Facebook’s UK users will lose EU privacy protections next year



Facebook is moving its UK users out from under the strict privacy protections of the European Union, according to a report from *Reuters*. Users of the social media site, and of Instagram and WhatsApp, will have to sign a terms of service agreement in the coming months with Facebook’s headquarters in California, instead of its European branch based in the Republic of Ireland. Moving the user agreements to the US means that UK users will no longer be covered by data policies crafted to adhere to the EU’s stringent privacy regime.

This change is similar to the one Google made earlier this year. It’s meant to avoid a situation where UK citizens are no longer citizens of the European Union, but have agreements based in an EU country, where Facebook is subject to the EU’s data protection laws. Users will still be protected by the UK’s data privacy laws, which currently mirror the EU’s GDPR.

“There will be no change to the privacy controls or the

services Facebook offers to people in the UK.”
Some UK privacy advocates are concerned the UK could eventually weaken its privacy laws once it’s outside the EU. The executive director of Open Rights Group said to *Reuters* that “[t]he bigger the company, the more personal data they hold, the more they are likely to be subject to surveillance duties or requirements to hand over data to the U.S. government.”

The worries aren’t founded on nothing. Back in 2018, the US passed the CLOUD Act, which makes it easier for the US government to share US companies’ data with foreign law enforcement (which UK agencies would count as).

There’s also the matter of bargaining. Because the UK will no longer be included in the EU’s trade agreements, the country will have to start making their own – and privacy advocates are worried about what protections the US may ask to be given up in negotiations.

Facebook’s UK branch told *Reuters* that “there will be no change to the privacy controls or the services Facebook offers to people in the UK,” but users of Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram will have to re-agree to the terms and conditions again, which Facebook will ask them to do sometime in the next six months.

https://www.theverge.com/2020/12/15/22177226/facebook-uk-users-california-based-privacy-terms-of-service-agreement