



Video games and the protection of minors

A dynamic ecosystem at regulatory crossroads

International Conference on Reviewing Practices to Address Risks of
Online Gambling and Video Gaming for Children and Youth
22 September 2026, Valletta

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What is the EAO?

A partial agreement of the Council of Europe, set up in 1992, with its own member states (41 member states + the European Commission)

What does the EAO do?

Provide essential market and legal information on the European audiovisual industry.

Until recently, this meant:

- Television
- Video-on-demand (VOD) services
- Cinema
- Video-sharing platforms (VSPs)

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Now, this means:

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- Video-sharing platforms (VSPs)
- **Video games** (pilot project)



Legal challenges and market dynamics in the video games sector,
IRIS, European Audiovisual Observatory, Strasbourg, November
2024

Overview of the video game sector

- Market overview
- Main stakeholders

Definitions

- What constitutes a video game

Securing and sustaining video games

- IP protection
- Piracy issues
- Public support

User and consumer protection

- Data protection
- Protection of minors
- Accessibility and inclusion
- National security

Key figures Europe (2025)¹

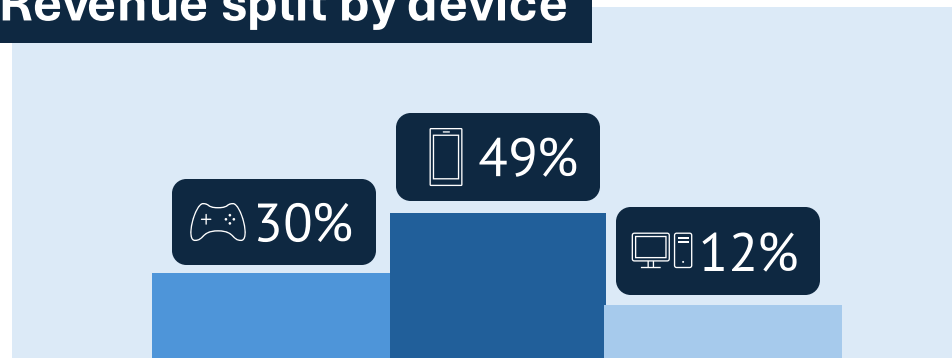
Revenue EUR 29,7 billion
from EUR 21 billion in 2018

Number of players 199 million
(aged 6-75 – 51% of that age group)

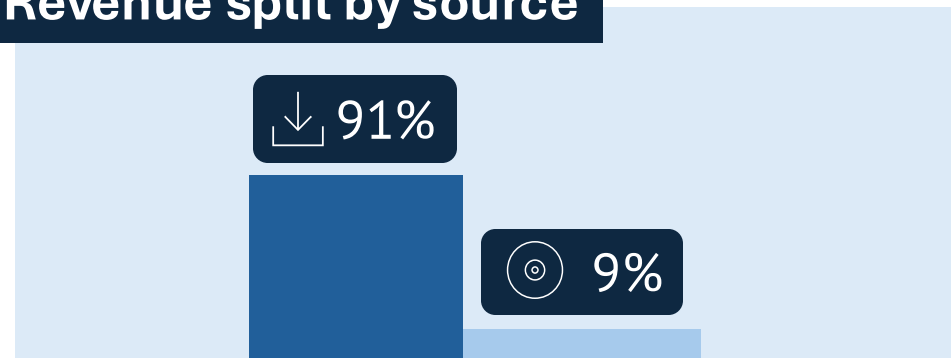
Studios 8,700

Employees 123,000

Revenue split by device



Revenue split by source



¹ Based on Video Games Europe's report [All about Video Games – European Key Facts 2025](#).

Video games Benefits and risks

Benefits

- Important for freedom of expression;
- Build social connections, reduce loneliness;
- Improve critical thinking, teamwork and communication;
- Encourage creativity;
- Support learning and education.

Risks

- Exposure to content inappropriate for minors
- Potential for excessive screen time;
- Exposure to toxic behaviours, harassment, cyberbullying, or predatory contact in online multiplayer environments;
- Unintended or excessive spending via microtransactions and dark patterns targeting younger users.

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Protection of minors and video games – A shift in focus

Industry and regulatory discourse has evolved from concentrating primarily on violent content to addressing broader systemic risks: game duration, online toxicity, monetisation mechanics, and data privacy.

Video games What are the risks?

In-game monetisation and simulated gambling

Loot boxes and microtransactions:

- Mechanism where players purchase randomized virtual items;
- Concerns for children lacking full comprehension of the financial costs involved;
- Features like loot boxes or secondary market skin trading heavily blur the line between video gaming and gambling.

Video games Existing tools for the protection of minors

Industry-led solutions

Age Classification Systems (PEGI, USK):

Serves as the primary European framework informing parents about age suitability and specific content descriptors (e.g., violence, gambling, in-game purchases).

