



EU response News Inclusion

EU Opens Probe into Shein Over Child-Like Sex Dolls and Addictive Design

The European Commission launches a formal investigation into Shein, targeting its alleged sale of childlike sex dolls and potentially addictive platform design, risking massive fines under the Digital Services Act.

The European Commission has [opened a formal investigation into Shein, the Chinese fast-fashion behemoth](#), over the sale of illegal products on its platform — including sex dolls designed to resemble children — as well as allegations that the site is deliberately engineered to be addictive.

Brussels launched formal proceedings against the Singapore-headquartered retailer under the Digital Services Act, citing its addictive design, a lack of transparency in its recommendation algorithms, and the sale of illegal products, including what regulators described as child sexual abuse material.

The investigation centres on three distinct areas of concern. First, regulators will scrutinise addictive design features — such as reward systems that offer users points or incentives to encourage excessive engagement. Second, they will examine the sale of illegal goods, including child-like sex dolls that French authorities had flagged to prosecutors late last year. Third, the probe will assess how Shein recommends products to shoppers, with EU rules requiring platforms to clearly disclose the logic behind their algorithms and offer users at least one option that does not rely on personal profiling.

Henna Virkkunen, the Commission's executive vice-president for tech sovereignty, was unequivocal. "In the EU, illegal products are prohibited — whether they are on a store shelf or on an online marketplace," she said. "The Digital Services Act keeps shoppers safe, protects their wellbeing and empowers them with information about the algorithms they are interacting with."

The investigation marks a significant escalation in Brussels' scrutiny of Shein, which has faced mounting criticism in Europe

over its supply chains, environmental record and consumer safety standards. Founded in China in 2012 and now headquartered in Singapore, Shein has rapidly grown into a global fast-fashion powerhouse, selling mostly Chinese-made goods at bargain prices. It opened its first permanent European store — inside the iconic BHV department store in Paris — in November, a move that triggered protests and an online petition attracting more than 120,000 signatures.

Non-compliant platforms face fines of up to 6 per cent of their global annual turnover — a sum that could run to hundreds of millions of pounds given Shein's scale. The Commission may also impose interim measures or demand binding commitments from the company.

Shein insisted it had done nothing wrong and would cooperate. "Over the last few months, we have continued to invest significantly in measures to strengthen our compliance with the DSA," the company said in a statement. "These include comprehensive systemic-risk assessments and mitigation frameworks, enhanced protections for younger users, and ongoing work to design our services in ways that promote a safe and trusted user experience."

Ireland's media regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, is expected to play a supporting role in the investigation, given that Shein's European headquarters are based in Dublin.

The case follows similar proceedings against TikTok, where the Commission has already made a preliminary finding that the platform's addictive design breaches the same legislation. Brussels is also examining X over the deployment of its Grok artificial intelligence system. Regulators have made clear that Shein is not presumed guilty and that the opening of proceedings does not prejudge the outcome.