



**An Bille um Sheirbhísí Comrádaíochta Intleachta
Saorga (Cosaint Leanaí), 2026**
**Artificial Intelligence Companion Services (Protection of
Children) Bill 2026**

Meabhrán Míniúcháin
Explanatory Memorandum



**AN BILLE UM SHEIRBHÍSÍ COMRÁDAÍOCHTA
INTLEACHTA SAORGA (COSAINTE LEANAÍ), 2026
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE COMPANION SERVICES
(PROTECTION OF CHILDREN) BILL 2026**

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

Purpose of Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to protect children under the age of 16 from the risks associated with artificial intelligence systems that are designed to simulate friendship, companionship, emotional support, romantic relationships or other human relationships.

The Bill is intended to address the emergence of so-called “AI companions”, “AI friends”, “AI partners” and comparable chatbot services that are designed to encourage prolonged interpersonal engagement between a user and an artificial intelligence system. There is a particular concern about the rise of anthropomorphic AI chatbots. The legislation recognises that children, by reason of their age and developmental stage, may be particularly vulnerable to emotional manipulation, social dependency, inappropriate influence and other harms arising from such systems.

The Bill establishes a prohibition on the making available of specified AI companion services and intimate AI services to children under 16 years of age. It places legal obligations on providers to implement age-assurance measures and empowers Coimisiún na Meán to supervise and enforce compliance.

The Bill also amends the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022 so that the provision of prohibited AI companion services to children may be treated as an online safety risk and regulated through Online Safety Codes.

The legislation is intended to complement and operate consistently with:

- the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022;
- the Digital Services Act (Regulation (EU) 2022/2065);
- the General Data Protection Regulation;
- the Data Protection Act 2018;
- the Artificial Intelligence Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689); and
- future European Union measures relating to child safety in digital services.

Contents of Bill

PART 1

Preliminary and General

Section 1 - Short title, citation and commencement

This section provides that the Act may be cited as the *Artificial Intelligence Companion Services (Protection of Children) Act 2026*.

The section further provides for commencement by Ministerial Order. This allows sufficient time for providers, regulators and public bodies to prepare for implementation and enables different provisions to be commenced at different times if required.

Section 2 - Interpretation

This section contains the principal definitions used throughout the Act.

The definition of “AI chatbot” is intended to capture conversational AI systems regardless of the underlying technology used.

The definition of “AI companion service” is directed towards systems designed primarily to simulate companionship, friendship, emotional support or ongoing social engagement rather than ordinary informational chatbots.

The definition of “intimate AI service” targets systems designed to simulate romantic, partner or family relationships.

The section also defines the terms “child”, “Coimisiún na Meán”, “Minister” and “provider”.

The definitions have been drafted to focus on the design, development and marketing of a service rather than solely on how individual users may choose to interact with it.

Section 3 - Designation of prescribed services

This section enables the Minister, following consultation with Coimisiún na Meán, to designate additional categories of AI chatbot service as AI companion services.

The purpose of the power is to ensure that the legislation remains technologically neutral and can adapt to future developments in artificial intelligence without requiring primary legislation to be amended on each occasion.

The Minister must be satisfied that a category of service creates a substantial risk of emotional manipulation or inappropriate social dependency in children before making such regulations.

PART 2

Prohibitions relating to children

Section 4 - Prohibition on making AI companion services available to children

This section establishes the central prohibition contained in the Bill.

Providers are prohibited from making AI companion services available to persons under the age of 16 years.

The policy objective is to prevent children from engaging with chatbot systems designed to simulate substitute social relationships.

Section 5 - Prohibition on making intimate AI services available to children

This section prohibits providers from making available intimate AI services to children.

The provision is intended to prevent children from accessing chatbot services designed to assume the role of a romantic partner, spouse, family member or equivalent personal relationship.

The section reflects the view that children should not be exposed to artificial systems specifically engineered to replicate intimate interpersonal relationships.

Section 6 - Prohibition on targeted promotion

This section prohibits the advertising, recommendation or promotion of prohibited services to children.

The provision also prohibits the use of algorithmic recommendation systems, behavioural advertising and profiling techniques to promote prohibited services to child users.

The objective is to ensure that providers cannot circumvent the intent of the legislation through marketing practices.

Section 7 - Requirement to operate age-assurance measures

This section requires providers to adopt appropriate and proportionate measures to determine whether a user is under the age of 16 years.

The section expressly provides that age verification cannot rely solely on self-declaration of age.

Providers are further required to prevent access by children once a determination has been made that the user is under the relevant age threshold.

The section requires age-assurance measures to operate consistently with data protection law.

