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France Bans Social Media for Under-15s: Lessons for India

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France Bans Social Media for Under-15s: Lessons for India

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*On , the **French Parliament** passed a law making **France the first European Union country to ban social media for children under 15**. New accounts are to be blocked from around **September 1, 2026**, and existing under-15 accounts from **January 2027**. The law also restricts the use of mobile phones in high schools.*

WHAT FRANCE HAS DONE

The French measure creates a legal **age floor of 15** for holding a social media account. Platforms will be expected to verify users' ages and prevent under-15s from signing up. The rollout is phased: a block on **new accounts from about September 1, 2026**, followed by the removal of **existing under-15 accounts from January 2027**. Bundled with the ban is a tightening of the existing restriction on **mobile phones in schools**, extending curbs to high schools.

France is not acting alone. **Australia was the first country globally** to legislate a hard age limit, passing a law in **late 2025** barring under-16s from social media. Together the two moves signal a growing willingness among democracies to regulate children's access to online platforms.

COUNTRY	AGE LIMIT	STATUS
Australia	Under 16	First globally, legislated late 2025
France	Under 15	First in the EU , passed July 2026

WHY GOVERNMENTS ARE ACTING

The push is driven by mounting evidence and public concern over the effect of social media on young minds:

- **Mental health and screen time.** Rising rates of anxiety, poor sleep and attention problems have been linked to heavy social media use among adolescents.
- **Online harms.** Exposure to cyberbullying, harmful content, grooming and addictive design features has intensified calls for protection.

- **Age-gating gaps.** Existing self-declared age checks are easily bypassed, prompting demands for stronger **age verification**.

THE INDIA ANGLE

India has been building its own architecture for **online child safety**, though it has not moved towards an outright ban. The key instruments are:

The DPDP Act, 2023

The **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023** treats anyone under **18** as a child. It requires data fiduciaries to obtain **verifiable parental consent** before processing a child's personal data, and it prohibits **tracking, behavioural monitoring and targeted advertising** directed at children. This makes India's **threshold (18)** higher than France's (15), but the mechanism is consent-based rather than a blanket ban.

The IT Rules, 2021

The **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021** impose **due-diligence obligations** on intermediaries, including grievance **redress** and the swift removal of certain unlawful content. These rules govern how platforms must behave once children are on them.

THE HARD TRADE-OFFS

Any age-verification regime forces a difficult balance between three values:

VALUE	CONCERN
Child protection	Shielding minors from harm and addictive design
Free expression	Avoiding disproportionate curbs on young people's access to information and community
Privacy	Age verification may require collecting sensitive identity data, itself a privacy risk

The central **paradox** is that **verifying age to protect privacy can undermine privacy**, since robust age checks may demand government IDs or biometric data from all users, including adults. India's challenge is to design age-assurance systems that are effective yet **data-minimising**, so that protecting children does not create a new surveillance surface.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2: Governance and the regulation of technology; government policies for the protection of vulnerable sections (children); comparative government policy; issues arising from the design and implementation of laws.

Prelims pointers:

- **France** is the **first EU country** to ban social media for **under-15s** (2026); **Australia** was first globally (**under-16**, 2025).
- The **DPDP Act, 2023** defines a child as anyone **under 18** and mandates **verifiable parental consent**.
- The **IT Rules, 2021** set intermediary **due-diligence** obligations.
- The DPDP Act bars **tracking, behavioural monitoring and targeted advertising** aimed at children.

★ FACTS CORNER, KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

The DPDP Act, 2023 is India's first standalone data-protection law; it provides for a Data Protection Board of India to enforce its provisions.

A data fiduciary is any person who alone or with others determines the purpose and means of processing personal data.

Age assurance is the umbrella term for methods (age verification, age estimation) used to establish a user's age online.

Article 21 of the Constitution, through the Puttaswamy (2017) judgment, recognises the right to privacy as a fundamental right, the constitutional anchor of India's data-protection regime.

The IT Rules, 2021 were framed under the Information Technology Act, 2000.

Sources: Reuters and AP reports on France's under-15 social media ban (July 2026), Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (MeitY), Information Technology Rules, 2021.

Source: France Bans Social Media for Under-15s: Lessons for India — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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