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Empowering youth in the digital age: towards creative, democratic and competence-based approaches to online participation

Motion for a resolution

tabled by Mr George PAPANDREOU and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

Across Europe, member States are responding to digital safety concerns with increasingly restrictive measures: France now requires parental consent for social media use under age 15; the United Kingdom mandates age verification; multiple jurisdictions are raising minimum age thresholds. Yet evidence reveals these approaches carry substantial costs without guaranteed effectiveness.

Research demonstrates that age verification systems risk privacy vulnerabilities through mass data collection and surveillance, while disadvantaged youth – those in care, from low-income families, or lacking documentation – face disproportionate exclusion. Studies show young people routinely circumvent age barriers, risking access to safety resources and trusted support networks in the process. As educational and civic content gets over-blocked, Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – addressing the principle of participation and guaranteeing children's right to express their views – is undermined.

Alternative paths are now being developed. Finland's integrated media literacy curriculum is cited as a promising model to mitigate online harassment. South Korea's comprehensive digital citizenship education has enhanced competences associated with less cyberbullying, better digital well-being and civic participation. Denmark's models are designed to support children's safety, confidence and creativity online, strengthening protection and empowerment simultaneously.

The Parliamentary Assembly must lead and examine competence-based alternatives – such as a “Digital Readiness” or “Digital Navigation” Licence – that equip and certify young people with critical-thinking, safety, and algorithmic literacy skills.

This requires the rigorous evaluation of restrictive measures' actual impacts, a comprehensive analysis of existing successful alternative models, and the examination of platform responsibilities for age-appropriate design and protection from manipulative practices.

Effective protection certainly requires capable, informed young citizens.

The report must chart a rights-respecting path that positions young people as active democratic participants whose digital capacities deserve not only protection but empowerment.

Signed (see overleaf)



Signed¹:

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1. ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party
SOC: Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group
UEL: Group of the Unified European Left