Southeast Asia
Public Policy Institute

Policy Approaches to Social Media Age Restrictions

November 2026

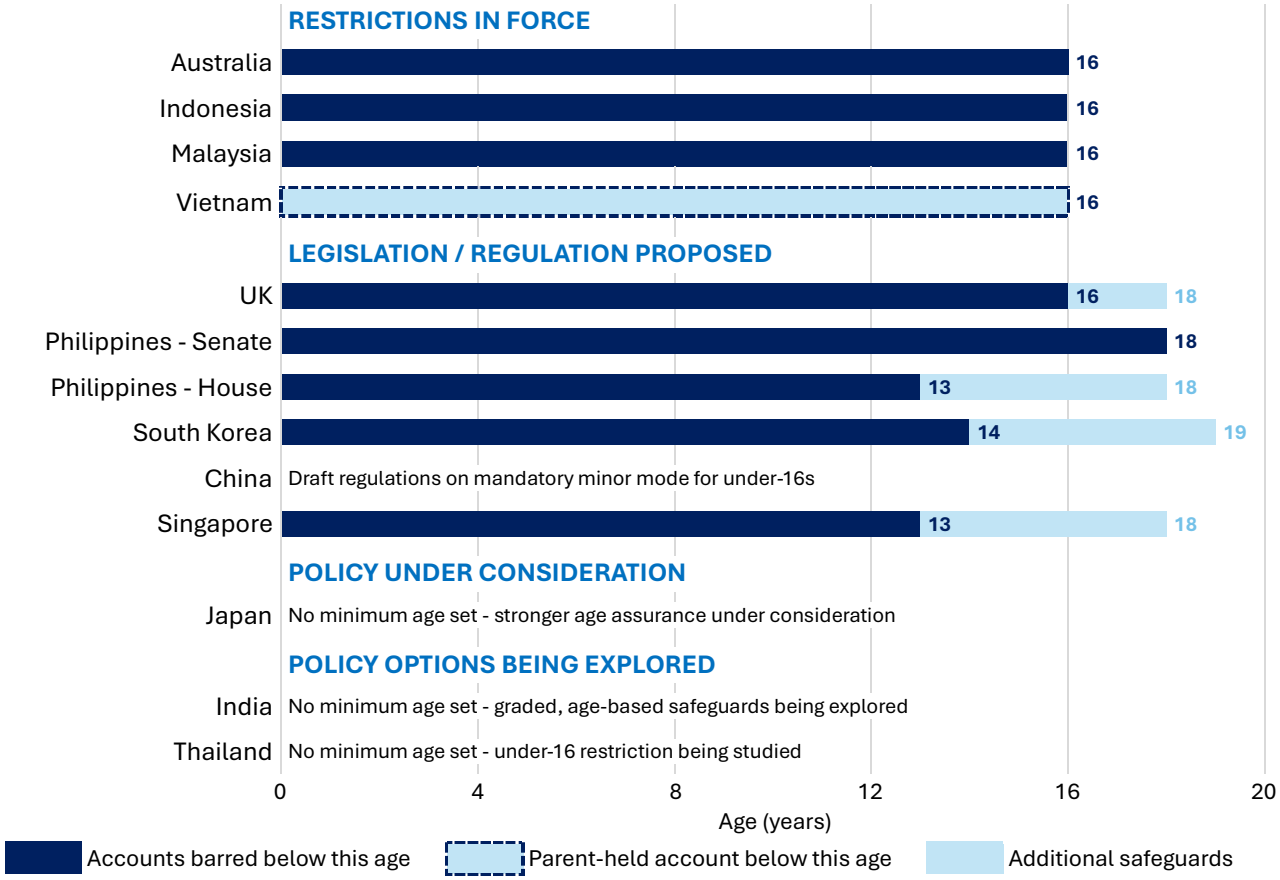
Governments across Asia are examining how to protect children from online harms, including exposure to harmful content, online grooming and potentially addictive platform features.

Minimum-age restrictions for social media have emerged as a targeted policy response, but approaches across the region are diverse. While some governments are introducing minimum-age requirements, others are considering graduated safeguards for different age groups, stronger age-assurance measures or greater platform responsibilities.

