



Brussels Info Flash

17 July 2026

H/ADVISORS' ANALYSIS

EU prepares tougher rules to protect children online as pressure grows on digital platforms

Brussels is moving towards stronger safeguards for minors, with Parliament calling for stricter enforcement and the Commission preparing a proposal after the summer.

The debate on **child safety online** is gaining momentum in Brussels, with both the **European Parliament** and the **European Commission** pushing for stronger safeguards for minors. In a report adopted by Parliament's **Committee on Culture and Education**, MEPs called for better enforcement of EU rules, stronger **platform accountability**, algorithmic transparency, privacy-by-design and safety-by-default. Commission President **Ursula von der Leyen** reinforced the message after receiving the recommendations of the Special Panel on Child Safety Online, warning that social media is “not a toy” and that platforms must prove their services do no harm.

Parliament's report calls for a ban on the most harmful **addictive design features**, stronger safeguards for recommender systems and the creation of a “**youth mode**” that would disable targeted advertising and limit manipulative features for minors. It also urges action on the growing influence of **influencers**, as well as practices such as kidfluencing and sharenting, while proposing ethical standards for **AI companions** and stronger safeguards against AI-generated harmful content. The focus is on shifting responsibility away from children and parents alone and placing a clearer duty of care on the companies that design and manage digital platforms.

The Commission is now considering more concrete age-related measures, including a privacy-preserving **age verification app** and a possible **social media start date** to define when children should be allowed to access certain platforms. Von der Leyen said the Commission will review the Special Panel's recommendations and present a proposal **after the summer**, while Parliament is expected to vote on its own-initiative report during the **14–17 September plenary session**. Together, the initiatives point to a stronger EU push to enforce the **Digital Services Act** and build a safer online environment for children.

MAIN ISSUES IN THE EU

THE COUNCIL

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- **Informal Justice and Home Affairs meeting.**

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- **Informal Justice and Home Affairs meeting.** Justice and home affairs ministers met informally in Dublin to discuss migration, asylum, returns, internal security and organised crime, with sessions on visa policy, data retention and the voice of the child in private family law.
- **EU-Andorra-San Marino agreement.** The Council authorised the signature and provisional application of the EU association agreement with Andorra and San Marino, allowing closer participation in the EU internal market and stronger cooperation in areas such as research, education, environment and regional policy.

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- **MFF migration and security funding.** The Council agreed its partial position on 2028-2034 funding for migration, borders, visas and internal security, supporting the Migration and Asylum Pact, Schengen, returns and action against organised crime, terrorism and cyber threats.
- **Temporary protection for Ukrainians.** EU countries agreed to extend temporary protection for people fleeing Ukraine until 4 March 2028, while linking new applications to compliance with military obligations in Ukraine.
- **Defence innovation.** The Council and Parliament reached a provisional agreement on AGILE, a €115 million programme to support SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups developing disruptive defence technologies.

- **EU budget 2027.** The Council agreed its position on the 2027 EU draft budget, setting €191.88 billion in commitments and €202.07 billion in payments, while backing 2026 budget changes on cohesion funding and fertiliser support for farmers.

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- **Third Accession Conference with Moldova.** The EU and Moldova opened negotiations on the external relations cluster, covering alignment with EU trade, foreign, security and defence policies.
- **28th Accession Conference with Montenegro.** The EU and Montenegro provisionally closed accession talks on competition policy and customs union, bringing Montenegro to 18 provisionally closed chapters.
- **9th Accession Conference with Albania.** The EU and Albania provisionally closed Albania's first negotiating chapters, covering science and research, education and culture, and external relations.
- **General Affairs Council.** Ministers discussed the Irish Presidency's priorities on competitiveness, values and security, including the single market, simplification, the next MFF, enlargement and the rule of law.
- **Third Accession Conference with Ukraine.** The EU and Ukraine opened negotiations on the external relations cluster, covering alignment with EU trade, foreign, security and defence policies.
- **EU-Mexico trade agreement.** The Council gave final approval to the EU-Mexico Interim Trade Agreement, modernising trade relations through improved market access, lower tariffs, stronger protection for geographical indications and wider opportunities in services, investment and public procurement.

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- **Agriculture and Fisheries Council.** Ministers discussed the Commission's Livestock Strategy and Protein Action Plan, focusing on competitiveness,

resilience, food security and reduced dependence on imported feed proteins.

