



Statement by the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights on the occasion of the European Parliament's voting on new EU measures to increase minors' safety online

Young people are growing in a digital world that is not always designed with their rights and safety in mind. Ahead of this week's vote, cities across the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights call on the European Parliament to adopt stronger, future-proof protections with young people's well-being at its core.

Across Europe, cities witness daily how the digital environment profoundly affects the safety, development, well-being, and rights of young people. The European Parliament will soon vote on additional measures to improve the online safety of minors. As the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights (CC4DR), a collaboration of more than 60 cities worldwide, we fully support these measures. We urge Members of the European Parliament to adopt stronger and more future-proof policies in the upcoming vote.

The digital environment is failing young people

Digital platforms, social media, messaging services, gaming environments, and AI-driven systems are often designed and optimised for engagement and profit, not for the safety and autonomy of minors. These design choices, combined with limited digital literacy and insufficient regulation, expose young people to a range of risks that no single city or Member State can address on its own.

Cities across Europe observe a consistent pattern of challenges faced by minors online, the most important ones being safety threats (online hate), erosion of public and inclusive values (undermining of public institutions by spreading of misinformation, disinformation and malinformation), financial exploitation (targeted advertising, online financial scams), health and well being issues (anxiety, depression, sleep disruption, negative body image, and screen-related physical complaints and medical misinformation).

Local action is not enough: EU-level system change is essential

Cities are investing heavily in digital literacy, prevention, awareness, youth participation, victim support, and norm-shifting. Across the Coalition, thousands of young people are engaged in co-creating safer spaces and articulating their own priorities. They consistently call for privacy, safety, transparency, ethical technology, and social and digital inclusion with accessibility for all people, as well as meaningful involvement in policymaking.

But local measures can only go so far when platforms operate across borders and profit from harmful engagement mechanisms. Structural transformation requires robust European regulation and enforcement.



The Cities Coalition for Digital Rights therefore calls on the European Parliament to:

1. Recognise cities as essential partners in EU digital governance

Cities witness emerging risks earlier than national or European institutions. They work directly with young people, schools, health professionals, and social services. The EU should formally involve cities in relevant expert groups such as the [Expert group on Safer Internet for Children](#). The EU should enhance cross-European cooperation, and support experimentation and public digital infrastructure and open technologies that reduce societal dependence on profit-driven platforms.

2. Enforce and strengthen the DSA and the AI Act

The Digital Services Act (including Article 28 on minors) and the AI Act provide essential safeguards. These frameworks should be rapidly enforced and actively supervised. We also urge the Parliament to ensure additional protection for minors by treating certain AI systems, such as chatbots used by children, as high-risk when appropriate, due to their potential impact on child development and rights.

3. Adopt a strong Digital Fairness Act that regulates harmful design practices

Safety-by-design should be the norm for all digital services used by minors. Platforms should carry the burden of proof to demonstrate that their design choices do not cause harm. The DFA should:

- ban manipulative and addictive features such as dark patterns, infinite scroll, and engagement-driven algorithms;
- prohibit targeted advertising, influencer marketing directed at minors, and gambling-like game mechanisms (including loot boxes);
- require transparency about algorithms and design choices;
- ensure that caregivers can switch specific functionalities on or off.

Regulation should focus on consequences, not only on specific design features that quickly evolve.

4. Strengthen accountability for platforms

Providers of digital services should be held responsible for the effects of their platforms on minors. Harmful content and dangerous design choices should be addressed promptly and effectively, with transparent oversight and real consequences for non-compliance. The cities support technologies following the foundational principles of CC4DR and the Open Source Principles of UN.

5. Make the internet safer, not restrict young people's access

The European Commission should pursue privacy-preserving age verification, but apply it with



caution and focus on making the digital environments themselves safer through strong enforcement of the DFA, DSA and AI Act.

The online world offers young people valuable opportunities to learn, connect and express themselves, but not all content is suitable for all ages. Existing age restrictions should be enforced, yet age verification cannot be seen as a standalone solution: it is easy to bypass and may give platforms an excuse to weaken content moderation, while overly broad restrictions risk limiting young people's development.

A shared responsibility

Cities recognize the importance of digital literacy, supporting families and educators, elevating youth voices and youth participation in the design of digital technologies. But we need the European Parliament to deliver the system-level change only the EU can provide.

We therefore call on the European Parliament to seize this moment and adopt, in line with the Jutland Declaration signed by over 20 EU member states, strong, minor-centred measures that protect minors' rights and ensure a safer, fairer, and healthier digital future for all young people in Europe.