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ABSTRACT

This exploratory policy paper addresses youth participation and protection in the digital environment, comparing evolving approaches in the European Union (EU) and Latin America and Caribbean (LAC). Age plays a central role in shaping how young people engage with the digital world, often serving simultaneously as a threshold for access and a trigger for regulation. Whether through school restrictions on mobile phone use, age limits on social media accounts, or parental control mechanisms, age functions as a proxy for maturity, risk, and responsibility. Yet how age is interpreted, enforced, and linked to policy objectives varies widely across countries and institutional settings.

The analysis explores how age is referenced across education, social media use, and data protection, mapping national laws, platform practices, and policy initiatives. This allows us to trace both converging regulatory trends and region-specific differences, while also highlighting the unintended consequences of age-based approaches when they overlook digital inclusion, civil rights, and the lived realities of youth. Rather than offering a static comparison, the paper frames age as a regulatory narrative that reflects broader assumptions about youth, risk, and autonomy, and that shapes their opportunities to participate in digital life.

The findings also emphasize the evolving role of platforms and policymakers in developing safer digital environments—through initiatives such as content filtering, parental controls, and safety centers—and the critical contribution of civil society actors, including parent associations, teachers’ unions, NGOs, and think tanks. Taken together, these dynamics show how youth digital governance is being co-constructed across regions, institutions, and communities, underscoring the importance of collaborative, evidence-based approaches that balance protection with inclusion and agency

This exploratory paper is a product of HEMISPHERES, an international collaboration exploring technology, policy, and regulation across the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean. It represents the culmination of a joint effort by a Working Group of academics from both regions, reflecting the rich diversity of their experiences and opinions. While individual contributors express their views in a personal capacity and may not agree with every statement, they are united by a shared commitment to fostering mutual learning between these distinct regulatory landscapes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Much of everyday life now happens online-learning, socializing, and taking part in public life. Consequently, the way we design and govern young people's participation in digital spaces has become a central concern for policymakers, platforms, educators, and families alike. They design and develop the technologies, set defaults, define the rules of engagement, and assign responsibility when things go wrong.

From restrictions on mobile phone use in schools to continuously evolving approaches to age verification and parental controls, debates about digital engagement often hinge on how age is used, who is permitted to participate and under what conditions. However, the way age is framed and operationalized in digital policy and regulation varies significantly between regions, reflecting broader differences in legal traditions, infrastructure, and socio-educational priorities.

This paper explores how the EU and LAC use age in online rules for young people-and what that means for youth engagement with the digital world. We review laws, guidance, and platform policies (2016–2025) to map where age turns on protections, defaults, or limits; how age is established; and which actors are involved (regulators, schools, telecoms, platforms, civil society). We discuss the trade-offs policy makers face-platform accountability, protection vs. participation, and equity-and suggest practical ways the two regions can learn from each other using a child-rights approach.

The objective of this paper is threefold:

- Map out how age is referenced and operationalized in regulatory policy documents-across countries, platforms, and sectors-in LAC and the EU, particularly where age determines access, rights, or restrictions for youth.
- Identify key actors shaping these evolving regimes of youth platform governance.
- Propose avenues for regulatory learning and collaboration, particularly where child rights-based, inclusive, and participatory approaches can be shared, adapted, or co-developed across regions.

2. AGE ACROSS SPHERES OF YOUTH ACTIVITY

Age plays a central role in shaping how young people engage with the digital world, often serving as both a threshold for access and a trigger for regulation. Whether restricting mobile phone use in schools, determining eligibility for social media accounts, or activating parental control settings, age is frequently used as a proxy for maturity, risk, and responsibility. Yet how age is interpreted, enforced, and linked to policy objectives varies significantly across countries and institutional settings.

This section explores how age is referenced across different spheres of youth activity-particularly education, social media use, and data protection-in selected countries in LAC and the EU. By examining national laws, policy initiatives, and platform practices, we map the evolving regulatory landscape and highlight both converging trends and regional specificities. Importantly, this analysis also draws attention to the limitations and unintended consequences of age-based approaches, especially when they fail to account for digital inclusion, civil rights, and the lived realities of youth.

Rather than offering a static comparison, the goal here is to understand how age functions as a regulatory narrative-one that reflects broader social assumptions about youth, risk, and autonomy, and that opens (or foresees) possibilities for participation in digital life.

Country	Age Across Spheres of Youth Activity
Brazil	Age Verification

In Brazil, one of the earliest legislative attempts to implement age verification emerged in a preliminary version of Bill No. 2.630. Article 7 of the draft proposed that social media platforms should require users to submit valid identification documents when creating an account. However, this proposal was ultimately deemed inappropriate, primarily due to the country's ongoing issue of civil invisibility—a condition affecting individuals who lack formal recognition in civil registries. For instance, data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) revealed that in 2023, approximately 26,760 newborns were not properly registered and did not receive a birth certificate. In this context, requiring official identification for digital access would likely exacerbate existing disparities and deepen digital exclusion. As a result, the proposed requirement was removed from the bill, and to date, no legally mandated age verification method has been established for digital platforms in Brazil.