Section 8 - Duty of transparency

This section requires providers to ensure that AI chatbots are clearly identified as artificial intelligence systems.

The purpose of the provision is to ensure that users understand that they are interacting with a machine-generated system rather than a human being.

The requirement applies regardless of whether the service falls within the category of an AI companion service.

Section 9 - Prohibition on anthropomorphic representation

This section prohibits providers from falsely representing that an AI system:

- is a natural person;
- possesses consciousness;
- possesses legal personality; or
- experiences human emotions.

The purpose of the section is to prevent deceptive representations which may mislead users regarding the nature of the technology.

The section does not prohibit fictional characters or creative interfaces provided that they do not falsely claim genuine human attributes.

PART 3

Enforcement

Section 10 - Functions of Coimisiún na Meán

This section designates Coimisiún na Meán as the authority responsible for monitoring and enforcing compliance with the Act.

The provision ensures that enforcement responsibilities are integrated within the existing online safety framework rather than requiring the establishment of a separate regulator.

Section 11 - Information notices

This section empowers Coimisiún na Meán to require providers to furnish information reasonably necessary for the performance of its functions.

The power is intended to facilitate investigations and compliance assessments.

Section 12 - Compliance notices

This section empowers Coimisiún na Meán to issue compliance notices where it is satisfied that a provider has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with the Act.

Compliance notices may require corrective measures to be taken within specified periods.

Section 13 - Administrative financial sanctions

This section applies the administrative sanctions framework available under the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022 to contraventions of the Act.

The intention is to avoid creating a duplicate penalties regime while ensuring that effective enforcement measures are available.

Section 14 - Offences

This section creates criminal offences for:

- knowingly making prohibited services available to a child;
- knowingly providing false or misleading information to Coimisiún na Meán; and
- failing to comply with a compliance notice without reasonable excuse.

The offences are designed to target serious and deliberate non-compliance.

Section 15 - Penalties

This section specifies the penalties applicable upon conviction for offences under the Act.

The section provides for penalties on both summary conviction and conviction on indictment, reflecting the seriousness of deliberate breaches.

PART 4

Amendment of the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022

Section 16 - Amendment of Act of 2022

This section provides that the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022 is amended in accordance with Part 4.

Section 17 - Online safety risk to children

This section inserts a reference to AI companion services into the interpretation provisions of the 2022 Act.

The purpose is to ensure consistency between the two legislative schemes.

Section 18 - Harmful online content

This section provides that the making available of prohibited AI companion services to children constitutes an online safety risk to children for the purposes of the 2022 Act.

The practical effect is that such services may become subject to Online Safety Codes and related enforcement mechanisms.

Section 19 - Online Safety Codes

This section empowers Coimisiún na Meán to prepare Online Safety Codes dealing specifically with AI chatbot services.

Possible matters addressed by such Codes include:

- age-assurance requirements;
- parental controls;
- transparency requirements;
- complaints procedures;
- risk-management obligations;
- service-design standards; and
- audit and reporting requirements.

The section recognises that detailed technical requirements may change over time and are more appropriately addressed through codes than primary legislation.

Section 20 - Directions

This section authorises Coimisiún na Meán to issue directions requiring providers to take specified steps to secure compliance.

Possible measures include:

- ceasing provision of a service to children;
- implementing stronger age-assurance arrangements;
- disabling particular chatbot personas; and
- taking other specified compliance measures.

The section provides the regulator with a flexible enforcement tool where immediate action is necessary.

PART 5

Miscellaneous

Section 21 - Regulations

This section confers a general regulation-making power on the Minister.

The power is intended to facilitate the effective operation of the Act and to address technical or procedural matters that may arise after enactment.

The section also contains the standard requirement that regulations be laid before each House of the Oireachtas.

Section 22 - Review

This section requires the Minister to conduct a review of the operation of the Act within three years of commencement.

The review must be laid before each House of the Oireachtas and must consider:

- the effectiveness of the legislation;
- developments in artificial intelligence technologies;
- enforcement experience; and
- whether additional legislation is required.

The purpose of the review mechanism is to ensure that the legislation remains effective in a rapidly evolving technological environment.

Human Rights and Constitutional considerations

The Bill seeks to balance the rights of children to protection from harmful online services with the rights of providers to conduct a business and the rights of users to receive information.

The restrictions imposed by the Bill are confined to services designed to simulate companionship or intimate relationships and apply only in respect of persons under the age of 16 years. The legislation is intended to pursue the legitimate objective of child protection in a proportionate manner consistent with the Constitution and the State's obligations under European Union law and the European Convention on Human Rights.

*Malcolm Byrne, TD,
Meán Fómhair, 2026.*