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# Virtual worlds

How video games are helping shape Europe's digital future

an event organised by





# Virtual worlds day 01



## MODERATOR

**Per Strömback**, Spokesperson at Dataspelebranschen (the trade organisation for Swedish game developers, publishers and distributors)

## PANEL

**MEP Laurence Farreng**, (Renew, FR)

**Rehana Schwinniger-Ladak**, European Commission, Head of Unit, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, Interactive Technologies [DG CNECT], Unit for Digital for Culture and Education (CNECT.G.2)

**Johanna Pirker**, Professor at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and Graz University of Technology

**Sjoerd de Jong**, Director of Developer Community, Epic Games

**Konrad Tollmar**, Director of Research at SEED (Electronic Arts subsidiary)

**Paweł Miechowski**, Communications Lead, 11 Bit Studios

## How video games contribute to technological developments

**MEP Farreng highlighted that there was a need for the European Union to pay more attention to the huge potential of Europe's video games industry in terms of culture, art, innovation and Europe's technological sovereignty. This innovation is crucial for the future of the EU and is a great strategic enjeux vis-a-vis the US and China.**

**Head of Unit, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, Interactive Technologies [DG CNECT], Rehana Schwinniger-Ladak** talked about the huge potential for jobs that new tech is creating.

There will be an upcoming non-legislative initiative on Virtual Worlds.

The Commission stated that there is sufficient regulation and said the development of the industry should be supported. In terms of what needs to be done to boost the EU tech sector, it was highlighted that the lack of big EU players (e.g. platforms and related innovation ecosystems), fragmentation of the European industry, problems for start-ups to scale up and risk of killer acquisitions, lack of awareness and understanding of potential benefits and a skills shortage. Virtual worlds will need to reflect EU values and respect EU legislation; where people are safe, confident and empowered; that are open and interoperable; that promote growth and development of industry.



## Did you know?

The health sector uses VR technology from video games. Hiring VR teams to enhance products and services for surgical training.

A study has found that video games could be a useful educational tool for training surgeons.

VR headsets are used for simulations to help astronauts in mission preparation.

## Game development spurs innovation in new technologies way beyond video games

She added that studies are showing how the way we learn is changing and that both innovation and culture can be expanded through games.

**Sjoerd de Jong**, Director of Developer Community, Epic Games

It was highlighted that Epic Games' Unreal Engine has been used in thousands of games since 1995. It is free to use for everyone and investment in new features is accelerating adoption and innovation beyond games, including in the following sectors: Games, film, television, broadcast, live events, architecture, automotive, manufacturing, simulation, training, fashion and music. Engines like Unreal allow for high-quality visualisations only limited by imagination, representing an important tool which makes processes well beyond games faster, cheaper and more accessible.

The vision is that no company can do everything alone, and the future cycles have to be enabled. You can actually work with Unreal Engine without programming skills: It is possible, although there will be some limitations of course, and more complex games might require more advanced skills, but the creation of simpler games is attainable by almost everyone with relatively basic digital skills.

**Konrad Tollmar**, Director of Research at SEED (Electronic Arts subsidiary)

EA presented the cross-disciplinary R&D that SEED is working on to explore the future of interactive entertainment, from advanced avatars to cloth simulation and next-generation AI learning for games, highlighting that the AI used in games poses virtually no risks for human health and safety but also provides innovative ways of

## Did you know?

**Video games' virtual worlds and VR technology bring cultural heritage to life and facilitate access to culture for all.**

testing games, 'hunting' for bugs and errors or detect cheating.

Technology developed for games can be used to create new types of experiences, richer and more detailed experiences. It is unclear where this might lead, but the possibilities are exciting, and this is why SEED collaborated with universities around the world, providing a bridge between academia and industry, SEED's current academic partnerships:

- BAIR: UC Berkeley
- KTH: TMH, Robotics, Digital Future
- University of Houston
- University of Florence
- WASP WARA Media & Language
- York University

## Spotlight on This War of Mine with Paweł Miechowski 11 Bit Studios

The infinite possibilities presented by video games as a medium to deal with any issue, however difficult – creating experiences, posing challenges and questions for game players was highlighted in this session. A great European success story, This War of Mine is on the official education curriculum in Poland. It has also been added to the permanent collection in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in addition to having been part of temporary displays in several other institutions.

