

Workshop ‘Age-appropriate design of online platforms: questions for EU law and children’s rights’

19 February 2027, Amsterdam

Call for papers

Governments and parents throughout Europe are demanding that minors are better protected when they go online. So far, much of the debate has concentrated on social media age limits. France has adopted statutory social media age restrictions. Similar efforts are being made in other European countries. There is also increasing political pressure on the EU to take action. In response to that, the European Commission established a panel of experts to advise on child safety online. After the co-chairs of the panel presented their [final report](#) in July 2026, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen expressed her [support](#) for ‘phased and gradual access for different age ranges’.

When it comes to protecting minors online, social media age limits are just one possible solution to a complex and broad problem. First, the problem is broader than social media, as online games and AI chatbots present similar risks to social media, including exposure to harmful content, manipulation, grooming, and problematic or addicted use. Second, social media age limits presume there is a single ‘right’ age to start using these services, whereas a children’s rights perspective requires [age-appropriate design of online services](#) that respects children’s evolving capacities. The final report of the co-chairs of the special panel acknowledges these issues. It speaks of ‘social media+’ instead of just social media and calls for ‘age-appropriate regulation’ of such services, which signals the policy debate may be moving beyond simple age limits.

Age-appropriate design of online services raises many questions on the intersection of children’s rights and EU law. For instance, what is the role of EU platform regulation and data protection law in ensuring age-appropriate design of social media, online games, and AI chatbots? Furthermore, how do different solutions to ensure age-appropriate design relate to children’s human rights? For example, if countries implement statutory age limits of 16 years for social media, then is the interference this poses with children’s right to freedom of expression justified in light of its aim? Another question is to what extent the EU has competence to legislate EU-wide design or access requirements for online services used by minors. At the same time, it can be asked how social media age limits and other solutions at the national-legal level relate to the Digital Services Act’s fully harmonised regime. It is also an open question which services should be addressed in protecting children online, and how the targeted services should be defined.

The fast developments around social media age limits and the protection of minors online necessitate critical reflection from different legal perspectives. It is crucial that the discussion does not narrow itself to statutory age limits as the only solution available to EU and national lawmakers, and that the interaction between children’s rights and EU law is sufficiently considered. Therefore, we are organising a workshop to bring together scholars working on the protection of minors online, from the perspective of either children’s rights or EU law. The goal of the workshop is to bring together these different perspectives and explore how children’s rights

should inform the implementation of existing EU laws (platform regulation, data protection, media regulation) and possible new legal solutions, including social media age limits.

Submissions

Are you interested in presenting your work during this workshop? Please submit an abstract of a maximum of 750 words to s.j.eskens@vu.nl with the subject line 'Workshop age-appropriate design of online platforms'. Please also include a short biography of up to 150 words in your submission.

We specifically welcome work in progress so that authors can benefit from the wide range of views we aim to bring together. We also encourage early-career scholars, including doctoral candidates, to submit an abstract.

The deadline for submitting abstracts is **16 October 2026**.

We aim to conclude the selection process mid-November.

Workshop format

Accepted contributors will each give a presentation of approximately 15 to 20 minutes, followed by discussion. This is a discussion-oriented workshop, and we ask participants to attend for the full day so that everyone can engage with each other's work.

Financial support

This workshop is funded by the Netherlands Network for Human Rights Research. There will be a limited amount of financial support available to cover accommodation and travel for those with limited institutional resources. Should you require funding to enable your participation to the workshop, please indicate this when submitting your abstract via email.

Date and location

The workshop takes place in person at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, which is located at De Boelelaan 1105, 1081 HV Amsterdam.

The date for the workshop is **Friday, 19 February 2027**.

Attending the workshop is free of charge.

Contact

For any questions about the workshop or the submission process, please contact Sarah Eskens at s.j.eskens@vu.nl.

Convenors

Sarah Eskens, Assistant Professor in Law and Technology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Simone van der Hof, Full Professor of Law and Digital Technology, Leiden University