

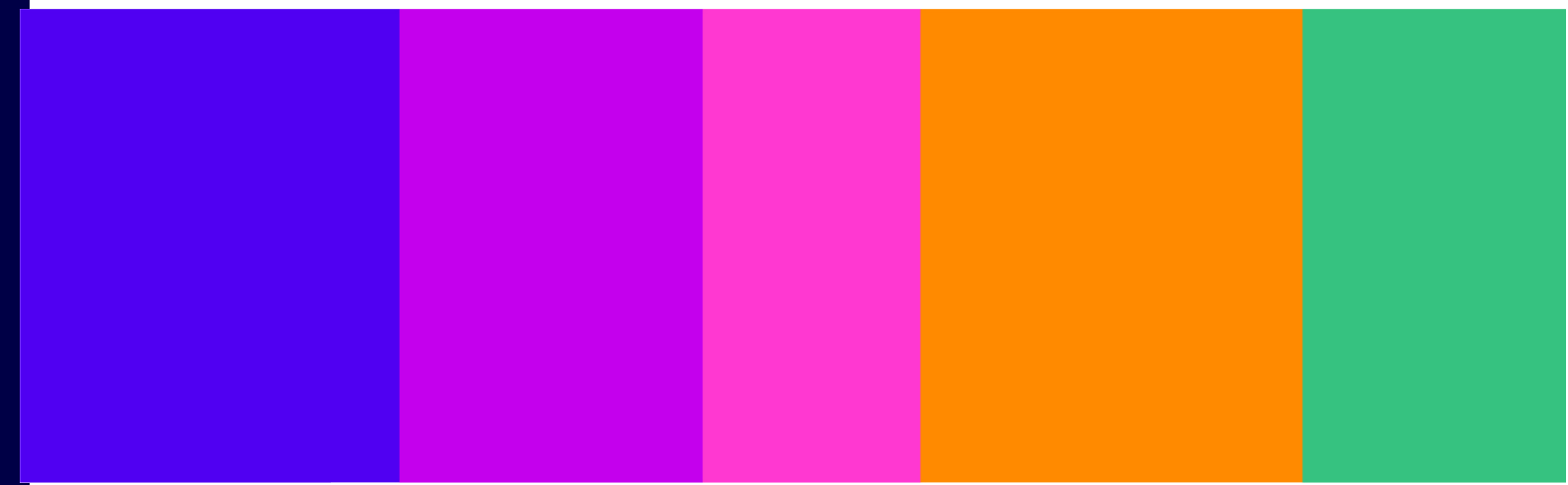


# Ofcom Children's Online User Ages Tracker

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Notification to cease the Children's Online  
User Ages Tracker

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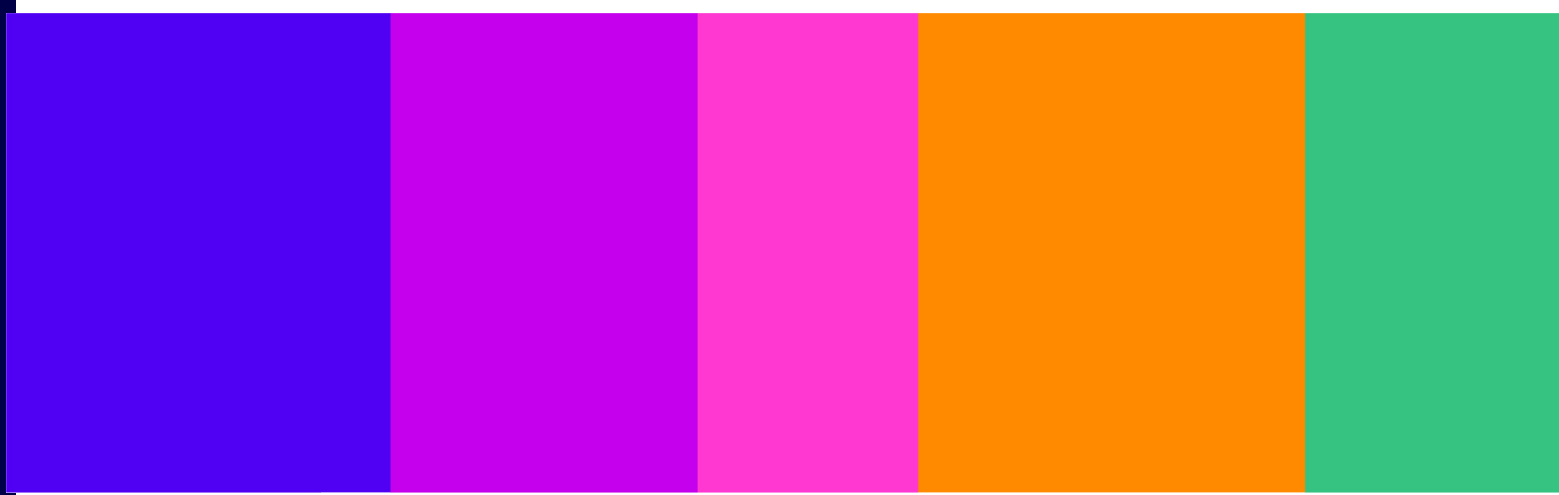
## Summary

Ofcom is named in the [Official Statistics Order 2023](#) as a producer of official statistics. As a producer of official statistics, Ofcom has a responsibility to follow the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) which ensures that published statistics have public value, are of high quality, and are produced by people and organisations that are trustworthy.