Parental Control

Given the heightened need for the protection of minors, UNICEF has emphasized that parental control tools are a vital component in safeguarding children's rights in the digital environment. In 2024, the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee (CGI.br), through a study conducted by the Regional Center for Studies on the Development of the Information Society (Cetic.br), found that only three in ten parents of children aged 9 to 17 actively set limits on their children's internet use. This data highlights a significant regulatory and infrastructural gap: Brazil has yet to establish a robust framework that empowers parents with effective tools to manage and monitor their children's digital experiences. The first general legal provision requiring parental oversight of children's online activities was introduced in the Brazilian General Data Protection Law (LGPD). Article 14, paragraph 1, stipulates that the processing of personal data belonging to children is only lawful when prior and explicit consent is obtained from at least one of their legal guardians.

However, this provision presents a notable limitation: it applies exclusively to children under the age of 12, thereby excluding adolescents (ages 12–17) from this layer of protection. Moreover, Brazilian law still lacks detailed, enforceable regulations mandating that online platforms implement specific, operationally viable parental control mechanisms. As a result, the legal framework remains insufficient to ensure that platforms systematically support parental involvement in managing minors' online experiences.

Restriction of Mobile Device Use in Schools

In January 2025, Brazil enacted a national law (Law No. 15.100/2025) prohibiting the use of mobile phones within all public and private school premises. The legislation was driven by growing concerns regarding the impact of excessive screen time on students' educational development and social skills. It includes narrowly defined exceptions for cases involving health, accessibility, safety, or pedagogical purposes.

Anticipating the significant implications of this policy for students, educators, and families, the Brazilian Ministry of Education launched a nationwide campaign between January and March to support the implementation of the new law. This initiative featured online seminars, mental health training programs, and efforts to promote extracurricular activities—such as sports and the arts—as constructive alternatives to screen use.

Prior to the enactment of Law No. 15.100/2025, several states and municipalities across Brazil had already introduced regulations limiting mobile phone use in educational environments. However, the introduction of a federal mandate marks a pivotal development, bringing Brazil into alignment with international policies adopted in countries such as France, Spain, Greece, Denmark, Italy, and the Netherlands.

Beyond its immediate practical effects on students' daily routines, the legislation reflects a broader policy stance by the Brazilian National Congress, asserting: (1) that unrestricted screen exposure can have detrimental effects on the development of children and adolescents, and (2) that the state bears a responsibility to intervene and mitigate these risks.

Other

- (1) One of the most recent initiatives by the Brazilian federal government is the publication of a document titled *“Youth, Children and Screens: A Guide on the Use of Digital Devices”*, [available here](#). Drawing on scientific evidence and a mapping of international best practices, the Guide offers guidance on how Brazilian society should address the use of digital devices by young people.

It covers a wide range of topics and is intended to support the various sectors involved in protecting children and adolescents. The Guide includes tailored recommendations for parents, the private sector, digital influencers, schools, government authorities, policymakers, healthcare services, and others.

Regarding legal protections for children and adolescents online, the Guide acknowledges that, while Brazil has yet to pass specific legislation regulating digital platforms, there are several legal instruments already in force that apply to the online environment. These include Article 227 of the Federal Constitution, the Statute for the Protection of Children and Adolescents (Law 8.069/1990), and the Consumer Protection Code (Law 8.078/1990).

Finally, beyond identifying the risks and existing protective mechanisms, the Guide also highlights the many opportunities that digital technologies can offer. It underscores the

importance of safe and responsible screen use as a means to unlock the full potential of these opportunities.

- (2) Bill 2.628/2022, under discussion by the Brazilian National Congress, will, if approved, introduce a robust legal framework aimed at protecting children and adolescents in digital environments. The proposed law applies to any digital product or service accessible in Brazil that is either directed at or may be used by minors, regardless of its origin.

At its core, the bill establishes that digital platforms must prioritize the best interests of children and adolescents, ensuring high standards of privacy, data protection, and safety. It outlines specific responsibilities for providers of digital services, including internet applications, social media, online games, and child-monitoring technologies.

Among its key provisions, the bill mandates that:

- Design and operation of digital products must include mechanisms to prevent exposure to harmful content, such as sexual abuse, violence, bullying, and predatory commercial practices.
- Default privacy settings must be the most protective available, especially in terms of data collection, usage, and profiling.
- Parental control tools must be easily accessible and include functionalities such as screen time management, content filtering, and restriction of communication with unauthorized users.

- Age verification systems must be implemented for platforms hosting pornographic content or targeting users under 18.

In the realm of online gaming, the bill bans the use of “loot boxes” for children and adolescents and requires that games provide mechanisms for reporting abuse, as well as options to disable interaction tools via parental controls.

With regard to advertising, the bill explicitly prohibits the use of profiling techniques and immersive technologies-such as augmented and virtual reality-for targeting minors.

For social networks, the bill requires that children’s accounts be linked to those of their legal guardians, that efforts be made to identify underage users, and that behavioral profiling for advertising purposes be banned.

To strengthen accountability, platforms must report instances of child sexual abuse to competent authorities and retain related data. They are also required to respond to reports of rights violations and remove offending content promptly, without the need for a court order.

Platforms with over one million registered underage users in Brazil will have to publish biannual transparency reports detailing content moderation practices, technical safeguards, and parental consent mechanisms.