AUSTRALIA AS A GLOBAL POLICY INFLUENCER

Australia was the first country to implement a nationwide minimum-age requirement for social media accounts, and its approach has become an important reference point for other governments. The regime took effect on 10 December 2025, requiring designated platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, Reddit and X, to take reasonable steps to prevent users under 16 from creating or maintaining accounts. Rather than penalizing children or their parents, the framework places responsibility for implementation on platforms, which face penalties of up to A$109.2 million for non-compliance. It also gives platforms flexibility in how they verify users' ages, rather than prescribing a single mandatory verification technology.

Figure 1: Status of Social Media Age Restrictions



Note: Singapore's limit may rise to 18 for services lacking safeguards.
Source: Authors' compilation.

These approaches raise important policy considerations, including how to balance children's online safety with privacy protections and continued access to digital services. The comparative table at the end summarizes the age thresholds, key policy measures and implementation status across the jurisdictions covered.

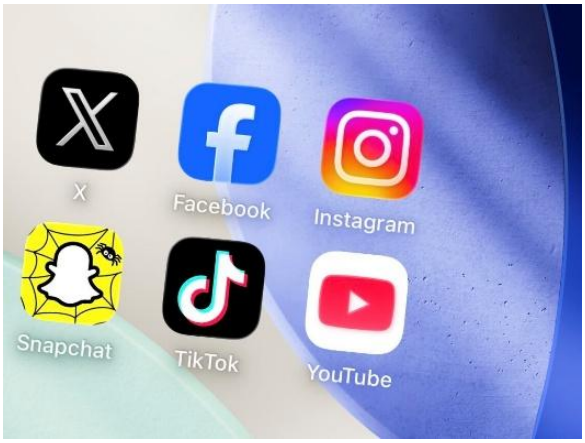
FROM AUSTRALIA'S MODEL TO NATIONAL APPROACHES

Indonesia, Malaysia and the UK illustrate how governments are translating minimum-age restrictions into different regulatory frameworks. Indonesia prohibits accounts for users under 16 on designated high-risk digital platforms, and its restrictions extend beyond social media to online gaming platforms such as Roblox. By October 2026, the government reported that TikTok had deactivated approximately 9 million accounts belonging to under-16 users.

Malaysia has combined its under-16 social media account restriction with broader online-safety requirements to protect children from harmful content and reduce online risks. The UK has announced plans to follow Australia's under-16 approach, but with additional safeguards for 16- and 17-year-olds, including default restrictions on overnight access, autoplay and personalized feeds. Messaging services such as WhatsApp and Signal are expected to be excluded.

DIFFERENT AGE THRESHOLDS AND SAFEGUARDS

Other governments are exploring how protections might vary according to children's ages and the risks they face online.



Singapore proposes to bar children under 13 from accounts and to require stronger safeguards for users aged 13 to 17. Platforms unable to provide those safeguards may have their minimum user age raised to 18. This builds on existing requirements, in force since 1 April 2026, for designated app stores to use age-assurance measures to prevent users under 18 from downloading age-inappropriate apps.

South Korea is considering a similar split, with restrictions on account creation for children under 14 and design controls for users aged 14 to under 19.

The Philippines illustrates the ongoing debate over how far age-based restrictions should extend. Proposals to restrict children's access to social media are being considered by both the House and the Senate, with different minimum-age thresholds under discussion. As of October 2026, a House bill would prohibit accounts for children under 13, while the Senate version would extend the restriction to everyone under 18. Both bills passed their third and final reading, but the differences have yet to be reconciled.

China's draft regulations would require social media, gaming, livestreaming and AI platforms to automatically activate a dedicated "minor mode" for users identified as under 16. The mode would filter harmful content, curb addictive use, protect personal data, and provide parental monitoring tools.

Across these approaches, governments are considering different ways to tailor online protections according to age. While age-specific measures can better account for differences in maturity and online risks, they also require platforms to distinguish between age groups and apply different protections. The choice of age threshold and the scope of restrictions therefore remain important considerations in balancing children's online safety with their access to digital services.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO ONLINE SAFETY

Not all governments are pursuing restrictions in the same way. Japan is focusing on stronger age verification, safer platform settings and greater responsibility for technology companies, rather than a blanket ban.

Vietnam requires account authentication and parental involvement, with children under 16 required to have accounts registered by a parent or guardian who supervises their activity. A draft amendment proposes further restrictions, including preventing children under 16 from posting, commenting, sharing or reacting to content on social media.

In India, the Supreme Court emphasized in October 2026 that children have a fundamental right to internet access and that blanket restrictions are impermissible. It pointed to alternatives such as parental oversight, private accounts by default and restrictions on contact from unknown adults.

