

Italian parents take Meta and TikTok to court over daughter's death

The family of Rossella Ugues, 12, who took her own life, are backing the country's first class action seeking a social media ban for under-14s



Rossella Ugues slipped into a "dark and gloomy" online world before her death in 2024, her parents said

CLAUDIA GRECO/REUTERS

Tom Kington, Rome

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The parents of a 12-year-old girl who took her own life after succumbing to harmful material online have backed Italy's first class action aimed at introducing a social media ban for under-14s.

Rossella Ugues, from Asti, northern Italy, switched from being a cheerful, outgoing schoolgirl to a brooding depressive in a matter of months before she killed herself in 2024.

After her death, her parents found that she had downloaded gloomy images from the internet, written messages about suicide and set up an Instagram account called "Just a dead pers0n".

She also played an online game encouraging people to list the attributes they were most insecure about. "She listed her laugh, despite her friends telling her it was beautiful," her mother, Irene Roggero, told The Times.



Irene Roggero, Rossella's mother

CLAUDIA GRECO/REUTERS

When her parents realised she was thinking of self-harm, they contacted a psychologist, only to have Rossella's problems written off as normal adolescent stress. "That was the autumn of 2023, then things moved fast," said Roggero. Her daughter took her own life on February 2 the following year.

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Rossella's mother and father are among a group of Italian parents taking Meta, the owner of Instagram and Facebook, and TikTok to court to prevent them from targeting young users.

The case is being championed by the Italian parents' group Moige, which wants a [ban on social media](#) for under-14s, an end to "predatory algorithms" that allegedly inundate children with harmful content and more warnings for triggering content posted online.

"It's ridiculous that a harmful product is being used by minors without parental consent. They have tougher rules for toys," Antonio Affinita, the head of the parents' group, said.

The parents say that young users become addicted to the release of the chemical dopamine in the brain triggered by "likes" or notifications as they use social media.

Tonino Cantelmi, an expert advising the group, has warned that a young person's brain is not fully mature until the age of 25 and vulnerable until then.

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"Our first legal action is to stop the companies, then launch a class action case for compensation to pay for all the therapy needed, and for the loss of minors to suicide. It will be backed by thousands of parents," Affinita said. He added that he "really appreciated" plans in the UK to ban social media use for under-16s.

Meta and TikTok have denied the lawsuit's accusations that their platforms [harm young people](#). They claim they block and remove harmful content and that they help parents to screen what their children see.

"We know parents worry about the safety of their teens online, which is why we're consistently making changes to help protect teens," Meta said.

TikTok said: "We also continue to invest in safety measures to diversify recommended content, block potentially harmful searches and connect vulnerable users with support resources."

Affinita said: "The responses from the tech companies are non-responses. Their safeguards are just fig leaves to protect their algorithms."

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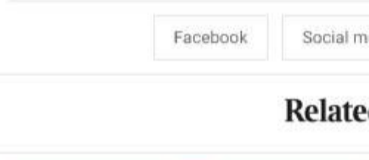
The first hearing at a Milan court is scheduled for November. Affinita said other parents' groups across Europe were preparing their own cases.

Roggero said she still could not believe her "smiling daughter with a great sense of humour" had slipped into a "dark, gloomy" world online. "There has to be a limit on age, there has to be a control of the algorithms. Social media can be so dangerous," she said. "The brain of a young girl is just not ready to defend itself against all of that."

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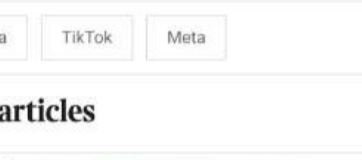
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