Enforcement is structured around a system of progressive sanctions, including warnings, fines (up to 10% of national revenue or R\$50 million per infraction), temporary

	<p>suspensions, and prohibitions on operation. Collected fines will be directed to the National Fund for Children and Adolescents.</p>
<p>Chile</p>	<p>Restriction of Mobile Phones Chile has not passed legislation outlawing mobile phones in schools, but many schools, guided by local policies, have introduced restrictions to limit distractions during instruction. In the same line.</p> <p>Social Media, personal data and age verification Chile's new Data Protection Law (Law No. 21.719, enacted in December 2024) introduces specific provisions regarding the processing of children's and adolescents' personal data, establishing a foundation for age verification practices. It requires that the personal data of children under 14 can only be processed with the consent of their parents, legal guardians, or caregivers. Adolescents aged 14 to 18 can generally consent to the processing of their personal data on their own, but for the processing of sensitive data, those under 16 still require parental consent. The law also emphasizes that any data processing must respect the best interests of the child and their evolving capacities. Although it does not mandate a specific digital age verification mechanism, the legal obligation to obtain parental consent-combined with mandatory notification requirements in case of data breaches involving children under 14-implies that service providers may need to implement effective age assurance systems to comply with the law.</p> <p>Parental Controls More Broadly Chile's General Telecommunications Law (Law 18.168) requires internet service providers (ISPs) to offer parental-control tools, but there's a significant caveat: these services are generally available only to users who request and potentially pay extra for them. Thus, while the infrastructure exists, there is no comprehensive, state-led enforcement or mandated default</p>

	<p>deployment of such tools.</p> <p>ISP obligation: Must provide control options, but uptake is limited due to optional, pay-per-use models that might hinder broad adoption.</p> <p>Lack of robust public initiative: No national campaigns or enforcement mechanisms ensuring parents are aware or actively using these tools - mirroring Brazil's concerns over parental engagement.</p> <p>Others: Chile applies a video game rating system (Decree 51, since January 2018) which classifies games by age (all ages, 8+, 14+, 18+). While this "content-based" system informs whether minors should access a product, it does not function as an online age-verification mechanism-it's strictly for retail labeling.</p>
Colombia	<p>School-level Mobile Phone Bans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In August 2023, the <i>Union of International Schools of Bogotá (Uncoli)</i>-a network of 27 private schools-announced a ban on mobile phones during the school day. This was implemented school-wide, independently of national policy. ● National context: The <i>Ministry of Education</i> has chosen not to enforce a nationwide ban, instead encouraging schools to set their own phone-use policies. <p>Parental Control and Age Verification</p> <p>Policy: <i>Proyecto de Ley 261 de 2024</i>, or "Ley de Protección a Menores de Edad en Redes Sociales", currently moving through Congress.</p> <p>Introduced in 2024 by the Senate and backed by the Ministry of Information and</p>

	<p>Communications Technology (MinTIC), notably Minister Mauricio Lizcano</p> <p>Key measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prohibit account creation/access for users under 14 years old without explicit parental consent. ● Platforms must implement age-verification systems and remove accounts of non-compliant minors. ● Curfew-style restrictions: prevent access between 22:00 and 06:00 for authorized minors . ● Parental control tools are mandatory, digital, always-on, enabling parents to supervise minors' interactions and content . ● Sanctions: Fines range from 5,000 to 50,000 monthly minimum wages, or COL\$6.5 – 65 billion, enforced by the Superintendence of Industry and Commerce <p>Current status: Approved in the Senate's Sixth Commission (Comisión VI). Awaiting debates in plenary and review in the House of Representatives.</p>
Uruguay	<p>Restriction of Mobile Phones</p> <p>Uruguay does not yet have a national law banning mobile phone use in schools. However, the issue has gained political traction following Brazil's Law No. 15.100/2025. In 2025, a bill titled "Responsible Use of Technology and Personal Electronic Devices in Educational Settings" was introduced in the Uruguayan Parliament. This initiative closely mirrors Brazil's policy by proposing a general ban on mobile phone use in educational institutions, with exceptions for pedagogical, health, and accessibility reasons.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the Uruguayan context poses unique challenges to prohibitionist policies. Uruguay has been a global pioneer in digital inclusion through its national Plan Ceibal (now just Ceibal), which since 2007 has distributed free laptops or tablets to all public-school students and teachers, connected almost 100% of public schools to Internet with broadband or</p>

fiber-to-the-home speeds, and developed educational software and pedagogical innovations based on technology. Ceibal integrates technology into everyday teaching practices, making total device bans impractical and potentially counterproductive. Surveys and policy evaluations, such as Kids Online Uruguay and other studies conducted by Ceibal, suggest that overly restrictive rules may encourage hidden device use, diminish students' opportunities to learn digital citizenship skills, and widen educational inequalities.

Social Media and Age Verification

Uruguay has no legally mandated age verification system for access to social media or other digital platforms. While platforms nominally restrict access to users over age 13, enforcement relies primarily on self-declaration. Regulatory developments in this area are minimal, and no major legislative proposals have been introduced since 2025.

The lack of age verification regulation may reflect both a rights-based concern for children's access to digital participation and a pragmatic acknowledgment of the country's high internet and device penetration, even among younger children. However, recent surveys—such as Kids Online Uruguay—have documented significant underage use of social media platforms, raising concerns about children's exposure to inappropriate content, online advertising, and data collection practices.

Academic and public discourse increasingly calls for regulatory frameworks that protect children's rights without excluding them from online spaces. To date, Uruguay has not followed Brazil or the EU in proposing biometric or document-based age verification methods, partly due to concerns over privacy, civil rights, and digital exclusion.