- **Foreign Affairs Council.** Foreign affairs ministers discussed Ukraine, including air defence and energy needs ahead of winter, continued pressure on Russia, the EU's Black Sea strategy and the situation in the Middle East.
- **Russian cyber and hybrid threats.** The EU condemned Russian cyber activities targeting Member States and partners, while the Council sanctioned nine individuals and four entities involved in cyber and hybrid destabilisation.
- **Air passenger rights.** The Council gave its final green light to updated EU air passenger rights rules, strengthening protection on compensation, assistance, rerouting, fare transparency and passengers with specific needs.
- **Fertiliser costs.** The Council adopted targeted measures to support farmers facing higher fertiliser and input costs, including a rural development liquidity scheme, earlier direct payments and flexibility on 2027 allocations.
- **EU-Armenia partnership mission.** The Council launched the EU Partnership Mission in Armenia to strengthen resilience against hybrid threats, including cyberattacks, foreign interference and illicit financial flows.
- **European Peace Facility.** The Council adopted assistance measures worth €120 million for Moldova's air defence and €15 million for the Philippines' maritime domain awareness.
- **Ukraine and human rights sanctions.** The EU and Ukraine condemned Russia's abuses against Ukrainian civilians and detainees, while the Council sanctioned actors responsible for serious human rights violations and repression.

THE COMMISSION

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- **Energy and ETS package.** The Commission presented an Electrification Action Plan and ETS review to boost competitiveness, decarbonisation and energy independence, with measures on electricity costs, clean technologies and industrial investment.
- **Circular economy.** New EU rules banning the destruction of unsold clothes and shoes by large companies entered into application, aiming to reduce textile waste and support reuse and recycling.
- **Industrial decarbonisation.** The Commission published State aid guidance on carbon contracts for difference to help Member States support industrial decarbonisation projects.
- **EU-Ukraine drone cooperation.** The Commission and Ukraine launched a Drone Deal and the EU-Ukraine Drone Alliance to accelerate joint development and production of drone and counter-drone technologies, backed by a further €1 billion in EU support for drones.
- **Rule of Law Report.** The Commission published its 2026 Rule of Law Report, assessing all Member States and four candidate countries, with findings on justice systems, anti-corruption, media freedom, checks and balances, and the rule of law's impact on the Single Market.

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- **Digital Services Act.** The Commission accepted X's action plan on DSA compliance, covering advertising transparency, researchers' access to data and improvements to its advertising repository.
- **Defence innovation.** The Commission welcomed the agreement on AGILE, a €115 million programme to support SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups developing disruptive defence technologies.

- **Migration and asylum pact.** The Commission presented its first assessment of transfers under the new asylum responsibility rules, noting initial progress in Member States' implementation.
- **Trade with developing countries.** The Commission and the High Representative published a report on the Generalised Scheme of Preferences, highlighting nearly €60 billion of imports under GSP preferences in 2024.
- **Displaced workers.** The Commission proposed €6.5 million from the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund to support 1,928 dismissed workers in Belgium and Spain.
- **Irish State aid.** The Commission approved a €300 million Irish scheme to provide temporary electricity price relief for energy-intensive companies, linked to decarbonisation investments.
- **Greek State aid.** The Commission approved a €41 million Greek scheme to support agricultural companies facing higher fertiliser prices.
- **Insurance acquisition.** The Commission approved Eurobank's acquisition of sole control of Eurolife under the simplified merger review procedure.

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- **Skills Guarantee.** The Commission launched six pilot projects worth €14.5 million to support almost 1,000 automotive workers at risk of unemployment.
- **EU-India strategic partnership.** The EU and India held the third Trade and Technology Council, deepening cooperation on strategic technologies, clean tech, resilient value chains and Horizon Europe.
- **French telecoms merger.** The Commission referred Iliad's proposed acquisition of certain SFR assets to the French competition authority.

- **Energy contracting joint venture.** The Commission approved the creation of a joint venture by EGC and Ten Brinke in Germany's energy contracting sector.

