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BAN ON SOCIAL MEDIA ACCESS FOR UNDER 16s: PROCEED WITH CAUTION

OBSERVACOM urges Latin American and Caribbean countries to **proceed with caution when considering measures to restrict under 16's access to social media**, such as those being implemented in Australia and some European countries.

Age-based access restrictions **are not a "magic solution"**. On their **own they are neither sufficient nor appropriate** to address the rights infringements that particularly affect children and adolescents on social media platforms.

Among other reasons, banning access **does nothing to change the business model of large technology companies**, which relies on the extraction and monetisation of data to fuel recommendation and advertising algorithms and that is at the root of the problem.

Moreover, **such measures risk producing counterproductive effects on children's own rights**. The age recognition and verification mechanisms required for enforcement, given current technological options, pose significant risks to the privacy of all users, including children themselves.



Social media platforms already systematically monitor users, and paradoxically, these measures may

further strengthen and legitimise that role.

The ban is **both risky and inadequate: it does nothing to address the business model of large technology companies**, which is the core of the

OBSERVACOM considers that **this is not the right moment to move forward with such measures in the region**. However, we strongly recommend **taking advantage of the policy momentum to promote more effective ways of protecting children online**, within a democratic and comprehensive regulatory framework grounded in international standards. These include:

- Prohibiting **advertising, commercial targeting, or marketing strategies** based on the automated or semi-automated processing of personal data.
- Establishing **algorithmic transparency obligations** regarding how moderation and recommendation systems operate and enabling users to meaningfully **adjust or limit these preferences**.
- Mandating the **assessment, prevention, and mitigation of systemic risks and harmful effects** on children and adolescents.
- Establishing **safety and well-being obligations** in the design of social media products and services for children and adolescents (such as limiting infinite scroll or unlimited interaction features).
- **Embedding data protection** by design to prevent manipulative patterns and prioritise user well-being.
- Providing accessible and easy-to-use **parental control mechanisms**.
- Implementing effective **complaint systems** to report inappropriate content or interactions.
- Including **digital literacy** programs and public awareness campaigns in official education curricula for children, as well as initiatives for adults, caregivers, and educators.
- Creating democratic oversight bodies with adequate resources and authority to **oversee and enforce compliance with these obligations**.