

Pornography factsheet

Ofcom is already taking action to protect children from accessing pornography

Preventing children from encountering pornography online is a top priority for Ofcom. We are already taking action through the video-sharing platform (VSP) regime. Pornography will also be a core focus of our regulatory action under the Online Safety Bill (OSB), which will apply to a much broader set of platforms.

Ofcom is one of the first regulators in Europe to implement and deliver a fully operational VSP Regime. We published [guidance](#) for VSPs in October 2021 which makes clear that we expect providers to have a robust access control system that verifies age and prevents under-18s from accessing pornographic material. Our guidance does not recommend specific technological solutions for access control measures but outlines forms of age assurance that we would *not* consider appropriate for pornographic content, such as general disclaimers, self-declaration of age, or use of debit cards (which can be held by under-18s). This helps to ensure that the regime is **futureproof** and **innovation-friendly**. We also emphasise the importance of protecting user privacy, and ensuring that the age assurance in place cannot be circumvented.

In October 2022, we published [our report](#) on the first year of VSP regulation, which gives greater transparency on the measures these platforms have in place. In our work on adult VSPs, we paid particular attention to age-assurance for site users and content creators. OnlyFans, the largest of the adult VSPs, has responded to our regulation by adopting age assurance for all new UK subscribers, using third-party tools provided by Yoti and Ondato, which use face scanning technology to estimate age in a privacy-protecting way. We put smaller adult VSPs on notice that they needed to take further action to prevent under-18s encountering pornography on their sites. We also signalled to platforms that expect to be regulated under the Online Safety Bill, that they should begin preparing for this now.

In January 2023, Ofcom launched an enforcement programme to assess the level of compliance, drive improvements and take enforcement action against adult VSPs if necessary.

As part of our VSP work, our media literacy work, and in preparation for Online Safety, Ofcom has undertaken extensive research, including into the public's attitudes to age assurance technologies, covering children, parents and adults who use pornography sites. Given the importance of privacy in this area, some of this work has been joint with the ICO. [Our research](#) with ICO into families' attitudes to age assurance found that parents and children felt that age assurance was most appropriate for activities that are traditionally associated with age restrictions offline, including watching pornography.

The Online Safety Bill will allow Ofcom to tackle pornography across different services

Under the Online Safety Bill...

- Ofcom will make clear that **dedicated pornography sites** should use effective age assurance to protect children and ensure that they are not normally able to encounter pornographic content.
- **Social media sites** will have to ensure they have taken steps to prevent child users from encountering pornography on their services, for example through effective age assurance.

Under Part 5 of the Bill, dedicated pornography sites must ensure children are “not normally able” to access content on their services. Building on our work on VSPs and ongoing research programme, our Part 5 guidance will be very clear that effective age assurance should be used.

Through the child access and risk assessment process under Part 3 of the Bill, social media sites, other services that host user-generated content (e.g. gaming services and online marketplaces) and search services must assess whether children are able to encounter primary priority content, which the government has said will include pornography, on their services. Where services are likely to be accessed by children, they will then be required to take steps to prevent children encountering this content. Age assurance will be a key tool, and our codes of practice will set out how this can be used to protect children from harmful content on these sites.

As pornography is accessible across different types of sites, a one-size-fits all approach is not appropriate. Children are accessing pornography on social media, as well as dedicated pornography sites. Preventing all children from accessing social media sites entirely is neither desirable nor proportionate given the broader benefits of these platforms. Pornography is allowed on some social media sites and prohibited on others, so certain services will need to restrict access to certain content while others will need to identify and remove pornographic content if posted. A different approach may be needed for these sites compared to dedicated pornography sites, where age assurance can be applied at the point of access.

