

EU watchdog urged to reject Meta 'pay for privacy' scheme

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Since November 2023, Facebook and Instagram users in Europe can buy subscriptions to avoid data tracking.

Civil rights groups on Friday called on an EU watchdog to rule against Facebook owner Meta's scheme to let Europeans pay to opt out of data

tracking, which they say violates EU law.

Since November 2023, Facebook and Instagram users in Europe have been able to buy subscriptions, which mean the platforms stop using their data for targeted advertising.

The EU regulator, the European Data Protection Board (EDPB), is due to decide shortly on whether a system like Meta's violates the bloc's data privacy laws.

Meta argues the subscriptions are a way to comply with the European Union's strict rules after losing a string of legal battles with Brussels.

Privacy activists argue this is a breach of consumer law, deeming it an unfair and aggressive practice.

"We urge the EDPB to issue a decision on the subject that aligns with the Fundamental Right to Data Protection," 28 civil rights organizations including Austrian privacy group NOYB and the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, said in a letter.

"When 'pay or okay' is permitted, data subjects typically lose the 'genuine or free choice' to accept or reject the processing of their personal data," they added.

Meta's European users are able to subscribe for a fee of 9.99 euros (\$10.80) a month on the web, or 12.99 euros on mobile phones using iOS and Android systems.

The 28 [rights groups](#) said such a system "frames privacy as a paid service—a commodity", which makes users "'purchase' their Fundamental Rights from controllers".

NOYB filed a complaint in November with the Austrian [data protection](#) authority, while there have been complaints made to authorities in Germany, the Netherlands and Norway.

European consumer groups also lodged a complaint with Europe's network of consumer protection authorities.

The Dutch, Norwegian and Hamburg supervisory bodies asked the EDPB to issue an opinion.

The EDPB confirmed to AFP that it received their request and that it had eight weeks to adopt an opinion, starting from January 25.

The watchdog said it would be a "general" opinion on the concept of "consent or pay in the context of large online platforms and will not look into any company specifically".

Meta did not wish to comment but in October said its scheme "addresses the latest regulatory developments, guidance and judgments shared by leading European regulators and the courts over recent years".

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