Parental Controls More Broadly

Uruguay lacks a comprehensive legal framework requiring platforms to implement parental control tools. The country does not mandate that platforms provide screen time limits, content filtering, or activity monitoring features by default. Nonetheless, awareness and use of parental mediation practices may be growing, in part due to education campaigns and support from

Ceibal, local social civility organizations (i.e., Pensamiento Colectivo), and international organizations (i.e., UNICEF).

According to Kids Online Uruguay, parental mediation is common, but varies significantly by children's socioeconomic contexts, age, and gender. Active mediation (e.g., discussing online experiences) tends to be more prevalent for boys than girls, while restrictive mediation (e.g., blocking websites or setting time limits) for girls than boys. Mediation as a whole is more common for younger children (9 to 12 years old) than older ones (13 to 17 years old).

Uruguay's General Data Protection Law (Law No. 19.670), approved in 2018, includes provisions for the protection of children's data, but does not explicitly require guardian consent for children's digital activity nor provide specific standards for parental control mechanisms.

In April 2021, Uruguay's House of Representatives sanctioned a legislative proposal aimed at preventing the misuse of digital platforms to harm the rights of children and adolescents: the "Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents in Digital Environments". The draft law C/1707/2021 is more focused on protection from harms than positive rights, defining specific types of harmful content-including sexually explicit or exploitative material involving minors-and calls for comprehensive prevention measures.

Key components include: 1) Governmental duty of prevention, as the State is tasked with preventing both deliberate and accidental access to harmful content, and identifying both perpetrators and victims. 2) The creation of a multi-agency Commission for the Protection of Children's Digital Rights under the Ministry of Education and Culture's coordination, serving an advisory, coordinating, and monitoring role. 3) The creation of annual plans and public awareness campaigns, developed by this commission and coordinated with schools, NGOs, and local governments. 4) Pursues bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements to combat online child sexual abuse and promote data exchange.

Policy momentum exists to strengthen these protections through educational and regulatory instruments. However, any future framework will need to navigate the tension between protecting children and ensuring their rights to participation, privacy, and non-discrimination in digital environments.

	<p>Other (Note: Ideally highlight more positive developments / alternatives to restrictions)</p> <p>Rather than focusing exclusively on restrictions, Uruguay has invested in positive digital governance strategies. Ceibal plays a central role in promoting digital citizenship education, supporting teachers and students through training, resources, and platforms that encourage responsible, inclusive, and informed technology use.</p> <p>The National Plan for Digital Citizenship, coordinated by Ceibal and ANEP (and other...), aims to foster safe and meaningful digital engagement from early schooling through adolescence. It includes curricular components, teacher development, and family-oriented resources. Additionally, Uruguay participates in the ICILS study (International Computer and Information Literacy Study), which provides internationally comparable data on students' digital skills and their school environment.</p> <p>Uruguay has also partnered with international organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO in initiatives to understand and address the risks and opportunities of children's screen use. These include national studies like Kids Online Uruguay, which have provided critical data for evidence-based policymaking.</p> <p>In sum, Uruguay's approach generally emphasizes education, inclusion, and evidence-based regulation over prohibition, but new waves of regulatory initiatives are shifting towards a more prohibitionist approach. Nonetheless, the country's legacy of digital inclusion policies has created both opportunities and constraints that distinguish it from its regional peers and may reduce the chances of prohibitionist or banning regulation taking center stage in this arena. This positions Uruguay to contribute meaningfully to regional and global dialogues on child digital rights and school technology governance.</p>
Peru	Restriction of Mobile Phones

Legislation regulating the use of smartphones in schools is recent. Law No. 32385, published in June 2025, aims to improve classroom attention, prevent cyberbullying, reduce digital overexposure, and foster a healthier, learning-focused educational environment. This law regulates the use of cell phones and electronic devices in all public and private basic education schools in Peru. It prohibits their use during class, except in two cases: when used for academic purposes explicitly authorized by the institution, or when the student needs them for justified health reasons.

School principals must implement protocols to ensure compliance with the law, apply corrective measures, and post visible signs informing of the restriction. In addition, the Ministry of Education (Minedu) and the Ministry of Health (Minsa) must develop awareness campaigns about the effects of excessive cell phone use on mental health, learning, and socialization.

Social Media and Age Verification

Peru currently lacks a dedicated age verification law for access to online services or digital content by minors. Current regulation specific to minors is based on the Personal Data Protection Law (Ley N.º 29733) and requires “reasonable efforts” to verify age and obtain parental consent when collecting data from users under 14. Adolescents aged 14 to 18 can consent on their own if the language used is clear and understandable. These rules apply primarily to data handling and not to access to platforms like social media, streaming, or gaming services. No regulation mandates age verification mechanisms—such as ID checks, biometric scans, or AI-based systems—at the point of entry to age-sensitive content. Proposed legislation, specifically Proyecto Ley 10880/2024-CR, intends to introduce some digital protections for minors, but it does not establish binding mechanisms for real-time age verification.

Parental Controls More Broadly

As with Age Verification, Peru does not have a specific law mandating parental control tools on digital devices used by children and adolescents. Current regulation specific to minors is also based on the Personal Data Protection Law (Ley N.º 29733), which requires parental consent for

data collection from minors under 14, although it does not impose technological controls such as pre-installed parental filters. A recent legislative project-Proyecto Ley 10880/2024-CR- addresses digital safety for minors, including recommendations for time restrictions and healthier screen habits, but these are non-binding.