Parental Control Tools:

Console- and platform-level controls allowing parents to limit screen time, restrict spending, block online interactions, and filter age-inappropriate titles.

Community Moderation:

Deployment of automated text/voice filters, reporting systems, and active moderation to curb toxic behaviour and enforce code-of-conduct standards in online lobbies.

PEGI Current tools

Evolution of the PEGI's age icons



Introduction of content descriptors



PEGI Recent adaptation of the age rating criteria

2026 expansion of age rating criteria

The presence of some of these features in video games, like in-game purchases and paid random items, but now they will formally be tied to specific age categories

Purchase of in-game content

games with time-limited or quantity-limited offers will be classified with a **PEGI 12**, games with NFTs or blockchain-related mechanisms will be **PEGI 18**.

Paid random items

the default rating will be **PEGI 16** if the game contains paid random items (and in some cases they can be a **PEGI 18**).

Play-by-appointment

mechanisms that reward returning to the game (e.g. daily quests) will get a **PEGI 7**. If these mechanisms punish players for not returning (e.g. by losing content or reducing progress) they will become **PEGI 12**.

Safe online gameplay

if games contain entirely unrestricted communication features (e.g. no blocking or reporting), they will be **PEGI 18**.

Protecting minors from digital harms

Growing momentum for more protection online

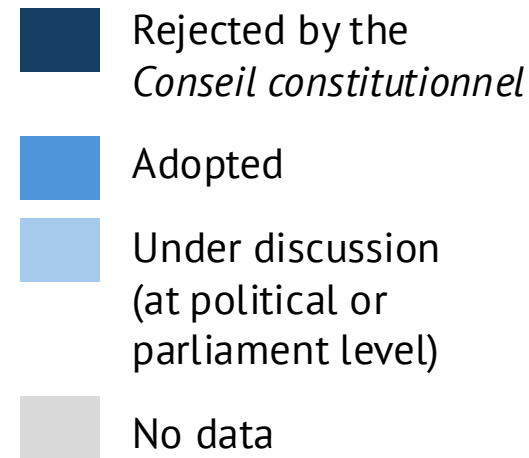
Context

Growing momentum at the political level to better protect minors online, focusing in most cases on social media but also potentially affecting some video games.

Impact on video games

This introduces a risk of fragmentation and legal uncertainty regarding certain video games.

Nation situations with regard to age bans on social media



Source: UNICEF report *Drawing a line in digital spaces: Taking stock of current and proposed age-based restrictions for social media*, March 2026 and additional desk research

UK social media ban What of video games?

The UK government will ban social media for **under-16s**, with further restrictions of certain harmful features for under 18s.¹

Targets

Major user-to-user social platforms with algorithmic recommendations (e.g. TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, X)

Exclusions

Pure messaging services (e.g. WhatsApp, Signal) and dedicated educational or news platforms

Timeline

Planned implementation for Spring 2027

Enforcement

Ofcom

Video games are explicitly exempted from an outright ban, but gaming platforms will be subject to **strict feature restrictions**:

- Ban on stranger communications;
- Livestreaming restrictions;
- Stronger age verifications;
- Protections by default for 16-17 year-olds.

¹ GOV.UK, [Guidance – Fact sheet: New rules to protect children online \(Updated 17 July 2026\)](#).

At the EU level What of video games?

Video games are currently covered transversally by existing legal framework:

in force

DSA

Rules to make the online environment safer

DMA

Rules to ensure high competitiveness in EU Digital markets

AI Act

Rules regarding AI systems

GDPR

Rules regarding data protection

to come

DFA

Rules against unfair digital practices

**OMNIBUS
PACKAGE**

Set of legal proposals amending existing acts to simplify the legal framework

Digital Services Act What of video games?

DSA

to strengthen the protection of fundamental rights online and better protect minors

SAFER
DIGITAL
SPACE

STRONGER
FUNDA-
MENTAL
RIGHTS
PROTECTION

ENHANCED
PROTECTION
FOR MINORS

EASY
FLAGGING
OF ILLEGAL
CONTENT

AD
TRANSPA-
RENCY

VIDEO
GAMES
?

Some games are at the crossroads:

Roblox: On August 31, 2026, the European Commission named Roblox a Very Large Online Platform (VLOP) because it has more than 45 million active monthly users in the EU (Article 33 DSA).

Video games meeting the criteria of Article 33 DSA would fall under the scope of the DSA, not as video games, but as VLOPs.

Digital Fairness Act What of video games?

DFA

to tackle
problematic
Practices

Expected
Autumn 2026

DARK
PATTERNS

ADDICTIVE
DESIGN OF
DIGITAL
PRODUCTS

UNFAIR
PERSONALISA
TION
PRACTICE

MISLEADING
MARKETING
BY
INFLUENCERS

UNFAIR
PRACTICES
RELATED TO
PRICE
MARKETING

ISSUES WITH
DIGITAL
CONTRACTS

VIDEO
GAMES?



Thank you!

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