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Cabinet to see age verifying app next month

Harris: Ireland should follow suit with UK under-16 social media ban

Tadhg McNally and Imasha Costa

An age-verification app is set to be brought to Cabinet next month as the Government ramps up preparations to ban social media for under-16s.

Tánaiste Simon Harris has said Ireland should follow suit with Britain, which has announced plans to bar under-16s from accessing social media platforms.

Mr Harris confirmed culture minister Patrick O'Donovan would bring the plans to Cabinet in July, with one aspect being the Government's age-verification mechanism.

While the plans are in train, some experts have warned that young people will take action to circumvent any restriction on their social media use.

The Government previously signalled the system would introduce age-verification requirements for certain websites, with it being checked against an individual's personal public service (PPS) number.

It is being developed as part of the Government's digital wallet plan, which will allow people to access documents such as birth certificates or driving licences.

The wallet is being introduced as the Government is now legally obliged to introduce one by the end of the year due to EU regulations.

It is understood there may be a need for legislation to restrict social media access for under-16s once the verification tool is rolled out.

Mr Harris said British prime minister Keir Starmer had shown "real leadership" on banning social media for young people.

"I think the social experimentation on the minds of our young people is real. It's worrying. I think it's potentially the mental health and wellbeing challenge of our time."

He said it was the Government's preference to act at an EU level, saying he hoped progress could be made during Ireland's EU Council presidency beginning next month.

"The most impactful thing we can see is the EU moving quickly but, if it doesn't, Ireland has the right under its own domestic legislation to act," he added.

Taoiseach Micheál Martin, meanwhile, said he had spoken with Ireland's EU

commissioner Michael McGrath, who said there were active efforts under way by the European Commission to protect young people from the harms of social media.

Mr Martin said this was "potentially" moving in the direction taken in Britain.

"There's a growing groundswell of national governments that we have to do more to protect young people. The precise mechanisms of a ban on social media for under-16s is to be worked out."

Mr Martin said it was like other areas where the Government has intervened to protect people, citing interventions on restricting alcohol and tobacco.

"Social media is the public health issue of our time, and governments have to act," Mr Martin said.

However, some experts cautioned that any attempt to restrict children and young adults from accessing social media will see them seek ways around it.

Senior lecturer of business information systems at UCC Stephen McCarthy said there "will always be workarounds, unfortunately", and believes this will be the main challenge.

"It is very hard to control, and maybe social media companies will then put the responsibility back on parents," he added.

"A lot of young teenagers would feel like if they are not on social media and their friends are, then they are completely out of the loop, so that peer pressure will be a big factor too."

Associate professor in clinical psychology at the University of Limerick Ruth Melia agreed an outright ban would not work, and that this has been visible in Australia after it was introduced.

"The Australian experiment hasn't worked, and very, very quickly, young people were able to get past the age verification processes and/or were driven into less safe or less regulated online spaces. A ban for under-16-year-olds means there is no onus on that social media platform to ensure that their content is safe and suitable for those people," she said.

Meanwhile, CyberSafe-Kids Ireland said measures proposed by Mr Starmer were still "not enough to adequately protect children".



PURPLE REIGN: Teagan O'Leary picks lavender during a day out at Joe's Farm near the village of Killeagh in East Cork.

Picture: Noel Sweeney

Two pensioners alone in home on hitman's list

Jimmy Woulfe

The only people in a house in Limerick that was to be targeted by an international hitman were two elderly pensioners.

Members of the family who normally live there were not at the house that evening, so the pensioners were on their own.

The body of the suspected international hitman who died in a road crash while being driven on a murder mission in Limerick last Monday was handed over to undertakers yesterday after an autopsy at University Hospital Limerick.

Limerick coroner John McNamara will convene an inquest at a later date.

The dead man, Axel Liebsch Morales, aged 33, was armed and wearing a balaclava when his accomplice drove into two other cars on the Newcastle West/Abbeyfeale N21 road.

The gunman died at the scene.

Both men carried Swedish passports, and the gunman originally came from South America.

A phone sat nav recovered from the scene of the collision showed they were en route to Rathkeale, where the intended target lived.

The driver fled the scene. Gardai suspect he has been helped evade arrest by the group who commissioned the gun attack.

Meanwhile, the feud which has raged in Rathkeale has escalated to the town's transient Traveller population with a vicious knife attack on a girl attending a wedding abroad.

She received major face injuries.

A local source who works closely with Travellers in Rathkeale said the feud, which erupted after a violent incident in the past three years and for which a man is currently serving a jail

sentence, has gone to a level not witnessed previously.

