

Meta Platforms – Child Safety – 2023

The internet was not developed with children in mind. Social media impacts children’s brains differently than adult brains.¹ It also poses physical and psychological risks that many children and teens are unprepared for, including sextortion and grooming, hate group recruitment, human trafficking (for any means), cyberbullying and harassment, exposure to sexual or violent content, invasion of privacy, self-harm content, and financial scams, among others.

Meta is the world’s largest social media company with billions of children and teen users. Meta’s platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Messenger and WhatsApp, have been linked to numerous child safety impacts and social policy challenges, including:

Mental Health:

Meta’s own company research showed Instagram’s negative impacts on teens’ self-image, increased rates of depression and anxiety, and a link to suicidal thoughts. The *Wall St. Journal* concluded that these Instagram documents revealed “Facebook has made minimal efforts to address these issues and plays them down in public.”²

Sexual Exploitation:

In 2021, nearly 29 million cases of online child sexual abuse material were reported; nearly 27 million of those (92 percent) stemmed from Meta platforms-- including Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger and Instagram.³ A *Forbes* report on Instagram pedophiles described Instagram as “a marketplace for sexualized images of children.”⁴

Cyberbullying:

Time Magazine reported that “By one estimate, nearly 80% of teens are on Instagram and more than half of those users have been bullied on the platform.”⁵ A UK study found that Instagram accounted for 42 percent of online bullying, followed by Facebook with 39 percent.⁶

Data Privacy:

In September 2022, Meta was fined over \$400 million for failing to safeguard children's information on Instagram.⁷

Legislative Response:

There is bipartisan Congressional support for the Kids Online Safety Act which will require companies to “act in kids’ best interests and prevent or mitigate the risk of certain harms including suicide, eating disorders and substance abuse.”⁸ The UK Online Safety bill aims to keep internet users safe from fraudulent and harmful content and prevent children, in particular, from accessing damaging material.

¹ <https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2022/social-media-children-teens>

² <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739>

³ <https://www.missingkids.org/content/dam/missingkids/pdfs/2021-reports-by-esp.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2022/06/25/meta-is-having-a-tough-time-keeping-pedophiles-off-instagram/?sh=7c02cbf45765>

⁵ <https://time.com/5619999/instagram-mosseri-bullying-artificial-intelligence/>

⁶ <https://techjury.net/blog/cyberbullying-statistics/>

⁷ <https://www.cnet.com/news/privacy/meta-fined-400m-for-failing-to-protect-childrens-privacy-on-instagram/>

⁸ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/16/new-bill-would-require-facebook-google-and-others-to-protect-children.html>

The European Union's Digital Services Act will make identifying, reporting and removing child sexual abuse material mandatory.⁹

Meta is facing increasing regulatory, reputational, and legal risks due to these unabated issues.

Meta states that it has no tolerance for child exploitation or bullying and is developing new child safety features for selected products and age groups. Yet, Meta has no publicly available, company-wide child safety or harm reduction performance targets for investors and stakeholders to judge the effectiveness of Meta's announced tools, policies and actions.

Resolved: Shareholders request that, within one year, the Board of Directors adopts targets and publishes annually a report (prepared at reasonable expense, excluding proprietary information) that includes quantitative metrics appropriate to assessing whether Meta has improved its performance globally regarding child safety impacts and actual harm reduction to children on its platforms.

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/28/opinion/social-media-facebook-transparency.html?smid=em-share>