Latin America Overview

Country	National Ban	Regional/School Ban	Notes
Brazil	✓		National law since 2025
Argentina		✓	Buenos Aires City ban since 2024
Peru	✓		National law since

			2025
	Mexico	✓	Querétaro state ban since 2025
	Bolivia	✓	National ban, enforcement varies
	Chile	✓	Ministry recommends regulated use
	Colombia	✓	Local bans, national bill proposed
Europe			

Country	National Ban	Regional/School Ban	Notes
France	✓		National ban since 2018
Netherlands	✓		Ban covers all schools since 2024
Italy	✓		Ban from pre-school to secondary
Hungary	✓		Nationwide ban since 2024

	Greece	✓		Phones must be kept in bags
	Belgium	✓	✓	Wallonia-Brussels ban from 2025/26
	Spain		✓	Several regions have bans
	Ireland	✓		Nationwide ban being implemented
	Sweden	✓		Only for learning purposes

	Latvia	✓		Ban for grades up to 6 from May 2025
	Luxembourg	✓		Ban in primary schools from Easter 2025
	Finland	✓		Legislation in progress
	Germany		✓	School-level restrictions common
	Denmark		✓	Most schools restrict

			phone use
Portugal		✓	Some schools/regions have bans
Austria	✓		Ban in class and during breaks since May 2025

Key Points:

Given that children constitute approximately one-third of all active internet users, and considering their prominent presence on social media platforms and inherent vulnerability, online age verification mechanisms have become a critical component of youth protection in the digital age.

In this context, the European Parliament has identified several types of age verification methods currently in use, including:

1. Self-declaration – The most commonly used method, in which users simply state their age. While easy to implement, it is also easily circumvented and unreliable.

2. Biometric verification – Involves AI-powered facial recognition technologies that analyze facial features to estimate whether a user is over 18. The main concerns with this method include potential inaccuracies and the intrusive nature of processing sensitive biometric data.
3. Behavioral analysis – Relies on the examination of online usage patterns, such as browser history, to infer the probable age group of the user. This method raises concerns about data privacy and inference accuracy.
4. Digital ID systems – Require users to provide government-issued identification verified through official channels. These systems offer higher accuracy but depend heavily on robust civil registration systems and can raise concerns related to surveillance and exclusion.

The Case of Spain:

In Spain, the public and policy conversation around young people's use of digital platforms is evolving toward a more proactive and protective stance, with growing attention to how digital environments can be designed to better support healthy development, creativity, and social participation.

While situated within the broader EU regulatory framework - particularly the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) - Spain is shaping its own approach by integrating national priorities related to education, mental well-being, and digital inclusion. The aim is not only to shield minors from harm but to promote a safer, more empowering digital experience.

One of the most visible expressions of this debate is the discussion around delaying or regulating smartphone access among younger children. Regional governments such as those in Galicia and Catalonia¹ ²are exploring policies that limit phone use in schools or encourage later adoption, based on growing societal consensus around the need to curb early digital dependency. These initiatives are framed less as bans and more as coordinated efforts between schools, families, and communities to foster healthier digital habits. They are part of a broader conversation about how to create nurturing digital environments that support children's learning, self-esteem, and social relationships.

At the national level, Spain is actively engaging with EU-wide discussions about age verification and platform accountability, seeking technical solutions that can enhance safety without compromising rights. The Ministry for Digital Transformation is evaluating systems that respect privacy while ensuring that age-appropriate content and features are effectively implemented. In this context, the country goes towards positioning itself as a contributor to EU innovation in child-centered digital governance - exploring mechanisms that balance protection, inclusion, and digital citizenship with a human-centered approach that promotes collective care and empowerment.

¹ View: <https://educacio.gencat.cat/ca/inici>

² View: <https://web.gencat.cat/ca/actualitat/detall/Selimina-lus-del-mobil-a-tota-letapa-obligatoria>

3. NEW DEVELOPMENTS – PLATFORMS

This section highlights the platform's recent developments, focusing on regional policies and initiatives related to content filtering, parental controls, and the establishment of safety centers. It explores how platforms and policymakers can work together to create safer, more supportive digital environments that promote positive engagement and well-being for young users.

Companies	New Developments
Meta	<p>In April 2025, Meta announced a series of updates expanding its “Teen Accounts” features across Instagram, Facebook, and Messenger. Initially introduced on Instagram in 2024, the Teen Accounts system now extends to additional Meta services, combining automated protections with new tools for parental oversight.</p> <p>One of the key developments is the introduction of parental notifications on Instagram. When a teen appears to be using a birthdate that does not reflect their real age, parents now receive prompts encouraging them to verify this information, accompanied by guidance developed in partnership with child safety experts.</p> <p>Meta has also started testing the use of artificial intelligence in the United States to detect accounts that are likely operated by teens, even if the declared age suggests otherwise. In such cases, the platform may automatically apply Teen Account protections, though users can dispute these classifications.</p> <p>Teen Accounts come with a set of default settings designed to limit exposure and interaction. For instance, users under 16 now require parental permission to initiate live streams on Instagram.</p>

