



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on September 16, 2023

TikTok Dealt \$368 Million Fine for Breaking European Data Privacy Rules

TikTok was [dealt a blow](#) Friday, as European regulators fined the popular social media app \$368 million over its alleged failure to protect the privacy of children, marking the first occasion in which the company has faced disciplinary action for failing to abide by Europe's data privacy rules.

The effort against TikTok was led by Ireland's Data Protection Commission, which takes a chief regulation role for Big Tech firms that have European headquarters. According to NBC News, the commission announced it was fining TikTok 345 million euros for violations going back to 2020.



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Per the commission's investigation, TikTok's signup process for teenagers involved settings that made accounts public by default, meaning anyone on the platform would be able to view the accounts of minors and comment on their content.

The commission also contends that TikTok's "family pairing" feature, which is intended for parents to manage the settings of their children's accounts, isn't as strict as it should be, as it allows adults to direct messages 16- and 17-year-olds without their consent, while encouraging teens to choose more "privacy intrusive" features while doing things such as posting videos.

TikTok disagreed with the decision and with the amount of the fine, arguing that it had made changes before the probe even began back in September 2021, such as making accounts for users 16 and under private by default and shutting down direct messaging functions for those aged 13-15.

"Most of the decision's criticisms are no longer relevant as a result of measures we introduced at the start of 2021 — several months before the investigation began," wrote Elaine Fox, TikTok's head of privacy for Europe.

NBC News further reported:

The Irish watchdog also examined TikTok's measures to verify whether users are at least 13 but found they didn't break any rules.

The regulator is still carrying out a second investigation into whether TikTok complied with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation when it transferred users' personal information to China, where its owner, ByteDance, is based.

TikTok has faced accusations it poses a security risk over fears that users' sensitive information could end up in China. It has embarked on a project to localize European user data to address those concerns: opening a data center in Dublin this month, which will be the first of three ... on the continent.



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TikTok isn't the only app the Irish regulator has targeted over the past year. Meta, along with its subsidiaries Instagram and WhatsApp, have faced major fines.

TikTok has been under investigation by the U.S. government for years due to its ties to Communist China. The platform's parent company, ByteDance, is known for recruiting former Communist Party officials and giving them preference in hiring. That includes those with ties to the Chinese military.

Moreover, the founder of ByteDance [vowed](#) to use the company to "promote socialist core values." In fact, the CCP now has an official stake in the firm.

President Donald Trump tried to take on TikTok, signing an executive order in August of 2020 banning any U.S. transactions with ByteDance. The ban on the app was blocked by a federal judge, however, and then revoked by Joe Biden in June 2021.

FBI Director Christopher Wray is one of many voices within the federal government describing TikTok as being controlled by the Chinese government.

In an [article](#) for The New American, Angeline Tan explained how Beijing uses TikTok to influence American citizens. "AI enables Beijing to study and categorize a user before surmising his or her motivations," Tan writes. "Data is power, and TikTok taps into data to curate content. This curated content then propels people to behave in specific ways. TikTok's influence is greater among the impressionable, young user demographic base."

In other words, TikTok uses its algorithm to deliver to its users content that furthers China's aims, tailored in a way to appeal to users' particular interests. The app has billions of downloads to date, and is especially popular with younger users — one-third of TikTok users are under 14.

And there is another important consideration about prolonged TikTok use that is drawing attention: the risk of developing "[TikTok Brain](#)," a term some researchers are now using to describe the shortened attention span conditioned by the short, super-stimulating video format of TikTok and related platforms such as YouTube Shorts.

John Hutton, director of the Reading & Literacy Discovery Center at Cincinnati Children's Hospital, described TikTok as a "dopamine machine" that trains the user's brain to continuously seek the stimulation of scrolling through the reels found on the platform.

"A flood of dopamine reinforces cravings for something enjoyable, whether it's a tasty meal, a drug or a funny TikTok video," according to [The Wall Street Journal](#), adding that this brain conditioning makes it difficult for people, particularly young people, "to participate in activities that don't offer instant gratification."

A number of countries have banned TikTok. The largest among them was India, although the ban lasted for less than a month in April 2019. Other countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, have banned it on government devices — as have several American states and municipalities.



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