Thailand has no minimum age for social media. It is studying a possible under-16 restriction and is pushing for child-protection settings to be switched on by default on new devices.

Taken together, these approaches show that protecting children online does not necessarily require blanket minimum-age restrictions. Governments are also considering measures that place greater emphasis on parental involvement, age assurance and platform responsibility. The effectiveness of these approaches will depend on how well they address online risks while protecting children's privacy and access to digital services.

THE IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGE: AGE ASSURANCE, ACCESS AND PRIVACY

Different national requirements create compliance challenges for technology companies. Variations in minimum ages, covered platforms and verification methods can increase costs and complexity. Implementing these restrictions also raises questions about how platforms can verify users' ages without collecting unnecessary personal information. Options include government-issued documents, age estimation and third-party verification. Each involves trade-offs in accuracy, privacy, accessibility and implementation. Digital ID could simplify verification across services, but making it a prerequisite for social media access could create privacy risks and exclude people who lack access to digital identification. Age-verification systems should confirm users' ages reliably without collecting or retaining more personal information than necessary.

> For policymakers, the key question is not only whether to restrict access by age, but how to design and enforce measures that protect children while preserving privacy and appropriate access to digital services.

Table 1: Social Media Age Restrictions: Country Comparison

Country	Age Threshold	Policy Approach	Status	Latest Development / Next Step
Australia	Under 16.	Designated social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, Threads, X, Reddit, Twitch and Kick, must take reasonable steps to prevent users under 16 from creating or maintaining accounts.	**In force** The social media minimum-age law took effect on 10 December 2025.	The government continues to monitor platform compliance and assess which services fall within the restrictions. Platforms that fail to take reasonable steps may face civil penalties of up to A$109.2 million.
Indonesia	Under 16 on designated "high-risk" digital platforms.	Platforms must deactivate accounts held by users under 16 on designated "high-risk" digital platforms, which include YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Threads, X, Bigo Live, and Roblox.	**In force** Ministerial Regulation No. 9/2026 was issued on 6 March 2026, with implementation starting on 28 March 2026.	Around 9 million under-16 accounts had been deactivated on TikTok as of October 2026. The government continues to assess platforms under its risk-based regulatory framework.
Malaysia	Under 16.	Social media platforms with at least 8 million users in Malaysia, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, are automatically deemed registered as Application Service Provider Class Licensees (ASP(C)). Platforms must verify users' ages and prevent those under 16 from creating accounts. Age verification may use government-issued documents, including identity cards and passports. In addition, platforms must comply with broader online-safety requirements to protect children from harmful content, assess and mitigate online risks, and strengthen child-safety measures.	**In force** The Online Safety Act came into force on 1 January 2026. The Child Protection Code and Risk Mitigation Code took effect on 1 June 2026.	Age verification for existing users is being rolled out over six months. Users identified as under 16 will have one month to download or transfer their data before restrictions are applied.
Vietnam	Under 16, with parental/guardian registration and supervision.	Under Decree No. 147/2024/ND-CP, children under 16 cannot independently register social media accounts. Parents or guardians must register accounts using their own information, including a Vietnamese mobile phone number, and supervise children's posts and shares. Vietnam is considering stricter child online-safety requirements under a draft amendment to the decree discussed in September 2026. The draft would require platforms to retain children's registration details and parental identification or Vietnamese mobile numbers, apply age-appropriate content controls, set the highest privacy protections by default and prevent access to harmful content. On platforms receiving at least one million monthly visits from Vietnam, children under 13 would be barred from posting, commenting, sharing or reacting. Users aged 13 to under 16 could use these features only where parental monitoring tools are available.	**In force** Decree No. 147/2024/ND-CP requires social media platforms to authenticate users, with the rules taking effect from 25 December 2024. **Proposed** The proposed amendment to Decree 147 would introduce additional child-safety and parental monitoring requirements.	A draft amendment to Decree 147 was discussed in September 2026.
Philippines	Under 13 in the House (HB 11566); Under 18 in the Senate (SB 2424).	**House:** HB 11566 would prohibit children under 13 from creating, maintaining or using social media accounts, while users aged 13–17 would be subject to age-appropriate safety protections. **Senate:** SB 2424 would prohibit users under 18 from accessing or creating social media accounts and require platforms to implement age verification and parental safety tools.	**Proposed** **House:** HB 11566 approved on third and final reading on 12 October 2026. **Senate:** SB 2424 approved on third and final reading on 8 October 2026. The two versions have not yet been reconciled.	The House and Senate must reconcile their respective bills and approve a final version before it can be submitted to the President for approval.

