



Spain, Greece take on digital Wild West

82% of Spaniards support teen ban move

MADRID: Spain and Greece on Tuesday proposed bans on social media use by teenagers as attitudes hardened in Europe against technology some say is designed to be addictive and the measures announced by Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez drew fury from Elon Musk.

Spain wants to prohibit social media for under-16s, Sanchez said.

Greece is close to announcing a similar ban for children under 15, a senior government source said.

But Sanchez also said his

government would create a law to hold social media executives personally responsible for hate speech on their platforms.

Musk wrote on X: "Dirty Sanchez is a tyrant and a traitor to the people of Spain."

About an hour and a half later, he escalated his criticism: "Sanchez is the true fascist totalitarian."

Representatives of Google, part of Alphabet, TikTok, Snapchat and Meta did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Spain's proposed measures.

Spain and Greece join countries such as Britain and France in considering tougher stances on social media, after Australia in December became the first nation to prohibit access to such platforms for

children younger than 16.

Governments and regulators worldwide are looking at the impact of children's screen time on their development and mental wellbeing.

"Our children are exposed to a space they were never meant to navigate alone ... We will no longer accept that," Sanchez said at the World Governments Summit in Dubai.

"We will protect them from the digital Wild West."

The Australia ban "leaves significant gaps that could undermine its goals", including limitations in age verification technology and users switching to unregulated messaging apps, Snapchat said in a statement on Monday.

Spain joins five other European countries that he dubbed the "Coalition of the Digitally Willing" to coordinate and enforce cross-border regulation, Sanchez said, without naming the countries, set to hold their first meeting in the coming days.

"We know that this is a battle that far exceeds the boundaries of any country," he said. His office did not respond to a request for clarification.

Legislation to ban children under 15 from social media is passing through France's parliament. Britain is also considering similar measures.

Spain's proposed regulation would give parents clear backing to set limits and would ease social pressure for children worried about

missing out, said Diana Diaz, director of the ANAR Foundation for at-risk children and adolescents.

Sanchez said prosecutors would explore ways to investigate possible legal infractions by Musk's Grok, as well as by TikTok and Instagram, part of Meta.

The proposed ban would be implemented as part of a change to an existing Bill on digital protection for minors being debated in parliament, according to a government spokesperson.

About 82% of Spaniards said they believed children under 14 should be banned from social media, according to a 30-country Ipsos poll on education published last August. That was up from 73% in 2024. - Reuters