"There is a lot of talk of revenge, and this is an indication of the scale of the vendetta," the local source said. "Now, it has spread to the transient Rathkeale Travellers."

"These families move around working in various parts of Europe, and come back every December and January when the population doubles to about 4,000."

"Up to now, this vendetta has seen repeated fire bomb attacks on the homes of the family and relatives of the man serving a jail sentence. "In one attack, shots were

fired at a caravan where a young child was sleeping.

"Members of the family waging the attacks have said nobody is safe, and that includes women and children, and they have also said they will go after the other family no matter where they are."

"Most of the family being targeted are away working in Europe," the source added.

As the search continues for the driver involved in last Monday night's collision, gardai are convinced he made contact with those who hired the hitman as he was able to leave the wider area within a short period.

'I got hurt because I intervened,' court told

Eoin Reynolds

A childcare worker acted with "extreme courage" when she grappled with Riad Bouchaker after he produced a large and "horrifying" knife and began "ferociously jabbing" a group of children, the Central Criminal Court has heard.

Mr Bouchaker is charged with attempting to murder three children, assault causing harm to Leanne Flynn, and with the assault of two other children and one adult. He denies all charges.

Ms Flynn told Karl Finnegan, prosecuting, that she had lined the children up in pairs on Dublin's Parnell Square East at about 1.30pm on November 23, 2023, as she prepared to take them to a nearby after-school creche.

She said her attention was drawn to a man at a bus stop when a bus pulled away without him boarding, and that he appeared to be searching in his bag.

She said she saw the man walking towards the children. As he got closer, he adopted a "crouched motion" and began moving hurriedly, she said. Ms Flynn noticed a knife, but couldn't say where it had come from, and saw the man "ferociously jabbing" multiple times at the children.

"I let out a shout and asked what he was doing and told him to get away from the children and I ran at him and grabbed him from behind."

She described a tussle in which Mr Bouchaker stabbed her in the back.

During cross-examination, Ms Flynn agreed the accused didn't seem to be trying to stab her.

"The children seemed to be his main focus. I got hurt because I intervened, but he seemed hell bent on getting the children."

Mr Bouchaker's trial also heard from Cíao Benicio, a Deliveroo driver who struck the accused on the head with his motorbike helmet.

News: 5

€1.3bn spent on 'temporary fixes' for school shortages

Jess Casey
Education Correspondent

The Department of Education is facing calls to explain its bill for accommodation as it emerged €1.3bn has been spent on rented lands, buildings, and modular accommodation for schools since 2020.

Temporary accommodation, such as prefabs, are often used by schools waiting under the school building programme. It is also used when additional capacity needs to be created quickly, including when children need access to a school place.

Between 2020 and 2025, the department spent €222m on renting lands and accommodation for schools, including rented buildings and rented modular accommodation.

From 2021 to 2025, the expenditure on its modular programme, which includes the installation of modular units and all associated site works and fees, amounted to €1.14bn.

In 2021, €73m was spent on the programme. This spend had more than quadrupled by 2024, growing to €299m. A further €288m was incurred in 2025.

The average cost for a modular unit for a primary school classroom is now €367,000, excluding Vat, according to the department, with the cost of associated site works varying depending on site conditions.

Since 2021, it has completed 595 purchased modular projects. A further 198 projects are at an advanced stage of delivery and construction.

The details were provided



Labour's Eoghan Kenny said the public deserved an explanation.

in an update to the Dáil's Public Accounts Committee (PAC), which had requested a breakdown on the department's spend on rented and prefab accommodation.

Earlier this year, the Government agreed to provide additional funding of €646m to the Department of Education to address shortfalls, which will be paid for by levying other departments.

Labour's education spokesman Eoghan Kenny said that modular accommodation and temporary arrangements have an important role to play in responding to urgent demand.

"However, temporary measures were never intended to become a long-term substitute for proper planning and investment," he said.

Mr Kenny, who is also a member of the PAC, said that taxpayers are entitled to ask "how we have reached a point where more than €1.3bn has been spent on temporary school accommodation solutions, while communities continue to wait for permanent educational infrastructure".

"No one disputes the need to accommodate children

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World
G7 leaders arrived at a French lakeside resort with relief after the US reached a preliminary deal to end the Iran war, tempered by unease over fresh tariff threats. **Page 7**

Business
The value of exports from Enterprise Ireland client companies rose by 8% during last year, with the strong growth recorded in Europe, Britain, and Nordic countries. **Page 14**