Twitter is the platform where the highest proportion of young people had seen pornography (41%). Dedicated pornography sites came next (37%), followed by **Instagram** (33%) and **Snapchat** (32%).¹

Once the Online Safety Bill is enacted, Ofcom will:

- produce guidance for Part 5 services (dedicated pornography sites) on appropriate measures to prevent children from accessing their content;
- produce our own risk assessment and risk profiles on the harms to children, including pornography;
- produce Child Access Assessment guidance and Child Risk Assessment guidance for services; and

¹ According to [research](#) carried out by the Children’s Commissioner.

- issue our protection of children codes, which will set out the measures we expect social media and search services to take to protect children.

Achieving lasting change in the pornography sector

If we are going to achieve lasting protection for children, proportionality must be at the heart of our approach to tackling pornography across different services. Ofcom will need to demonstrate that we have considered children’s rights to access age-appropriate experiences online, and adults’ freedoms to access pornographic content if they choose to do so. Effective, accurate, privacy-preserving age assurance solutions will be central to protecting the rights and freedoms of internet users under the Online Safety Bill.

Adult users must be willing to verify their age if the deployment of age assurance is to be successful in protecting children from accessing porn. Pornography services will resist measures that they fear will keep their users away, and those measures that are introduced may be circumvented.

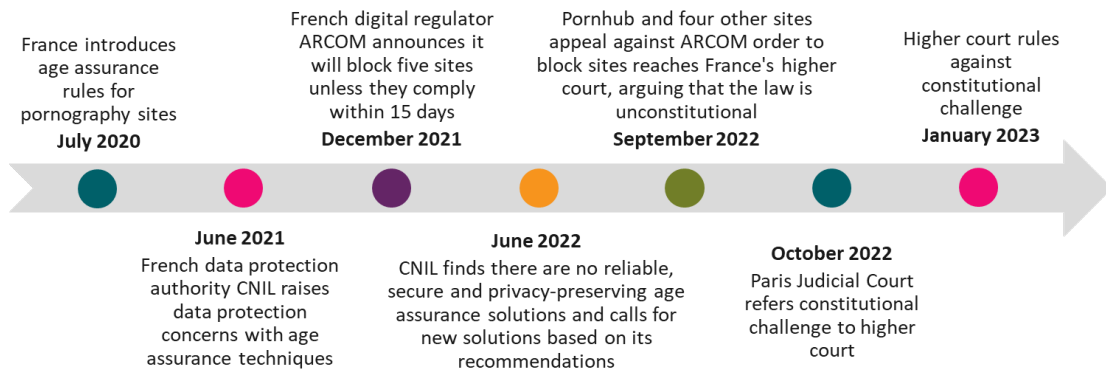
Our research has found that adults broadly support the idea of age assurance to prevent children from accessing pornography but many users view it as “an interruption and a hassle” and young men in particular are sceptical of its effectiveness and share methods for circumventing measures. Successful uptake of age assurance will therefore require privacy preserving technological solutions that add minimal friction to the user journey and offer transparency around the processing of personal data.

This type of regulation will be new for many online pornography services. We have seen that the industry is prepared to legally challenge or circumvent regulations that create new barriers for their users to access their content. The experience of other countries is that legal action by the industry delays the enforcement of the new rules. In France, despite introducing age assurance for pornography sites in 2020, enforcement action has been stalled because of legal challenges.² In Germany, a court-mandated blocking order against a pornography site that refused to deploy age assurance has been circumvented by the provider changing domain names.

Ofcom will ensure our process for setting our codes and guidance is robust and comprehensive. We need to allow sufficient time for proper consultation and evidence gathering because we are confident this will enable us to get effective, enforceable rules into place more quickly, with greater prospects of withstanding legal challenge.

² See France’s [higher court decision](#) to reject the constitutional challenge raised by dedicated pornography sites.

France & Age Assurance



Following these legal hurdles, the French government is now bringing forward proposals on the use of a digital certificate via a third-party application to verify age. In parallel, the French parliament is debating legislation that would require social media platforms to block access to minors under 15 unless they have parental consent