Southeast Asia
Public Policy Institute

Country	Age Threshold	Policy Approach	Status	Latest Development / Next Step
South Korea	Under 14, with additional restrictions for users aged 14 to under 19.	Proposals would restrict children under 14 from creating social media accounts, while users aged 14 to under 19 could face restrictions on potentially addictive designs and algorithms.	**Proposed** Seven related bills are pending in the National Assembly.	The Korea Media and Communications Commission supports advancing seven related bills through public discussion and consultation.
China	Under 16, with mandatory restricted "minor mode" for covered online services.	Draft provisions would require online platforms to automatically place users under 16 in "minor mode", which restricts access to content and features across social media, short-video, livestreaming, gaming and AI services. The draft would also prohibits minors from accessing stranger social networking and virtual intimate relationship services, and bans under-16s from hosting livestreams. Age verification may involve identity documents, digital identity services, facial recognition and behavioral analysis. Smartphone manufacturers and app stores would also be required to support implementation.	**Proposed** The Cyberspace Administration of China published draft provisions on the protection of minors' online use on 18 September 2026. The public consultation closed on 17 October 2026.	No further implementation timeline or next steps have been announced.
Singapore	Under 13, with additional safeguards for users aged 13–17.	Existing age-assurance requirements for designated app stores, including the Apple App Store, Google Play Store, Huawei AppGallery, Microsoft Store and Samsung Galaxy Store, would be extended to designated social media services, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, X and HardwareZone. Platforms would be required to prevent children under 13 from creating or maintaining accounts and provide stronger safeguards for users aged 13–17, including restrictions on potentially risky features such as direct messaging from strangers and autoplay.	**In force** App store requirements. **Proposed** The government is consulting platforms and the public.	The government plans to introduce legislative amendments in early 2027. Platforms that cannot provide the required safeguards for users aged 13–17 may have their minimum user age raised to 18.
Japan	No minimum age currently set.	The government is considering stronger age verification and child-safety measures, including asking social media operators to improve age assurance and protections against harmful or addictive features.	**Considering** The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications is developing a policy framework, with a policy conclusion targeted for the end of 2026.	Japan is pursuing a different approach from blanket age bans, focusing on age verification, safer platform settings and greater responsibility for technology companies.
India	No minimum age currently set.	The government is exploring graded, age-based safeguards rather than a blanket ban, potentially including parental consent, parental oversight, private accounts by default and restrictions on contact from unknown adults.	**Exploring** In October 2026, the Supreme Court held that the right to access the internet is a fundamental right that extends to children. It rejected blanket restrictions but left room for proportionate age-based safeguards.	The Supreme Court has sought the government's response to a petition calling for a national framework to protect children from social media risks.
Thailand	No minimum age currently set.	The government is studying whether to introduce a law barring children under 16 from social media, and is pushing for child-protection settings to be on by default on new devices. ThaiHealth and the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society are also working on media and digital literacy measures.	**Exploring**	In June 2026, the Deputy Prime Minister, speaking as chairman of ThaiHealth, said Thailand is studying a possible under-16 restriction. In August 2026, the Digital Economy and Society Minister said child protection mode will be on by default on newly released Apple smartphones, and that talks with other platforms continue.

Country	Age Threshold	Policy Approach	Status	Latest Development / Next Step
UK	Under 16, with additional safeguards for users aged 16 and 17.	The government plans to prohibit social media platforms from offering their services to children under 16. The restrictions are expected to cover platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, Facebook and X, while excluding messaging services such as WhatsApp and Signal. Platforms would be required to implement effective age-assurance measures. The government also plans to restrict livestreaming and communication with strangers for under-16s on other online services, including gaming platforms. For users aged 16 and 17, platforms would be required to restrict access between midnight and 6 am and switch off notifications during this period. Autoplay and personalized feeds would also be switched off by default, although teenagers will be able to change these settings.	Proposed The government announced the under-16 social media ban in June 2026 and set out further details in its July 2026 consultation response. The detailed regulations and implementation arrangements are being developed.	In October 2026, Ofcom, the UK's regulator for communications services, set out four age-check methods that can currently be highly effective at 16: photo ID matching, digital ID services, banking-based checks and facial age estimation. The government plans to lay the first regulations by the end of 2026, with the restrictions expected to take effect in spring 2027. Ofcom will consult on draft guidance once the regulations are laid.