	<p>Additionally, the company has introduced restrictions on direct messages, such as automatic blurring of suspected nudity, a feature that teens cannot disable without adult approval.</p> <p>On Facebook and Messenger, the Teen Account experience is similar. It includes private-by-default account settings, limited messaging capabilities, and time management features such as daily reminders and quiet modes during evening hours. These additions follow Meta’s internal data suggesting that the majority of teens opted to remain in the Teen Account experience and that parents generally support the approach.</p> <p>While Meta frames these changes as steps toward greater digital well-being for young users, the measures also serve to preempt criticism and regulatory pressure regarding the company’s role in adolescent online safety. The use of AI for age estimation, in particular, raises questions about the balance between platform responsibility and user autonomy, especially when such systems can override user-provided information.</p>
TikTok	<p>TikTok’s added the enhanced Family Pairing features-scheduled "Time Away" blocking, screen-time limits with passcodes, and visibility into who teens follow-build in flexibility and shared responsibility . E.g. they added a wind-down reminder with calming music and meditation prompts, with the intention to help teens disconnect mindfully after 10 pm.</p> <p>Overall, these features are smartly designed to foster healthy habits through positive guidance and communication-something both families and experts seem to appreciate</p>
Google	<p>Between 2024 and 2025 a key area of convergence between European Union regulation and Google’s product development lies in age verification systems. The EU Digital Services Act (DSA) obliges Very Large Online Platforms to implement mechanisms to prevent minors from accessing</p>

harmful content³. While the DSA does not prescribe a single method, it encourages robust, privacy-conscious approaches. In parallel, Google⁴ has expanded its efforts by integrating age-verification signals directly into its platforms, notably through Google Accounts and app settings. Its policy advocacy has pushed for OS-level and app-store-based verification mechanisms, aligning with recent proposals from countries like France and Spain that support age-gating at the device or platform entry level, rather than within each service.

When it comes to parental controls, both EU regulation and Google's roadmap point toward greater parental oversight and user empowerment. The DSA emphasizes the need for platforms to offer protective tools, such as privacy-by-default settings for minors and accessible parental controls. Responding to this environment, Google has made updates to its Family Link ecosystem. As of early 2025, Family Link offers enhanced screen-time settings, app and content filtering, contact approvals, and school-time modes, providing guardians with a comprehensive dashboard to manage their children's digital lives. These efforts directly respond to the DSA's mandate for age-appropriate design and are in line with the policy momentum within several EU countries pushing for default protections at the operating system level.

In terms of content filtering and algorithmic transparency, the DSA requires platforms to give users access to at least one content recommendation system that does not rely on profiling. It also bans manipulative design practices, particularly those affecting children's autonomy and decision-making. Google's response has been to further reinforce SafeSearch as a default for accounts identified as belonging to minors. This setting filters explicit content from search results

³ View: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/dsa-impact-platforms>

⁴ View: <https://blog.google/outreach-initiatives/public-policy/google-legislative-proposal-for-keeping-kids-safe-online>

and is now mandatory for supervised accounts. Additionally, Google’s educational resources and safety portals have been redesigned to promote algorithmic transparency and empower users (and parents) to manage personalization features, content exposure, and privacy settings more intuitively.

LAC is moving through a phase of policy experimentation and public-private collaboration. Google’s strategy in the region focuses more on education, tool localization, and advocacy, rather than responding to strict regulatory demands⁵. Nonetheless, LAC’s increasing interest in aligning child online safety with digital rights -and the influence of EU policy models- suggests that more formalized regulation may emerge in the coming years, particularly in countries with active digital agendas such as Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay.

⁵ View: <https://www.youtube.com/howyoutubeworks/kids-and-teens/advisory-committee/>

4. NEW DEVELOPMENTS – STAKEHOLDERS

This section examines the growing involvement of key civil society actors—such as parent associations, teachers’ unions, NGOs, and think tanks—in shaping the discourse and policies around digital well-being and education. These stakeholders play a vital role in advocating for responsible technology use, offering grounded perspectives from everyday experience, and contributing to the development of inclusive, evidence-based frameworks that support healthy and equitable digital environments.

Parents		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federation of Catholic Family Association in Europe
Think Tanks	EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Germany conducts two annual studies: the JIM Study (since 1998) on media consumption by 12- to 19-year-olds, and the KIM Study on media's role in the daily lives of children aged 6 to 13. • EuroChild • Insafe & INHOPE • Dynamic Coalition on Children's Rights in the Digital Environment
	LAC	<p>There currently aren't any prominent parent-led think tanks in LAC solely focused on technology and family-related issues. However, several civil society organizations and NGOs actively engage on digital rights, tech policy, and community welfare—areas closely aligned with parental interests: ONG Derechos Digitales in Chile, Colnodo in Colombia, Faro Digital in Argentina.</p>
Educators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Schoolnet
NGOs	EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • euCONSENT: is designing a global network to enable reusable and interoperable online age assurance across various websites and apps. Central to this is the new, free AgeAware App, which will store anonymized tokens from approved age

