM: General Assembly
ISSUE: Addressing Government Restrictions on Social Media Access for Minors
NAME OF WRITER: Abdulwahab Al Moutar
POSITION: Chair

ABSTRACT

In today's world social media has become an important part of how young people learn, communicate, and express themselves and their personalities. However, the spread of cyberbullying, harassment, sexual exploitation, and harm to mental health has caused governments worldwide to act on this issue. Australia was the first country to impose a minimum age law of 16 which has led to many countries announcing their own restrictions on minor's access to social media.

These restrictions raise difficult questions. Although these laws aim to protect children from harm UNICEF argues that they might resort to more dangerous apps which raise safety and privacy concerns. Thus, the international community must work together on a framework that keeps minors safe online while protecting their privacy and respecting their rights.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Minor

Someone under the age of 18 years old and has not yet reached the stage of adulthood

Social Media Minimum Age

The legal minimum age a person must be before they can register for an account on certain social media platforms

Age Verification

A method of confirming a user's age for example using face scans, government ID or passport

Parental Consent Model

A model that allows minors to use social media only with special permission from a parent or guardian

Addictive Design Features

Features made to keep users on an app for a long time without feeling it, such as endless scrolling and autoplay which aim to maximize app usage time

Digital Rights of the Child

A general list of rights listed by the UNCRC which include: freedom of expression, access to information, privacy, and protection from harm

Cyberbullying

The use of digital platforms to harass, threaten, or embarrass someone. It's one of the main reasons why countries even consider imposing bans and/or restrictions.

BACKGROUND

In the beginning most social media apps had a minimum age of 13 years to create an account, this was built on the 1998 US COPPA law which aimed to protect the online privacy of children under the age of 13 and to prevent collecting their data.

However, over the years the negative effects of social media on young people began to raise concerns which led to the UN's 2021 confirmation of children's rights online which includes the right to be protected and the right to access information. This ultimately led to the first laws being passed in hopes of making social media safer for minors.

The first leap was taken in December 10,2025 and it was when Australia formally imposed a social media minimum age of 16 years. Australia blamed platforms mostly and within days of the ban over 4.7 million accounts were removed. After this many countries followed and introduced restrictions / bans of their own.

Yet not all countries followed, some remained silent while others believed that it would be too hard to implement, and with this the issue was clear. Countries needed to find a balance between protecting children, respecting privacy and rights, and allowing for freedom of expression and access to information.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA RESTRICTIONS ON MINORS

1. **Child Safety and Mental Health**
   Some believe imposing restrictions will protect children from cyberbullying and harmful online content which in turn helps their mental health

2. **Privacy Concerns**
   When platforms use ID's to verify a users age they have access to sensitive details which raise privacy concerns

3. **Children switching to more dangerous platforms**
   With social media restrictions children might resort to using other platforms that could be much more harmful towards them. Examples include the dark web and other similar platforms

4. **Children's Rights**
   UNICEF argue that imposing restrictions cut off children from information, friends, and support they may receive

5. **Enforcement Challenges**
   Age checking technology isn't always accurate and many children were able to make accounts even after the ban because they looked older.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Australia

- The first country to impose a minimum age which started on December 10 2025. Platforms that did not comply with this rule could face serious fines from the government.

United Kingdom

- Imposed a wide scale ban on social media for under 16s and is expected to take effect in spring of 2027

United Arab Emirates

- The first Arab country to set a minimum social media age of 15 years old. They set it in June 2026 and gave companies 12 months to comply.

Indonesia and Malaysia

- Both introduced restrictions to users under 16 in 2026 with Indonesia being the first country in southeast Asia to do so.

France

- An under 15 ban was passed in July of 2026 however it was eventually struck down due to privacy and freedom of expression concerns and since then a new solution has been proposed

Brazil

- Brazil's Digital ECA laws required users 16 and under to link their accounts to a parent or guardian and also banned targeted advertising of these platform to minors

UNICEF

- Supports protecting children online but believes that bans alone aren't enough and so they call for safer app design and imposing restrictions

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POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

1. **Digital Literacy Education**
   Schools and qualified organizations can help educate children and teens about the dangers of social media and how to use it safely and responsibly.

2. **Holding Platforms Responsible**
   Laws could place the responsibility on big tech companies rather than on children and guardians with fines for failure to comply.

3. **Safer App Design**
   Platforms could be required to make social media safe by design by removing certain features for those underage such as removing direct messaging and audio calling from strangers

4. **Privacy Safe Age Checks**
   Platforms could check if a user is above or below the required age limit without storing their ID card of face scan

5. **Gradual Access by Age**
   Platforms could block certain features for users under a certain age and as the child grows he or she gains more access to more features gradually.

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