

UK law to give regulator powers to fine tech companies

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British campaigners have been calling for legislation that forces tech giants to tackle harmful online content

Britain's online regulator could be given powers to impose hefty fines on

technology companies that fail to remove harmful content, as part of draft legislation unveiled by the government on Wednesday.

The new internet laws outlined in Britain's Online Safety Bill are aimed at protecting [young people](#), clamping down on racist abuse and safeguarding online freedom of expression, the government said.

Online regulator Ofcom will be given the powers to fine companies up to £18 million (\$25 million, 20 million euros) or 10 percent of their annual global turnover—whichever is higher—if they fail in their duty of care.

Under the guidelines, [social media sites](#), websites and apps must remove and limit the spread of illegal and [harmful content](#), including posts showing the sexual abuse of children or suicide as well as terrorist material.

The legislation also includes the creation of a new criminal offence for senior company figures who fail to make necessary efforts to improve safety.

The draft bill, announced in Tuesday's speech by Queen Elizabeth II outlining Prime Minister Boris Johnson's agenda for the year ahead, has been demanded by campaigners who want to see curbs on tech giants to tackle harmful online content.

At the end of April, football stars and others from the sports world staged a four-day social media boycott to highlight online abuse and discrimination.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden called the legislation "groundbreaking", saying it would "usher in a new age of accountability for tech and bring fairness and accountability to the online world".

The UK legislations follows on the heels of a 2017 German law which imposes fines of up to 50 million euros on platforms if they fail to remove hate speech.

A French law which imposed fines on platforms for failing to take down hateful content was struck down for impinging on freedom of expression in 2020.

The European Union, which Britain left definitely at the end of last year, is working on [legislation](#) to overhaul the bloc's rules on digital services.

The UK draft law also looks to tackle so-called "romance fraud"—scams that manipulate individuals into sending money to fraudsters on dating apps.

Analysis by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau found in 2019-20 there were 5,727 instances of romance fraud in the UK with losses totalling more than £60 million.

"Ruthless criminals who defraud millions of people and sick individuals who exploit the most vulnerable in our society cannot be allowed to operate unimpeded," Home Secretary Priti Patel said.

"It's time for tech companies to be held to account and to protect the British people from harm. If they fail to do so, they will face penalties," she added.

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