		<p>assurance providers after users successfully complete a certified online age check.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Digital Rights (EDRi): wrote a joint statement on the dangers of age verification and responded to the DSA Article 28 call for evidence.
	LAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faro Digital is an Argentine NGO founded in 2015 that advances digital citizenship through education, communication, research, and public campaigns. It offers participatory workshops, media-literacy training for educators (e.g. Alfabetizad@s), and practical content on topics like digital well-being, online risks, and misinformation. A key partner of UNICEF and other institutions, it has led initiatives such as “Convivencia Digital” to empower adults and young people across LAC with tools for safe, reflective technology use.
Policymakers	EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age verification under the Digital Services Act (DSA): the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (Connect) hosted the first meeting of the Task Force on Age Verification under the Digital Services Act (DSA) in January 2024. With this Task Force, the Commission launched a proof-of-concept pilot on using the EU Digital Identity Wallet for age verification 18+ with six Member States so far. • The Better Internet for Kids strategy (BIK+), the digital arm of EU strategy on the Rights of the Child, is Europe's comprehensive approach to ensuring that children's rights are upheld online via “age-appropriate digital services, with no one left behind and with every child in Europe protected, empowered and respected online” (BIK+, 2022, p. 9). • BIK+ released a report titled Mapping age assurance typologies and requirements, which assesses ten main methods for age assurance and ten key requirements of age assurance tools: proportionality, privacy, security, accuracy, functionality, inclusivity, participation, transparency, notification mechanisms, and children's perspective. As part of this report, the European Commission and BIK released the

		<p>Toolkit Age Assurance: A guide for parents and children, and a self-assessment guide and questionnaire to help service providers reflect on their digital services and how they may intersect with the protection of children online as part of the <i>BIK+ strategy</i>. This self-assessment tool offers guidance, not a legal compliance mechanism, and should be applied context-specifically to individual digital services. Digital service providers are advised to supplement this tool with other assessments and their own legal reviews to ensure compliance with their obligations, including under the AVMSD, DSA, or GDPR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● The BIK Policy Monitor Report 2025 indicates that 20 European Union countries have implemented or are developing age verification policies. Many of these countries are also drafting national policies and legal frameworks, such as those for the EU Digital Identity Wallet for minors (present in 15 of 29 countries). While widely available in 19 of 29 countries, consumer codes of practice for commercial content are largely self-regulatory.● Selected examples of policy frameworks:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Greece: National Strategy for Protecting Minors from Internet Addiction (Dec, 2024): This plan includes a national parental controls platform and a "Kids Wallet" for national age verification.○ Spain's proposed Law on the Protection of Minors in Digital Environments mandates reliable age verification for minors to access restricted content/services. Key provisions include: Courts can issue digital restraining orders against online threats to minors; the minimum age for social media accounts would increase from 14 to 16; Devices used by children would have parental control tools by default; and health screenings for teenagers would be implemented to detect emotional disorders linked to excessive internet use. Moreover, the Spanish Data Protection Agency and Ministry of Digital Transformation are piloting an age verification system for adult content websites.○ France: the Presidential Commission on Screens and Children submitted its
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		<p>findings in April 2024. Their report highlighted the impact of "hyper-connectedness" on children's health, development, and future, recommending age-based screen limits and guiding adults toward best practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Ireland: Online Safety Code mandates providers to use age verification systems for content that could impair minors' development as well as effective complaint handling, parental controls, and content rating systems.○ Germany's Interstate Treaty on the Protection of Minors in the Media (JMStV) prohibits minors' access to adult content. The Federal Agency for Child and Youth Protection in the Media (BzKJ) ensures providers implement suitable measures, including age verification under the DSA. <ul style="list-style-type: none">● EU Digital Identity Wallet (EUDI): The European Commission is developing a unified, privacy-preserving, user-friendly, and interoperable EU age verification solution. This initiative aims to allow users across the EU to easily prove their age for access to legally restricted online content, such as pornography, gambling, and alcohol, starting with an 18+ age verification. The primary trend in digital identity systems for minors involves leveraging existing national infrastructures for age verification, aligning with the EUDI initiative. Selected examples:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Austria enables those over 14 to apply for ID Austria.○ Belgium's MyGov.be serves as a national digital identity wallet accessible to all citizens, including minors.○ Lithuania highlights national identity verification tools usable by teenagers with parental consent.○ Spain, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Poland, and Sweden are actively participating in discussions, pilot projects, or ongoing efforts related to the EU's EUDI Regulation, underscoring a collaborative move towards a harmonized European approach.
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	LAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Puerto Rico: Law that sets at 18 the minimum age for a person to create an account on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat. Key provisions: Minimum age: 18 years old to create accounts on social networks; platform accountability: platforms are required to verify the age of users and adopt stricter security measures; protection against harmful content. ● Colombia: <u>Bill</u> by the Democratic Center to prevent children under 14 from directly opening social media accounts. This bill mandates social media platforms implement age verification systems. Key Provisions: Parental Consent Required: Minors under 14 can only access social media with explicit consent from a legal guardian. Platforms must include warnings and access controls for this propose; platforms must delete accounts and personal information of users under 14 who do not meet the consent conditions; penalties for non-compliance Violating these regulations carries fines ranging from COP 6.5 billion to COP 65 billion (approximately US\$1.6 million to US\$16.6 million), enforced by the Superintendency of Industry and Commerce (SIC); "School for Parents" Initiative: The bill also proposes creating an "educational space" to train and guide parents and guardians on responsible digital platform use, though operational details are not yet specified.
Youth	EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth Consultation Formats: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bulgaria: Established a National Children's Council in 2024 to foster youth participation in decision-making. ○ Ireland: Coimisiún na Meán, the media regulator, formed a Youth Advisory Committee and plans more stakeholder advisory groups. ○ Luxembourg: BEE SECURE offers educational initiatives and uses formats like Bildungsdësch, youth panels, and the Youth Parliament for youth consultation. ○ Spain: The Expert Committee for Protection of Minors in Digital Environments has a youth participation working group, and the Spanish Youth Council

