

BANNING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR UNDER-16S

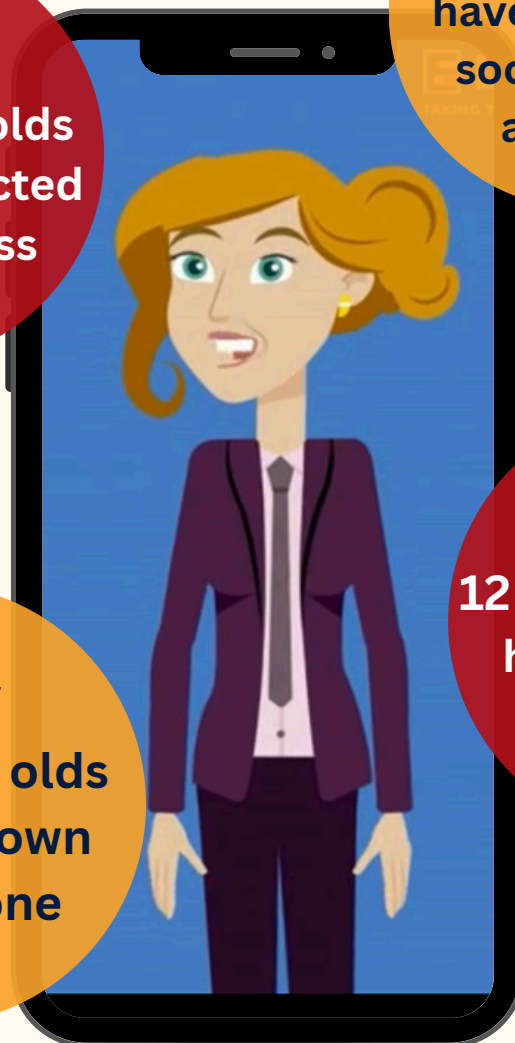
Should Ireland follow Australia's lead?

61% of
12 to 14 year olds
have unrestricted
online access

82% of
8 to 12 year olds
have their own
social media
account

94% of
8 to 12 year olds
have their own
smartphone

99% of
12 to 14 year olds
have their own
smartphone



LawEd supports this bold reform to protect our youth

WHAT IS THE AGE OF DIGITAL CONSENT?

DATA PROTECTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



The **age of digital consent** is the legal age that you have to be to sign up to apps and online platforms like social media, **without needing permission from a parent or guardian.**

✓ In Ireland, the age is 16.

Social media companies are supposed to get parental permission for users under 16. However, most platforms **do not check age properly**, meaning many children still access these apps.

Young people are easily able to get around the law and set up social media accounts with **false information**. This is why Australia are going a step further and no longer just relying on the **age of digital consent** to protect the youth online.

AUSTRALIA TAKES THE FIRST LEGAL STEPS



Australia has implemented a **complete ban on social media for under 16s**. This newly passed law has been identified as being the **strictest** social media regulation to date. Australia's law makes it clear that the minimum age of 16 is not just a guideline, but a **legal requirement** when creating a social media account. The law forces social media companies to hold themselves **accountable**, and ensure that all social media platforms have secure **age-verification technologies**. If companies fail to follow the new social media law, they can face **harsh fines**.

IRELAND TO FOLLOW AUSTRALIA'S LEAD



Ireland, along with many other countries has taken Australia's approach in protecting minors online into consideration. With **94% of Irish children between the ages 8 to 12 owning their own smartphones**, access to social media before the digital age of consent (16) is at an all time high.

Tánaiste, **Simon Harris** has recently pointed out the psychological and developmental impacts that **unregulated access** to social media platforms can have on minors. Ireland has identified that Australia has paved a way to **protect children** under 16 from the risks of the digital world and discussions to follow their lead have begun.

AUSTRALIA'S NEW LAW

Australia is currently carrying out a **12-month trial period** in order to explore how these strict new measures will be enforced. The law imposing a **social media ban** is set to take effect in December 2025. The law takes the responsibility of **age verification** away from the user and places it directly on social media companies themselves. It states that social media platforms are required to take "**reasonable steps**" to prevent children under 16 from creating social media accounts.



DID YOU KNOW?

77% of people surveyed in Australia **support the social media ban**. Many parents support the ban as they are concerned that social media exposes children to content that is **not age appropriate** such as pornography, violence and unrealistic body standards. This is a **shared concern** with parents in Ireland.

WHAT CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT AUSTRALIA'S NEW LAW

Critics have warned that Australia's new law lacks a lot of detail and is too vague, which could cause **complications** when trying to enforce such strict regulations. Some experts have also stated that implementing these laws could potentially **interfere with children's rights**. It is feared that **banning access** to social media platforms for children under 16 could push the youth into accessing the dark web.

IRELAND'S CURRENT LEGAL STANDING

The **Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022** plays a central role in Ireland's approach to online safety. The law requires online platforms to remove **harmful content** to help protect users. The Act focuses on what is being posted, rather than who is accessing the platforms, meaning that young people are still being **exposed to harmful content** that has not yet been removed.



WHAT WOULD IRELAND NEED TO DO?

In order to follow Australia's lead and protect the youth, Ireland would need to **implement stricter laws**. The law would need to prohibit under 16s from accessing social media entirely. This would include:

- Requiring social media age restrictions
- Stricter age verification measures across social media platforms
- Imposing harsh fines on companies for non-compliance

LEARNING FROM AUSTRALIA

As Ireland considers implementing stronger protections for young people online, Australia's recent law offers **valuable guidelines**. Ireland would need to ensure that the law is **clear, enforceable** and **respects children's rights**, without pushing young people towards unsafe online spaces.

WHAT WOULD A SOCIAL MEDIA BAN MEAN FOR IRISH SOCIETY?

PROTECTING YOUNG PEOPLE

Social media is how many children connect, learn and express themselves, but it is also a space where they are exposed to the most risks before an appropriate age. Exposure to **harmful content, grooming and catfishing** are all linked to the digital environment that has been designed without young people's safety in mind. Restricting access until the age of 16 would allow children to develop more **emotional and psychological maturity** before entering an unfiltered digital world.



BETTERING MENTAL HEALTH

45% of young people in Ireland are already **self-restricting** their social media use due to the impact that constant online comparison and **digital pressure** has on their **mental wellbeing**. A complete ban would eliminate FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) that often keeps young people online, even when they are aware that it is negatively affecting their **mental health**.



FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS

Educators and parents are increasingly managing the **consequences of social media** use, including cyberbullying, distractions, anxiety and conflict between students. A social media ban would **reduce** the need for **constant supervision** and relieve the pressures of setting digital boundaries at home and at school.

