



Theo Bertram, Director of Government Relations and Public Policy for Europe, TikTok – Opening Statement to Committee on Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht, 19/05/2021

On behalf of TikTok, I thank the Chair and members of the committee for inviting us to attend today. We are grateful for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Committee on the draft Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill and I am happy to answer questions about the various topics that you will see we have raised in our 20-page submission.

I'm disappointed I can't be there today in person. I may not sound like it but I am an Irish citizen thanks to my mother and I would spend school holidays as a boy crossing the ferry back to Dublin. I am now very proud to take my own kids back to Ireland when I get the chance and for them to learn about my grandfather, T W Moody, who was the late professor of modern Irish history at Trinity College Dublin, and after whom I am named Theo. From my family, I inherited a love of Irish literature and theatre and did my PhD on Samuel Beckett. Having worked in tech for the last decade or so, I am also proud that Dublin has become one of the most important global destinations for digital industry. As the director of government relations and public policy for Europe for Tik Tok, I am very pleased that Dublin is a major global hub for our business.

TikTok is a global, short-form video platform that provides its users with a vibrant, creative experience in a fun and safe environment. Our mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy.

Since beginning our journey in Ireland, we have gone from strength to strength. Our EMEA Trust & Safety Hub established in Dublin in 2020 - one of only three such centres around the globe - is led by global Head of Trust & Safety and Kildare native Cormac Keenan, with many senior global leaders based here. The Hub is designed to enhance TikTok's localised approach to content policy while also supporting our ongoing objective to put safety at the heart of all that we do. Members of the committee may have noted our recent announcement about our European Transparency and Accountability Centre based in Ireland, which will allow experts and policymakers like yourselves to come and see first-hand how we moderate and deliver content. A newly established European data privacy team is also based here, focused on upholding the highest standards of data protection and overseen by the Irish Data Protection Commission.

TikTok has hired over 1,000 people in the last year, bringing its total headcount in Ireland to over 1100, and our ambition is to continue growing our presence here to include opening a permanent office in Dublin. We have also announced our intention to establish a data centre in Ireland by 2022, a further \$500m investment that will create hundreds of jobs and ultimately become the home of European user data.

TikTok is also dedicated to protecting our users from mis- and dis- information on the platform. In fact, we were one of the first platforms to create a Covid Information Hub dedicated to disseminating information from the WHO, and we are actively working with the Irish government and Irish health authorities to build awareness of the importance of vaccines in the fight against Covid-19 and to dispel any related misinformation in Ireland.



Youth empowerment and education is a huge focus for us, and our Youth Portal is a place where teens and their families can build their digital literacy skills as part of the growing TikTok community. TikTok is also the lead sponsor of this year's St Patrick's Festival and we are contributing half a million euro to various community aspects to this year's campaign to support local artists and live events.

Ensuring a safe online experience is of paramount importance at TikTok. Our platform is designed to inspire creativity and joy, and we know people are at their most creative when they feel safe, and that is why we support the objectives of the draft legislation. TikTok welcomes the systemic approach to regulation outlined, one that looks at systems and processes rather than individual pieces of content.

TikTok is also encouraged by the Bill's commitment to a proportionate, consistent and fair approach that recognises the different nature of regulated services and the rapidly evolving technological environment. There is an important balance between online safety and protecting fundamental rights such as free expression, and the enshrinement of democratic values within the proposed Media Commission's constitution is a positive step in that respect, helping to strike the right balance from the outset.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to discuss these issues today and I look forward to answering any questions they may have regarding our written submission or about TikTok's vibrant operations in Ireland.