		<p>facilitates youth organization involvement in policy, including digital issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>BIK Youth Ambassadors</u>
	LAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth Consultation Formats: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ UNICEF’s “Our Rights in the Digital World” (2022) consultations in LAC countries used co-creation sessions to gather youth perspectives on AI, digital inclusion, and education technologies. ○ <i>Global Kids Online (LSE/UNICEF)</i> has supported youth surveys across Latin America, including Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, to gather large-scale data on children's digital practices and perceptions.
Private sector	Global	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● TikTok launched its first global Youth Council, made up of 15 teenagers from diverse countries, who have already met with senior leadership- including the CEO-to provide input on the Youth Portal redesign and the transparency of reporting and blocking processes
	EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meta, in collaboration with ThinkYoung, has launched "Our Feed Our Future," a youth advisory network comprising young people (and parents) from France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Denmark, and Italy to shape digital regulation and online safety across Europe.

5. OPPORTUNITIES FOR REGULATORY LEARNING & COOPERATION AMONG REGIONS

The widespread use of mobile phones and social media platforms among children and adolescents has sparked urgent debates worldwide about safety, mental health, data privacy, and digital rights. Governments and institutions are increasingly under pressure to regulate the digital environment for youth in a way that balances protection with empowerment. In this context, EU and LAC, despite their differing regulatory traditions and digital infrastructures, share common goals and face similar dilemmas offering fertile ground for mutual regulatory learning and cooperation.

Across both regions, policymakers, educators, and families are grappling with how to: restrict mobile phone use in schools to protect attention, learning, and well-being; regulate access to social media platforms, especially for children under 13 or 16; strengthen age verification systems that are effective and privacy-preserving; promote parental control tools that support –not replace– digital education.

In the EU, regulatory frameworks like the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) have introduced strong provisions on child safety, transparency, and platform accountability. Several EU countries are also moving toward stricter age verification systems, limitations on mobile phone use in schools and the role of parental controls.

In LAC, regulations are more fragmented, but there is growing political and social pressure to address digital risks. Countries like Brazil, Chile and Argentina are beginning to explore digital safety policies.

While national mobile phone bans and restrictions in schools have been widely adopted across EU and LAC, there remains a significant gap in evidence regarding the effectiveness of these measures. Furthermore, alternative approaches-such as integrating mobile phones into inclusive, community-based educational models-have not been

sufficiently explored or evaluated. This highlights the need for further research and innovation to ensure that policies not only address potential harms but also harness the educational potential of digital devices in diverse learning environments.

Youth participation in policy making

All these initiatives are focused on regulating youth online but it's not clear how youth has been engaged in these discussions. Youth participation in the policy-making process is essential because it ensures that the perspectives, needs, and lived experiences of young people are meaningfully integrated into decisions that directly affect their lives⁶⁷. Engaging youth as co-creators - rather than passive recipients - of policy leads to more relevant, effective, and equitable outcomes, as young people bring unique insights, creativity, and a deep understanding of emerging digital realities. Their involvement also fosters a sense of agency and belonging, helping to build long-term civic engagement and trust in institutions. Importantly, the process of including youth challenges traditional power dynamics, promotes intergenerational learning, and helps organizations and governments design policies that are more inclusive and responsive to diverse communities. Dialogues between LAC countries and the EU could be framed as to inform meaningful ways on how to engage youth in these discussions.

Alternatives for regional collaboration:

- **Create a EU-LAC Forum on Youth & Digital Regulation**, involving policymakers, researchers, educators, civil society, and young people.
- **Generate Pilot programs for assessing the impact of mobile phone restrictions in educational settings.** Drawing on evidence from EU bans, which have shown success in reducing distractions and fostering healthier

⁶ View: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4304922

⁷ View: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3844115

learning environments, LAC educators and policymakers can design context-specific pilots that account for regional digital divides and infrastructure challenges.

- **Pilot hybrid age verification models** that combine technical accuracy with cultural and infrastructural relevance;
- **Support policy co-design processes** with youth, families, and local communities in both regions;
- **Create a bi-regional observatory** to monitor platform compliance and evaluate age assurance tools across varied legal, social, and technological contexts;
- **Promote regulatory alignment and mutual learning** between EU frameworks (e.g., DSA, GDPR, eID Wallet) and emerging LAC legislation.

PROJECT INFORMATION

CALL: ERASMUS-JMO-2024-NETWORKS (Jean Monnet Policy Debate)	TOPIC: ERASMUS-JMO-2024-NETWORKS-H EI-NON-EU-LATIN-AMERICA
TYPE OF ACTION: ERASMUS-LS (ERASMUS Lump Sum Grants)	PROPOSAL NUMBER: 101176829
PROPOSAL ACRONYM: HEMISPHERES	TYPE OF MODEL GRANT AGREEMENT: ERASMUS Lump Sum Grant
REPORTING PERIOD: From 01.11.2024 to 31.11.2027	TYPE OF MODEL GRANT AGREEMENT: ERASMUS Lump Sum Grant
REPORT VERSION: 1.0	DATE OF PREPARATION: 26.08.2025
BENEFICIARY ORGANIZATION: Technical University of Munich (TUM), Germany	
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Urs Gasser	PROJECT COORDINATOR: Pablo Gómez Ayerbe
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