As a producer of official statistics, Ofcom follow the guidance set out in [Changing or ceasing to publish official statistics – Government Analysis Function \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#). In line with this guidance, where substantial changes are made to a piece of research that is established as an official statistic, we notify stakeholders of the changes that are planned to be made, laying out the reasoning for doing so.

We are ceasing Ofcom’s Children’s Online User Ages Tracker, a survey designed to estimate the proportion of children with false ‘user age’ on their online profiles, making them appear older than they are.

More information on the background and our decision to cease the Tracker can be found in the sections below.



# Background

## Ofcom's responsibilities

In October 2023, the government confirmed Ofcom as the UK's online safety regulator under the [Online Safety Act](#). Under this Act, Ofcom will ensure that regulated online services can identify, mitigate, and manage risks to users, and that these services are safe by design – especially for children.

## Purpose and Context

Ofcom's 2022 ethnographic research report, [Risk factors that may lead children to harm online](#), identified a key risk factor: children bypassing age assurance measures on social media apps or sites. For example, using a false date of birth to access services and content while under the minimum age requirement. This can put them at greater risk of encountering age-inappropriate or potentially harmful content.

To explore this further – and given the lack of robust data from online platforms – Ofcom commissioned [a pilot quantitative study in 2022](#) to estimate the proportion of children with a false 'user age' on their profile, making them appear older than they actually are. Due to the complexity of the analysis, the study provided a robust estimate of the minimum number of children whose user age was older than their real age. In 2023, Ofcom sought to conduct this research again on an ongoing basis with various improvements, which became 'Ofcom's Children's Online User Ages Tracker'.

Further details on each wave of data collected to date is provided below.

## Objectives and methodology

Since the pilot study, the primary aim of this research has been to understand children's user ages on various online services and the extent to which they bypass age assurance measures.

To achieve this, Ofcom commissioned quantitative research to estimate the proportion of children with online profiles showing a "user age" that makes them appear older than they actually are.

For all the apps/sites included in the Children's User Age questionnaire, users must be at least 13 years old to create a profile (except Vimeo, which required a minimum age of 16). Online profiles with user ages of 16+ and 18+ mark the points at which platforms grant access to certain features and functionalities that younger children cannot access. Examples include the ability to use direct messaging when at age 16 and access adult content when at age 18. Therefore, the research focused on:

- Children aged 8-12 with an online user age of at least 13
- Children aged 8-15 with an online user age of at least 16
- Children aged 8-17 with an online user age of at least 18

The study examined ten platforms<sup>1</sup> identified as the most used among children aged 8-17 in various Ofcom research.<sup>2</sup> To ensure comparability across waves, the same list of platforms has been maintained from Waves 1-4.

## Research waves to date

- Pilot (2022) – Ofcom commissioned a pilot quantitative study, conducted by Yonder Consulting, to assess children’s user ages at that time to estimate the proportion of children that have online profiles with ‘user ages’ that make them appear older than they are. The research focused on six platforms identified as the most used among children aged 8-17 in Ofcom’s Media Literacy research. The sample was based on a quota of 1,000 social media users aged 8-17.
- Wave 1 (2023) – Ofcom repeated the research with YouGov, making several changes based on learnings from the pilot to achieve clearer and more robust findings. Therefore, comparisons should not be made to the 2022 pilot data. Changes included, age calculations, collection of demographic data, and platforms asked about.<sup>3</sup> The sample consisted of 1,806 social media users aged 8-17.
- Waves 2 and 3 (2024) – The research was conducted twice (waves 2 and 3) using the same methodology as Wave 1. Only two changes were made to Wave 2; no further modifications were made in Wave 3. Wave 2 sample included 1,808 social media users aged 8-17 and Wave 3 included 1,7709 social media users aged 8-17.
- Wave 4 (2025) – The fourth wave retained the core survey design but added two new questions to improved data collection and analysis. The sample consisted of 1,793 social media users aged 8-17.

For more information about each study and access to research materials, please follow the link [here](#).

## Why we are ceasing the tracker

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We are ceasing the current Children’s Online User Ages Tracker survey, with no further waves being conducted (the last survey was Wave 4), as it is no longer fit for purpose. Considering the changing online landscape and the implementation of Ofcom’s Protection of Children codes, tracking and estimating a child’s ‘user age’ using the same methodology is no longer feasible. This is because the approaches to age assurance differ between platforms, and it is therefore not possible to consistently and accurately estimate a child’s ‘user age’.

Given the importance of understanding the effectiveness of age assurance on online services, we will continue to monitor the evolving landscape. We will continue to collect data as part of Ofcom’s broader research programmes, fulfilling our duties under the Online Safety Act and enhancing our understanding of children’s experiences online.

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<sup>1</sup> These platforms include YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Discord, Pinterest, Twitch, X/Twitter, and Vimeo.

<sup>2</sup> Ofcom’s Children’s Media Literacy Tracker and the Online Experiences Tracker (W2) were examined to judge which online services were most used among children ages 8-17. More information about these trackers can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> For further details on changes made to the questionnaire, please refer to the [technical report](#).

## Further information

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If you have any questions or would like any further information, please contact [market.research@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:market.research@ofcom.org.uk).