Projects highlighted by the Commission during their presentation:

### The INVICTUS Project

- <https://www.areteproject.eu/>
- [iv4xr-project.eu](https://www.iv4xr-project.eu/)
- <https://www.impacttedtech.eu>

**Johanna Pirker**, Professor at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and Graz University of Technology talked about the contribution of video games to innovation, saying that without games there would be no smartphones. She talked about the huge potential in Europe in the sector, but also referred to the issue of gender imbalance in games, which must be addressed.

Ms. Pirker said that when she was three years old, she couldn't read but she knew how to start up her father's DOS machine to play Prince of Persia.





**52%**  
of the European population between the ages of 6 and 64 plays video games

**Official inauguration of the "Virtual Worlds" exhibition**

**MEP Laurence Farreng:** "It is important to show that video games matter. With one in two European playing video games, this is part of everyday activity and inclusive regardless of age, gender and nationality. Video games should be at the centre of education. This is only the beginning – and important to see how Europe can benefit from video games and how video games can benefit from Europe."



**MEP Tomas Frankowski:** "Esports cannot be compared to or regulated as traditional sports. There is a window of opportunity to develop esports."

**MEP Ibán García del Blanco:** "There is a need to support an industry with huge potential that employs

nearly 100,000 people in the EU and supports other industries. The sector is often demonised but there are lots of positive things including benefits to players including concentration and focus. There is a need for more women in the sector and an adequately skilled workforce."

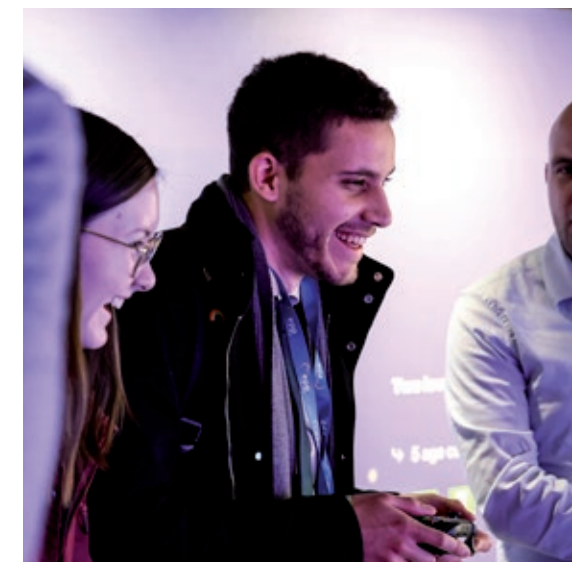


**Emma Ihre, Head of Sustainability, Embracer Group:** "Europe must be able to attract and retain the talent needed to make our incredibly diverse games. 2023 is the EU year of skills. Embracer Group and ISFE members look forward to working with the EU institutions to make sure we educate and train our students and workforce."



**MEP Viola von Cramon** acknowledged how useful video games can be for pedagogical support and life-long learning and that video games were pioneers in the digital transposition.

**Member of Commissioner Gabriel's cabinet, Lauriane Bertrand,** acknowledged the support that video games provides to society at large especially in the areas of healthcare and education, saying that video games are truly a force for good.



