

[Print subscriptions](#)

[Sign in](#)

[Search jobs](#)

[Search](#)

Europe edition

[The Guardian](#) - [Back to home](#)[The Guardian](#)

**Support the Guardian**

Fund independent journalism with €10 per month

[Support us](#)



[View image in fullscreen](#)

Ludivine Printz in the village of Seine-Port, which has voted to ban smartphones in public. Photograph: Magali Delporte/The Guardian

[France](#)

## Fighting the smartphone ‘invasion’: the French village that voted to ban scrolling in public

Seine-Port is introducing restrictions on phone use in streets, shops and parks – but young people say there’s little else to do



[Angelique Chrisafis](#) in *Seine-Port*

[@achrisafis](#)

Sat 10 Feb 2024 06.00 CET

- 
- 
-

**A** picture of a smartphone with a red line through it serves as a warning in the window of

a hairdresser's shop in a French village that has voted to ban people scrolling on their phones in public. "Everyone is struggling with too much screen time," said Ludivine, a cardiology nurse, as she had her hair cut into a bob, leaving her phone out of sight in her bag. "I voted in favour, this could be a solution."

Seine-Port, in the Seine-et-Marne area south of Paris, with a population of fewer than 2,000 people, last weekend voted yes in a [referendum](#) to restrict smartphone use in public, banning adults and children from scrolling on their devices while walking down the street, while sitting with others on a park bench, while in shops, cafes or eating in restaurants and while parents wait for their children in front of the school gates. Those who might check their phone's map when lost are instead being encouraged to ask for directions.



[View image in fullscreen](#)

Vincent Paul-Petit, the mayor of Seine-Port, who drove the ban. Photograph: Magali Delporte/The Guardian  
The village has also approved a charter for families on children's use of screens: no screens of any kind in the morning, no screens in bedrooms, no screens before bed or during meals. If parents of teenagers sign a written agreement not to give their child a smartphone before the age of 15, the town hall will provide the child with an old-fashioned handset for calls only.

"I'm totally in favour of this," said Ludivine, 34, who has two children aged one and four. "Some say it's an attack on freedoms but I don't think so. It's about raising awareness of the impact of phones in our lives.

"My one-year-old has zero screens. My four-year-old has no screens on a school day, and only ever for a short moment while the youngest is napping. A lot of children and adults are intoxicated by

screens – even babies in pushchairs scroll phones. This is about replacing that with more human contact. Before I had children, my TV was always on in the background; now I never switch it on.”

A total of 277 people turned out to vote – about 20% of the electoral register – with 54% in favour of the charter. The mayor, Vincent Paul-Petit, of the rightwing party Les Républicains, will now write a municipal decree on smartphone use, the first of its kind in [France](#). It is not enforceable by police – officers could not stop or fine people scrolling in the street because there is no national law against smartphones – but the mayor describes it as an incitement to stop scrolling and guidance for limiting phone use. Shopkeepers are being urged to put up stickers in windows and gently ask people to stop scrolling.



[View image in fullscreen](#)

Children walk by signs discouraging smartphone use outside the village school. Photograph: Magali Delporte/The Guardian

In the village bar, the restaurant manager Angélique da Silva said she was unlikely to ask customers to stop scrolling but she saw its purpose. “It’s an interesting idea for children,” she said. “But the younger generation don’t approve of this because if you take their phone away, they have nothing. They grew up with a phone in their hand, not like our generation.”

Smartphones and screen time are increasingly becoming a political issue in France. Emmanuel Macron said last month he would consult scientific experts to [“determine the best use of screens”](#) for young children, suggesting there could be bans or restrictions.



[View image in fullscreen](#)

Angélique da Silva at the Terrasse restaurant in Seine-Port. Photograph: Magali Delporte/The Guardian  
“I want to preserve public spaces from the smartphone invasion,” said Paul-Petit, the mayor. “It’s not about banning all phones, it’s about proposing that people abstain from getting out their smartphones to scroll social media, play a game or watch videos in public places, which we want to preserve for social life.”

“This is about the addiction element of smartphones, whether games or social networks, when we can no longer tear our eyes from the screens. We’ll encourage a baker or butcher not to serve someone who comes in scrolling on their phone: if they’re having a conversation on their phone, they can finish it outside, then come in and say hello.”



[View image in fullscreen](#)

Signs outside the village school. Photograph: Magali Delporte/The Guardian

He added: “Teenagers walking down the street almost all have their phone in their hand ... I understand that the word ‘ban’ can offend some people. But what is important is opening up a debate.”

Noémie, a psychologist waiting for her eight-year-old daughter outside the village school, was in favour of limiting scrolling. She said: “Recently in a waiting room, I brought books and dolls for my daughter to play with and everyone congratulated me that she wasn’t on a screen.”



[View image in fullscreen](#)

Merry Landouzy with her son Tao.

Merry Landouzy, a school support worker for children with disabilities who has 10-year-old twins, had not voted. “Whether we like it or not, screens are part of this generation’s lives,” she said. “Ultimately, if we occupy kids with fun activities, particularly outside, they don’t actually want to be on screens. My daughter is a footballer and prefers to be outside. It’s about what alternative activities we can provide.”

Young people in the village complained there were not enough facilities for teenagers who had little to amuse them but their phones. The mayor has promised a film club, book exchanges and facilities for sport.

“There’s not much else to do – if you ban phones, you’d have to put in place real structures for young people’s leisure, sports and games,” said Nawel Deciron, 21, a history student and trainee teacher. Her mother, Fatiha, a former shop manager, said: “Parents are responsible and can deal with the issue of screens themselves.”

Adrien, 17, a high school student who wants to be an actor, said: “Smartphones are such an important part of our lives that I don’t think it’s possible to restrict them in the streets.” He has had a phone since the age of 11, listens to music on it in the street, uses it in school and uses the GPS for finding his way.

“It’s a generational thing,” said Jean-Luc Rodier, a recently retired postal worker who voted in favour of the restrictions. “I’m scared of artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, I’m not generally in favour of bans but this is about raising the alarm on phone use.”



[View image in fullscreen](#)

Jean-Luc Rodier, right, supports the ban but his son Gabriel sees no point in it. Photograph: Magali Delporte/The Guardian

His son Gabriel, 20, also a postal worker, was against it. “I spend five hours a day on my phone, which I think is reasonable. I also read proper books. But I like looking things up on my phone in the street. You can’t ban knowledge at your fingertips.”