Source: Authors' compilation.

About the Southeast Asia Public Policy Institute

The Southeast Asia Public Policy Institute is a research institute based in Bangkok and Singapore, working across the region. Our mission is to support the development of solutions to the most pressing public policy challenges facing Southeast Asia in the 21st century.

The Institute works on a range of issues across sustainability, technology, public health, trade, and governance.

We convene dialogues with stakeholders and decisionmakers to drive discussion on the challenges and opportunities facing markets in the region. The Institute draws on a network of in-market researchers, advisors, and partners to provide insights and recommendations for governments, policymakers, and businesses.

We work with partners on projects to explore and drive discussion on policy challenges through:

- **Research and policy development** – in-depth research providing insights and actionable policy solutions aimed at policymakers looking to move the needle on key issues.
- **Policy dialogues and roundtables** – to present policy ideas and start a dialogue with the most relevant stakeholders holding the pen on policy development in markets across the region.

The Institute is founded on the premise that direct connection and candid, informed dialogue is crucial for both policymakers and business leaders operating in the region's changing economic and public policy landscape.

Disclaimer

This is a policy note developed by the Southeast Asia Public Policy Institute exploring policy developments in markets in Southeast Asia. It aims to provide an overview or highlight activity in the region relevant to a specific policy area and is based on public information and the insights of Institute officers that may be gathered from stakeholders working in the relevant policy space. It does not contain any confidential or business sensitive information. It is not an exhaustive study of policy, legislation or regulation and should not be used to inform investment or other business decisions.

References

ABS-CBN News, “House OKs bill for rules protecting kids on social media, online gaming”, 12 October 2026.
https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/nation/2026/10/12/house-oks-bill-for-rules-protecting-kids-on-social-media-online-gaming-1754

ANTARA News, “TikTok deactivates 9M child accounts to comply with RI rule: Minister”, 8 October 2026.
https://en.antaranews.com/news/434540/tiktok-deactivates-9m-child-accounts-to-comply-with-ri-rule-minister.

Argos Identity, “Malaysia’s Social Media Age Verification Requirements”.
https://blog.argosidentity.com/93831

Asia News Network, “Bill restricting social media usage among minors advances in Philippine Senate”.
https://asianews.network/bill-restricting-social-media-usage-among-minors-advances-in-philippine-senate/

Asia News Network, “Underage accounts in Indonesia may be removed from digital platforms: Minister”.
https://asianews.network/underage-accounts-in-indonesia-may-be-removed-from-digital-platforms-minister/

CNA, “Malaysia social media account ban for under-16s from June 1: Questions remain”, 1 June 2026.
https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/malaysia-social-media-account-ban-under-16s-june-1-questions-remain-6153241

The Diplomat, “Indonesia Says Tech Firms Have Wiped 4.7M Child Accounts Since Govt Ban”, June 2026.
https://thediplomat.com/2026/06/indonesia-says-tech-firms-have-wiped-4-7m-child-accounts-since-govt-ban/

eSafety Commissioner, “Social media age restrictions”.
https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/industry-regulation/social-media-age-restrictions

eSafety Commissioner, “Social Media Minimum Age: Compliance Update”, March 2026.
https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-03/SocialMediaMinimumAgeComplianceUpdateMarch2026.pdf?v=1774962373565

The Freeman, “It’s time to regulate social media”, 4 October 2026.
https://www.philstar.com/the-freeman/opinion/2026/10/04/2560733/it-time-regulate-social-media

Government of Vietnam, “Social media platforms have to authenticate users via phone numbers: Decree”.
https://en.baochinhphu.vn/social-media-platforms-have-to-authenticate-users-via-phone-numbers-decree-111241112173317774.htm

India Today, “Social media for minors: Supreme Court asks Centre to consider parental consent”, 28 September 2026.
https://www.indiatoday.in/india/law-news/story/social-media-minors-supreme-court-centre-parental-consent-3004934-2026-09-28

The Indian Express, “Govt looks at nuanced, graded age-based restrictions on social media for children”.
https://indianexpress.com/article/india/govt-looks-at-nuanced-graded-age-based-restrictions-on-social-media-for-children-10570566/

Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), “Age Assurance”.
https://www.imda.gov.sg/how-we-can-help/age-assurance

Inquirer.net, “Senate approves bill restricting social media use by minors”.
https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2319819/senate-approves-bill-restricting-social-media-use-by-minors

The Japan Times, “Japan considers social media age verification to protect children”, 3 June 2026.
https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/06/03/japan/science-health/social-media-age-verification/

LawChakra, “Supreme Court Issues Notice on Children Social Media Safeguards Plea by Emerald Heights School”, 16 October 2026.
https://lawchakra.in/supreme-court/children-social-media-notice/

Linklaters, “APAC Online Safety regulations: The shift to proactive ‘systems and processes’”.
https://techinsights.linklaters.com/post/102mv4s/apac-online-safety-regulations-the-shift-to-proactive-systems-and-processes

Ministry of Digital Development and Information Singapore, “MDDI's response to PQ on establishing frameworks for under-18 social media access and design feature safeguards”.
https://www.mddi.gov.sg/newsroom/mddi-s-response-to-pq-on-establishing-frameworks-for-under-18-social-media-access-and-design-feature-safeguards/

Ministry of Digital Development and Information Singapore, “MDDI response to PQ on requesting Meta to deploy teenage usage restriction in Singapore”.
https://www.mddi.gov.sg/newsroom/mddi-response-to-pq-on-requesting-meta-to-deploy-teenage-usage-restriction-in-singapore/

Ministry of Health Singapore, “Expert panel submits key findings and recommendations to support healthier and safer social media use among young people”.
https://www.moh.gov.sg/newsroom/expert-panel-submits-key-findings-and-recommendations-to-support-healthier-and-safer-social-media-use-among-young-people/

The New Indian Express, “Children have fundamental right to access internet, blanket ban impermissible, says SC”, 17 October 2026.
https://www.newindianexpress.com/india/2026/Oct/17/children-have-fundamental-right-to-access-internet-blanket-ban-impermissible-says-sc

Ofcom, “How age checks at age 16 can work to underpin the UK’s social media ban”, 29 October 2026.
https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/protecting-children/how-age-checks-at-age-16-can-work-to-underpin-uks-social-media-ban

Philstar.com, “Senator files bill seeking social media ban for minors”, 25 April 2026.
https://www.philstar.com/nation/2026/04/25/2523466/senator-files-bill-social-media-ban-minors

The Press of Asia, “China Proposes Mandatory ‘Minor Mode’ for Under-16s, With Face Checks Among Age-Verification Tools”, 28 September 2026.
https://pressofasia.com/china-draft-rules-minor-mode-under-16-age-verification-face-recognition/

Reuters, “South Korea media commission says Meta's youth protection changes should apply”, 27 August 2026.
https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/south-korea-media-commission-says-metas-youth-protection-changes-should-apply-2026-08-27/

The Star, “Philippine lower house approves bill restricting minors’ social media access”, 12 October 2026.
https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2026/10/12/philippine-lower-house-approves-bill-restricting-minors039-social-media-access

The Straits Times, “Indonesia starts first South-east Asia social media ban for kids”.
https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-starts-first-south-east-asia-social-media-ban-for-kids

Tech in Asia, “South Korea plans stricter social media rules for minors”.
https://www.techinasia.com/news/south-korea-plans-stricter-social-media-rules-for-minors

The Thaiger, “Thailand eyes under-16 social media ban over screen time”, June 2026.
https://thethaiger.com/news/national/thailand-eyes-under-16-social-media-ban-over-screen-time

The Thaiger, “Thailand pushes default child safety settings on new phones”, August 2026.
https://thethaiger.com/news/national/thailand-pushes-default-child-safety-settings-on-new-phones

UK Government, “Fact sheet: New rules to protect children online”, September 2026.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fact-sheet-new-rules-to-protect-children-online/fact-sheet-new-rules-to-protect-children-online

Vietcetera, “Vietnam proposes restrictions on social media use for under-16s”.
https://vietcetera.com/en/vietnam-proposes-restrictions-on-social-media-use-for-under-16s

Vietnam.vn, “Proposal: Children aged 13–16 may only comment on social media under adult supervision”, 9 September 2026.
https://www.vietnam.vn/en/de-xuat-tre-13-16-tuoi-chi-duoc-binh-luan-tren-mxh-khi-co-nguoi-lon-giam-sat