Google will let ‘experienced users’ keep sideloading Android apps

Google says that it’s softening its plan to require every Android developer — even outside of the Play Store — to verify their identity, a move which critics warned could kill sideloading for good. The company now says it’s developing a workflow to allow “experienced users” to install apps from unverified developers.

Mandatory verification for developers even outside the official Play Store was first announced this August, and would require developers to provide their legal name, address, email, and phone number, and in some cases even upload government ID. It drew criticism from groups like the Keep Android Open campaign and the open source app repository F-Droid, which argued the move “ends the ability for individuals to choose what software they run on the devices they own.”

That plan is still going ahead, with early access to the verification scheme launched yesterday, but Google has made an important concession. The company says it is now developing an “advanced flow that allows experienced users to accept the risks of installing software that isn’t verified.” This installation flow will include safeguards to protect people who are being coerced into installing a dangerous app, or tricked by a scammer, along with “clear warnings to ensure users fully understand the risks involved.”

Google is also working on a new developer account type for students and hobbyists, which won’t have to go through “full verification requirements,” but will only allow app installs

on “a limited number of devices.”

“Keeping users safe on Android is our top priority,” Android president Sameer Samat wrote on X. “Scammers rely on anonymity to scale their attacks. Right now, if we block a bad app, they can often just create a new app and try again. Verification stops this “whack-a-mole” cycle by requiring a real identity – making it much harder and costlier to repeatedly distribute harmful apps. This is an important change but we announced it early to get input. Some really good feedback received: Students need a path to learn, and users, especially power users, want to take more risk in what they install. We’re making changes to address both.”

Developer verification will roll out in 2026 for developers in Brazil, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand, before applying globally in 2027. It’s not the only big change on the horizon for Android: Google has struck a deal with Epic to end their lawsuit, which would see Android lower its developer fees, relax rules on payment methods, and introduce official “Registered” third-party app stores, though that deal is still pending approval from the judge handling the case.

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