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- **Batteries Regulation.** The Commission adopted exemptions to battery removability rules for six product categories where consumer replacement may pose safety or technical risks.
- **Agri-food promotion.** The Commission simplified EU agri-food promotion rules, easing administrative, financial and reporting requirements for beneficiaries.
- **Semiconductors.** The Commission approved €659 million in German State aid for four first-of-a-kind semiconductor facilities.
- **Spanish State aid.** The Commission approved a €65 million increase to Spanish State aid schemes supporting agricultural and fishery companies facing higher fuel prices.
- **EU-UK Gibraltar agreement.** The Commission and the UK signed the EU-UK Agreement on Gibraltar, completing the post-Brexit legal framework for this area and safeguarding Schengen, the Single Market and the Customs Union.

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- **EU Deforestation Regulation.** The Commission adopted measures to support implementation of the EU Deforestation Regulation and provide greater legal certainty for businesses and Member States.
- **EU-Bahrain relations.** The EU and Bahrain launched negotiations on a Strategic Partnership Agreement covering security, trade, resilience, innovation and regional cooperation.

- **French offshore wind.** The Commission approved a €63 billion French State aid scheme for eleven offshore wind farms.
- **Hungarian development bank.** The Commission approved a €2 billion Hungarian capital injection into Magyar Fejlesztési Bank to support SME competitiveness, green and digital transition and regional development.

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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- **Housing exclusion.** The Employment Committee discussed the proposal for a Council Recommendation on fighting housing exclusion.
- **European Democracy Shield.** The Special Committee on the European Democracy Shield exchanged views with Commissioner Marta Kos on candidate countries.
- **Just Transition Fund.** The Regional Development Committee held a hearing on regions in transition and the future of the Just Transition Fund.

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- **Ukraine healthcare and food security.** The Development Committee debated global food security and the humanitarian impact of attacks on Ukraine's healthcare system.
- **EU fisheries funding.** The Fisheries Committee considered its opinion on the proposed 2028-2034 fund covering cohesion, agriculture, fisheries, maritime policy, prosperity and security.
- **Corporate law.** The Legal Affairs Committee discussed the proposed 28th regime corporate framework and exchanged views on revised sustainability reporting standards.
- **Geographical indications.** The Legal Affairs Committee adopted its position and voted to enter negotiations on Lisbon Agreement rules on appellations of origin and geographical indications.
- **Hybrid warfare.** The Security and Defence Committee adopted its report on hybrid warfare and the protection of EU territorial integrity and critical infrastructure.
- **Economic governance.** The Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee adopted the economic governance simplification package and reports on

real estate statistics, EU-UK competition cooperation and the global role of the euro.

- **Anti-money laundering.** The Civil Liberties and Economic Affairs committees held a hearing with AMLA Chair Bruna Szego on the Authority's 2025 annual report.
- **Youth Guarantee.** The Employment Committee considered a report on implementing the Youth Guarantee and supporting young people's access to jobs, education, apprenticeships and traineeships.

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- **EU trade relations.** The International Trade Committee debated EU-China trade and investment relations, as well as the state of play of EU-US trade relations.
- **Organic products.** The Agriculture Committee adopted its report on EU rules for organic production, labelling, certification and trade with third countries.
- **Plant reproductive material.** The Agriculture Committee adopted its report on the production and marketing of plant reproductive material in the EU.
- **Social media and young people.** The Culture and Education Committee adopted proposals to mitigate the impact of social media and the online environment on young people.
- **Consular protection and internal security.** The Civil Liberties Committee adopted its recommendation on the EU-Switzerland PNR agreement, while considering consular protection and the EU Anti-Corruption Strategy.
- **Artificial intelligence.** The Internal Market Committee questioned Anthropic on AI safety, cybersecurity risks and the application of the AI Act and EU digital rules.

- **Chemical products simplification.** The Internal Market and Environment committees adopted the Omnibus VI provisional agreement on simplifying rules for chemical products.
- **Single Market programme.** The Internal Market Committee adopted its draft report on the Single Market and Customs Programme for 2028-2034.
- **Security and defence.** The Security and Defence Committee discussed the Irish Presidency's priorities with Ireland's Minister of Defence Helen McEntee.

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- **Child sexual abuse online.** The Civil Liberties Committee discussed the latest trilogue feedback on rules to prevent and combat child sexual abuse online.
- **Fertiliser prices.** The Agriculture Committee held a hearing on the EU fertilisers strategy and rising agricultural raw material prices.
- **Digital Omnibus.** The Industry and Civil Liberties committees discussed the draft report on simplifying the EU digital legislative framework.



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