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UAE's Under-15 Social Media Ban and the Global Wave of Minor- Protection Laws

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WHY IN NEWS

On June 18, 2026, the UAE Cabinet, chaired by Vice-President and Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, approved a decision barring children under 15 from creating or operating personal social-media accounts. The UAE thereby became the first Arab nation to legislate such a ban, joining a fast-growing global movement to wall off minors from open social platforms.

WHAT THE UAE DECISION DOES

The UAE measure is notable for both its reach and its enforcement design.

ELEMENT	DETAIL
Who is barred	Children under 15 from creating or operating personal social-media accounts
Transition period	12 months for platforms and families to comply
Coverage	Applies to residents and tourists alike
Ages 15 to 16	Permitted only under strict safeguards
Age verification	Mandatory AI and biometric verification; self-declaration explicitly rejected
First in region	First Arab nation to adopt such a ban

The rejection of self-declared age is the decision's sharpest feature. Most platforms today rely on a user simply ticking a date-of-birth box, which children routinely bypass. By mandating AI-driven and biometric verification, the UAE is forcing the cost and responsibility of age-assurance onto the platforms.

THE GLOBAL WAVE

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The UAE move sits within a broader regulatory turn against unrestricted minor access.

JURISDICTION	MEASURE
Australia	Ban on social-media accounts for under-16s, with platform-side age assurance
European Union	Digital Services Act obligations on protection of minors; several states debating age thresholds
UAE	Under-15 ban (June 2026), AI/biometric verification
India	DPDP Act, 2023 requires verifiable parental consent before processing data of under-18s

Australia’s under-16 ban, in particular, set the template that the UAE has now adapted. The common thread is a shift from self-regulation to enforceable, state-mandated age thresholds backed by technical verification.

INDIA’S POSITION: THE DPDP ACT, 2023

India has chosen a consent-based rather than an outright-ban model. The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 classifies anyone under 18 as a “child” and requires Data Fiduciaries to obtain verifiable consent from a parent or lawful guardian before processing a child’s personal data. It also prohibits tracking, behavioural monitoring and targeted advertising directed at children.

This is a higher age threshold (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/threshold/>) (18) than the UAE (15) or Australia (16), but a lighter intervention: India regulates data processing rather than barring account creation outright.

ANALYSIS: PROTECTION VERSUS ACCESS

The debate turns on competing values. Proponents cite mounting evidence linking heavy adolescent social-media use to anxiety, sleep disruption, cyberbullying and exposure to harmful content. Critics raise three concerns:

- 1 Digital exclusion:** Blanket bans can cut adolescents off from educational, civic and support communities online.
- 2 Privacy paradox** (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/paradox/>): Biometric age-verification, intended to protect children, itself collects highly sensitive data and creates new surveillance risk.
- 3 Enforceability:** Determined minors migrate to VPNs and unregulated platforms, so bans may shift rather than solve the problem.

The UAE’s 12-month transition and tiered approach (full ban under 15, supervised access 15 to 16) is an attempt to balance these.

WAY FORWARD

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- **Privacy-preserving age assurance:** Adopt verification methods that confirm age without retaining raw biometric data.
- **Digital-literacy ecosystems:** Pair restrictions with media-literacy curricula so that access, when granted, is responsible.
- **Calibrated** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/calibrated/>) **Indian path:** India can strengthen DPDP child-protection rules and enforcement rather than import an outright ban, preserving access while raising the duty of care on platforms.

UPSC RELEVANCE

Prelims: UAE Cabinet and Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum; DPDP Act, 2023 child-consent provisions; Australia's under-16 ban.

Mains (GS2): "Should India follow the global trend of age-based social-media bans for minors, or is its consent-based DPDP model better suited?" Discuss with reference to child rights, digital inclusion and data privacy.

FACTS CORNER

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UAE ban: Under-15s barred from social media (June 18, 2026); first Arab nation; 12-month transition; AI and biometric age verification.

Australia: Pioneered the under-16 social-media ban.

DPDP Act, 2023 (India): "Child" = under 18; requires verifiable parental consent; bars tracking and targeted ads at children.

UAE PM: Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE.

Sources: *The Hindu* (<https://www.thehindu.com>), *LiveMint* (<https://www.livemint.com>)

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