



Protect children online without making the Internet less secure

Protecting children online is an objective we all share. The challenge is ensuring measures strengthen child safety without weakening the privacy and security millions of people rely on every day, including children.

As organisations committed to a safe, secure, and rights-respecting internet, we are concerned by suggestions that the Government restrict virtual private networks (VPNs). VPNs are cybersecurity tools. They help people protect personal information on public Wi-Fi, enable secure remote working, allow students to access education networks safely, and help small businesses protect their systems. VPNs are essential for human rights defenders and journalists, domestic abuse survivors, the LGBTQ+ community, and others at heightened risk online.

The evidence does not support assumptions that young people use VPNs to bypass age restrictions. [Ofcom's research](#) found that only around 3% of children had used VPNs to access content meant for older audiences. [Evidence from Australia](#) shows children are much more likely to get around age checks by not being asked, giving false information, or even drawing on a moustache.

Restricting VPNs would undercut the security and privacy of millions, without making children safer. Age-gating VPNs would require everyone to surrender sensitive personal information simply to access tools designed to protect privacy. Blocking VPN traffic reliably is technically unfeasible, and risks blocking employers, schools and public authorities using VPNs from accessing parts of the web. This would push people away from compliant and reputable VPN providers toward unregulated, data-exploiting services that are harder to oversee, leaving them less secure.

The Government should focus on policy interventions that address the root causes of online harms: strong enforcement of platform obligations, better parental controls, investment in digital literacy, and safety- and privacy-by-design obligations.

Children deserve an Internet that is safe, private, and secure. Those objectives should reinforce one another, not come into conflict.

SIGNATORIES:

- Amnesty International
- Big Brother Watch
- Defend Digital Me
- ExpressVPN
- Global Partners Digital
- Index on Censorship



- Internet Infrastructure Coalition
- Internet Society
- Internet Society UK
- Internews
- IPVanish
- Liberty
- Mozilla
- Mullvad VPN
- Mysterium VPN
- NordVPN
- Open Rights Group
- Proton
- Reporters Without Borders
- Stop Killing Games
- Stop Killing Internet
- Surfshark
- Tuta
- VPN Trust Initiative