

# Information Regulator engages Facebook SA over privacy policy

South Africa's Information Regulator has announced that it met Facebook South Africa on Wednesday, 13 January 2021, to discuss its revised WhatsApp privacy policy.



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WhatsApp's revised private policy sparked a global outcry after the popular Facebook-owned messaging app alerted its 2 billion users to accept the new terms if they wanted to continue using it.

According to reports, WhatsApp will now share data with Facebook.

"As part of the Facebook family of companies, WhatsApp receives information from, and shares information with, this family of companies," Ars Technica quoted the new privacy policy.

"We may use the information we receive from them, and they may use the information we share with them, to help operate, provide, improve, understand, customise, support, and market our services and their offerings."

According to the Information Regulator, it is now in possession of the recently updated WhatsApp privacy policy furnished

by Facebook South Africa.

“In terms of the revised policy, it appears that there are different terms of service and privacy policies for users in the European countries and in non-European countries.”

The watchdog said it will be analysing whether the terms of service and the privacy policies indeed differs and applicable to users outside Europe and compliant with the Protection of Personal Information Act (PoPIA).

“The regulator will engage with Facebook after the completion of the analysis,” it said, adding that it remains committed to ensuring the protection of personal information of South African citizens.

The Information Regulator is, among others, empowered to monitor and enforce compliance by public and private bodies with the provisions of the PoPIA.

However, according to WhatsApp, the privacy policy update does not affect the privacy of the users’ messages with friends or family.

“We can’t see your private messages or hear your calls, and neither can Facebook. Neither WhatsApp nor Facebook can read your messages or hear your calls with your friends, family, and co-workers on WhatsApp,” the messaging app said this week.

“Whatever you share, it stays between you. That’s because your personal messages are protected by end-to-end encryption. We will never weaken this security and we clearly label each chat so you know our commitment.”

In addition, WhatsApp stated that it cannot keep logs of who everyone is messaging or calling, see the shared location and neither can Facebook.

“We don’t share your contacts with Facebook when you give us permission, we access only the phone numbers from your address book to make messaging fast and reliable, and we don’t share your contacts lists with the other apps Facebook offers,” its statement shared on its website read.

Meanwhile, it claims that groups remain private.

“We use group membership to deliver messages and to protect our service from spam and abuse. We don’t share this data with Facebook for ads purposes. Again, these private chats are end-to-end encrypted, so we can’t see their content.”

In addition, according to the app, users can still set messages to disappear.

“For additional privacy, you can choose to set your messages to disappear from chats after you send them.”

The Information Regulator's engagements with Facebook South Africa are ongoing.

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