



# The Digital Services Act (DSA) explained

Protecting children and  
young people online

## Why do we need the Digital Services Act?

Everyone has the right to connect to the internet, and the right to learn new digital skills so that they can use the internet safely and in the best way.

The internet is a place where you can read, learn, watch, listen, play or simply look at content that people share from all over the world. The EU wants to make sure that:

- everyone can have fun online, learn new things and get information while being safe and protected.
- new technologies and online platforms respect everyone's digital rights.
- small platforms and start-ups are encouraged to innovate and grow.

Special rules are needed for this, and these make up the Digital Services Act, or DSA for short.

This leaflet looks at the rules specifically made for the protection of people under the age of 18.

## What does the European Union (EU) do to protect children and young people online?

The DSA will make sure that all digital services you use, but especially "Very Large Online Platforms" (or "VLOPs") like Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube, among others, do everything they can to protect users' rights, keep you safe and stop the spread of illegal or inappropriate content.

## How are minors protected online?

### Appropriate content

Children and young people should always feel safe, secure and protected online from content or contacts that could bother, upset or scare them, or make them feel angry, sad, worried or bullied online.

Under the DSA, the content they see online, on websites and social media, should match their age, as well as their interests. It is important that the platforms quickly spot and act on any content that could hurt people's rights and dignity, privacy and freedom of expression.

The DSA wants online platforms to:

- **make sure that they respect the privacy, safety and security of young users.**
- **consider the impact of their services on important things like fair elections, public safety, the mental and physical well-being of users, and all forms of gender-based violence.**

# Personal data and privacy 🔍

Everyone has a right to privacy, and to keep their personal information safe.

This also applies online, meaning that firms shouldn't ask you to share more personal details with them or other users, and the data you do share must be protected. It cannot be manipulated or shared, and people cannot spy on you.

The DSA states that:

- if an online platform doesn't know if someone is a child or not, it shouldn't ask for more personal information just to find out.
- online platforms used by children should have special privacy and security settings by default.

The DSA wants platforms to look at other providers for positive examples and best practices on how to keep their young users safe.

## **Think about it...**

**How much personal data are you asked for online? Is it always necessary?**

# Advertisements



Targeted advertisements (ads) use information about users (including kids) that is available online or information on websites they visit, to show specific ads of products of their interest. The platforms use algorithms and artificial intelligence to decide what to show.

- Under the DSA, if platforms know for sure that a user is a minor, they cannot use their personal data to show them ads suggesting products that they might already want to buy/showed interest in.

- The DSA wants online platforms to make the information about their ads available to all, so that experts can investigate potential risks, such as disinformation or illegal ads. This information includes who is the target of the ad and how the ads are presented, especially when they are presented to minors.

## Think about it...

How often do you see targeted ads on social media or websites? Do you compare the ads you see with those your friends see?

## Child-friendly instructions

Terms and conditions of websites and platforms must be written in a way that's easy to understand for everyone, including children and young people. Any other instruction or complex piece of text should have an explanation to go with it.

- Platforms should make an extra effort to explain things clearly so that young users can easily know what they're agreeing to, or what conditions they are accepting.

- Whenever a website or platform makes changes to their internal rules, it must be communicated clearly and in a way that is easy for everyone to understand.

# Online risks



Users – and children and young people in particular – should always feel safe from dangers and online risks such as harassment, viruses, false information, or people pretending to be someone else.

The DSA states that platforms need to identify and tackle potential online risks to children and young people using their services. They also must put measures in place to prevent this. Some examples of these measures are:

## **Parental controls**

- Settings of online platforms or websites that help parents and carers monitor or limit access of their children to the internet, to protect them from online risks and inappropriate content.

## **Age verification**

- A system to check the age of users, normally based on hard (physical) identifiers and/or verified forms of identification. Some online content, websites or services are not appropriate for younger age groups.

## **Age assurance**

- The range of methods to estimate the age of a user. This information can be used to customise the personal online experience of each user.

## What happens next?

The Digital Service Act came into force – meaning it started being used – on 16 November 2022.

In April 2023, the European Commission announced which platforms – with more than 45 million users in the EU – are considered “Very Large Online Platforms” (VLOP) or “Very Large Online Search Engines” (VLOSE). These include websites such as Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, Google Maps and many others.

As of September 2023, these very large platforms and search engines will have to make sure they follow all the rules in the DSA.

From February 2024, all online services, big and small, must follow the DSA rules.

The EU and Member States will check that these rules are followed, and can fine companies who break the rules.

## Where can you get help?

If you need help or information on any online issues, please contact the Safer Internet Centre in your country. These centres provide helpline services specifically for children and young people, available by phone, email, or online chat – and they are free!





## Full text of the DSA

The full text of the Digital Service Act is available in all official languages on the EUR-Lex website: [REGULATION \(EU\) 2022/2065 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC \(Digital Services Act\)](#).

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Better Internet for Kids

