

Australia's Social Media Ban for Children Takes Effect

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The measure, which affects anyone under 16, is one of the most sweeping efforts in the world to safeguard young people from the potential harms of the platforms.

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Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, center, standing alongside 12-year-old girl Flossie, center left, who criticized social media companies during an official function to mark the start of Australia's social media changes in Sydney on Wednesday. Credit...David Gray/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

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Hundreds of thousands of teenagers in Australia awoke Wednesday to find their social media accounts logged out or deactivated, under a [new law](#) that bars anyone younger than 16 from the services.

The day marked the launch of a [sweeping governmental effort](#) to shelter children from the potential harms associated with such platforms, putting the country at the vanguard of regulating social media services that parents and educators worry have ensnared a generation of young people.

But the day was also a reminder that the task of weaning teenagers off social media would be a challenging one.

Luca Hagop, 15, who spends a lot of time on social media and who [spoke earlier to The Times](#) about the ban, returned from a school camp Wednesday afternoon to find his Snapchat and Facebook accounts were not working, but that he could use Instagram and YouTube just fine.

He shrugged it off, because he only cared about the latter two, his father, Adrian Hagop, said.

The measure, [passed a year ago](#) requires the technology companies behind the platforms — Facebook, Instagram, [Kick](#), Reddit, Snapchat, Threads, TikTok, Twitch, X and YouTube — to identify and disable the accounts of

Australian users who are under 16. Under the law, failure to take “reasonable steps” to remove underage users could lead to fines of up to 49.5 million Australian dollars (about \$33 million).

Video

Why Some Teenagers Are Against Australia’s Social Media Ban

Australia has imposed one of the world’s most comprehensive measures banning social media for children under 16. This is what several young Australian teens think about the ban, which took effect on Wednesday.

The year leading up to the law taking force was riddled with skepticism and confusion about how it would work, concerns about privacy and civil rights implications and back-and-forth wrangling over what platforms would and would not be banned.

Most of the 10 services currently covered by the law said they would comply. A few said they had begun deactivating accounts in the days before the law came into effect. Some have argued that the government’s classification of what is considered a social media service was murky and that the ban may push children into less-regulated corners of the internet.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Australia said on Wednesday that his country was proudly leading the world in pushing back against big tech companies and holding social media services responsible for their effect on children’s lives and minds.

Image



Australia’s online regulator reported earlier this year that 95 percent of teens ages 13 to 15 used social media in 2024. Credit...Matthew Abbott for The New York Times

“It is one of the biggest social and cultural changes that our nation has faced,” Mr. Albanese said. “It’s a profound reform which will continue to reverberate around the world in coming months, to assist not just this generation, but generations to come.”

Speaking in Sydney, Mr. Albanese stood alongside a 12-year-old girl from the state of Tasmania who said the social media companies were taking advantage of young, malleable brains.

“We deserve the chance to figure out who we are without algorithms telling us what to like, what to think and how to feel,” the girl, Flossie, said.

Anika Wells, the communications minister, said many other countries were supportive and expressed interest when she spoke about the law at the United Nations General Assembly in New York. Denmark and [Malaysia](#) have said they are planning similar restrictions.

Ms. Wells [said](#) the companies would be required to report the number of underage accounts on their platforms before and immediately after the ban, and then each of the next six months.

Image



Government ministers at an official function to mark the start of Australia's social media changes at Kirribilli House in Sydney on Wednesday. Credit...David Gray/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

The setup and enforcement of age restrictions are left up to the companies. In the days leading up to the ban, some teenagers said that they were prompted to verify their ages using a facial analysis feature, but that it gave inaccurate estimates. The law also states that companies cannot ask users to provide government-issued identification as the only way to prove their age because of privacy concerns.

Australia's eSafety commissioner, Julie Inman Grant, said officials were planning on monitoring the law's long-term effect on teens by studying things like sleep, interpersonal interactions, test scores and antidepressant use.

"We'll be looking at a vast amount of data," she said. "This will be longitudinal, we'll be looking at short-term impacts, medium-term, and longer-term."

The eSafety commissioner [reported](#) this year that 95 percent of teenagers ages 13 to 15 used social media in 2024. YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram were the most popular services.

Two Australian teenagers, backed by an advocacy group, filed a constitutional challenge to the law in the country's high court before it went into effect, arguing that it infringes on their right to political communication. Australian media also [reported](#) that Reddit was preparing to sue over the law.

Human rights organizations, including the country's [human rights commission](#), have also expressed concerns that a "blanket ban" will not be effective.

"Many young people will no doubt find ways to avoid the restrictions," Amnesty International said [in a statement](#) on Wednesday. "A ban simply means they will continue to be exposed to the same harms but in secret, leaving them at even greater risk."

Critics have also noted the law may disproportionately affect teens living in remote areas connecting with peers online, or young people who are minorities or living with a disability who may have found communities through social media.

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