# Experts criticise Ofcom's approach to Online Safety Act implementation



A significant concern has been raised regarding the implementation of the Online Safety Act by Ofcom, the UK’s communications regulator, as critics argue that it may allow major tech platforms to reduce their safety measures while still being compliant. The Molly Rose Foundation has come forward with strong criticisms, alleging a “lack of ambition” in the regulator's approach toward protecting children online.

Andy Burrows, the chief executive of the Molly Rose Foundation, expressed his concerns during an interview with Sky News. He pointed out that the current system permits large tech companies to adhere to a simplistic “checklist” and consider themselves compliant with the law. He stated, “What we’re seeing from Ofcom is a distinct lack of ambition,” highlighting the urgent need for a more robust stance in addressing online safety challenges.

The Online Safety Act mandates that major tech platforms, including giants like Meta and TikTok, must follow Ofcom’s codes of practice on managing illegal content and ensuring children’s safety online. This regulation requires those platforms to remove illegal materials and employ age verification measures to restrict children's access to harmful content. However, Mr Burrows believes that the existing framework allows these companies to potentially reduce their safety standards, which he feels is contrary to the intentions of Parliament.

The Molly Rose Foundation was established by the family of Molly Russell, a girl who tragically took her own life at the age of 14 in 2017 after encountering distressing content on social media. In light of these events, Burrows noted that recent actions by major tech firms cause concern, citing Meta's decision to phase out third-party fact-checkers and shift to a user-based community notes system while loosening content policies in the name of free speech. “What we’ve seen from some of the big tech companies... is a bonfire of safety measures here in the UK,” he remarked.

In response to these issues, Burrows has called upon the UK government, particularly Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, to introduce a strengthened version of the Act. He has met with the Prime Minister to discuss the pressing need for reform, stating that current safeguards for online safety seem inadequate as there is a perception that the UK is “going backwards” in protecting children.

Mr Burrows urged policymakers, including Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer and Technology Secretary Peter Kyle, to listen to the voices of parents who are advocating for stronger measures. He noted that polling indicates a significant majority—85% of parents—desire a new legislative framework to ensure online safety for children.

As the discussion surrounding online safety legislation continues, many stakeholders are closely monitoring the actions and regulatory measures taken by both the government and tech platforms, with the overarching goal of enhancing the protection of vulnerable users, particularly children.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/127/public-accounts-committee/news/199900/online-safety-act-may-take-years-to-have-noticeable-impact-despite-publics-high-expectations/> - This URL supports the claim that the Online Safety Act may take years to have a noticeable impact and highlights Ofcom's challenges in regulating overseas providers. It also mentions the need for Ofcom to manage public expectations regarding the Act's effectiveness.
* <https://www.hoganlovells.com/en/publications/whats-next-for-the-uks-online-safety-act-and-can-it-solve-the-misinformation-problem> - This URL provides insight into the phased implementation of the Online Safety Act by Ofcom and discusses concerns about the Act's ability to tackle misinformation and online hate speech. It also touches on the balance between freedom of expression and protection from harm.
* <https://consoc.org.uk/the-online-saftey-act/> - This URL discusses the Online Safety Act's implications on civil liberties and privacy, including concerns about breaking end-to-end encryption. It also highlights criticisms of the Act's complexity and potential threats to freedom of expression.
* <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2023/october/online-safety-bill-becomes-law/> - This URL confirms the passage of the Online Safety Act into law in October 2023 and outlines its key provisions, including requirements for tech platforms to manage illegal content and ensure children's safety online.
* <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/features-and-news/online-safety-act> - This URL provides Ofcom's perspective on the Online Safety Act, detailing their role in enforcing the new regulations and ensuring compliance among service providers. It also discusses the challenges in regulating online content.