**A Wide range of technology and creative professionals collaborate on making a game**



# Virtual worlds day 02



## How video games in education prepare for the jobs of the future

### MODERATOR

**Shahneila Saeed**, Head of Education, Ukie (the association for UK Interactive Entertainment)

### PANEL

**MEP Ibán García del Blanco**, (S&D, ES): Introductory words

**Hans Martens**, Head of Digital Citizenship, European SchoolNet: New iteration of the Games in Schools project

**Prof. Anesa Hosein**, University of Surrey: How video games can help close the gender gap in STEM fields

**Liesbeth Last**, teacher: Practical uses of video games in the classroom

**Adam Seldow**, Senior Director of Education Partnerships, Roblox Game-based learning, assessment and Roblox

**MEP Alexis Georgoulis**, The Left, GR: Conclusion

**MEP Ibán García del Blanco:** "Video games present a huge opportunity for schools to create an engaging learning method that helps teamwork, creativity, memory, focus and can transform learning into something joyful. Learning by play led to positive results in students of all ages. Games can improve language learning, stimulate creativity, build new skills, boost digital literacy and digital skills."

Video games are an economic and cultural powerhouse that need to be understood – hence his pilot project in CULT committee in 2020, "understanding the value of a European video game society". The Commission is now preparing a comprehensive report and engaging with the sector, involving all stakeholders. It was highlighted

that the CULT INI report on esports is calling for the creation of a supportive plan, a long-term game strategy, for talents to be encouraged, to defend cultural diversity, to protect IP and to protect consumers.

**Hans Martens, Head of Digital Citizenship, European SchoolNet** announced the new iteration of the Games in Schools project. You don't need to be a gamer to bring games into your school...but there are so many pressures including a lack of infrastructure, the need to convince the school leadership and to adapt the existing curriculum.

It was announced that a new central piece of research will be launched this year to improve understanding of the educational benefits of video games to include

a survey, case studies and expert input. The study will also aim to establish the best games for teachers to use in the classroom as well as the obstacles and how to overcome them.

Please find the study here: <https://www.europeanschoolnetacademy.eu/courses/course-v1:GIS+GamesCourse+2023/about>



**Prof. Anesa Hosein, University of Surrey** presented her research on how video games can help close the gender gap in STEM fields. She elaborated that her research found that girls who play video games are 3x more likely to choose STEM subjects than girls who do not. Her personal experience echoed her findings. Her research also found that there is a levelling effect happening from playing video games with girls from a lower socio-economic background who play video games also more likely to go into STEM. It also provides children with those backgrounds a world view and open up new opportunities more generally.

Read more here: <https://www.isfe.eu/perspective/girls-who-play-video-games-are-three-times-more-likely-to-pursue-stem-careers-than-girls-who-dont/>

### Did you know?

Led by European SchoolNet on behalf of ISFE, the Games in Schools project trains teachers and educators across Europe on how to use video games as pedagogical support in the classroom.

#### The project's output includes:

- A Massive Open Online Course
- Peer-reviewed, teacher-created lesson plans
- A handbook for teachers on how to use video games for educational purposes

**Teacher, Liesbeth Last, from KU Leuven and VTI Roeselare (technical school)** followed on with an enthusiastic endorsement of the benefits of using video games in the classroom. She talked about the ways how games make learning more engaging, make it simpler to teach the usually difficult-to-reach students, and give the students a lot of self-confidence. She also spoke about how using games in her school had brought different ages of students together. Ms Last explained how she uses videogames to assist pupils learn vital skills like entrepreneurship needed to navigate a labour market transformed by technological change.

She called for game ambassadors at school to help make young game players responsible, to allow young gameplayers to develop training for teachers, to involve gameplayers in the teaching in class. She said that video games provided an immersive and deductive learning method and encouraged usually quiet pupils to

engage and speak up in class. She also observed increased motivation, improved problem-solving and communication.

Read more here: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a61edb7a803bb7a65252b2d/t/636e923606b61f6829557bac/1668190785189/GameDeveloperIndex2022WEBB.pdf>

**Game-based learning, assessment and Roblox (Adam Seldow, Senior Director of Education Partnerships, Roblox)**

Roblox highlighted the benefits of game-based learning: fun and engaging, promotes communication and collaboration and builds resilience. The challenges, that have been identified are that it's difficult to get it into classrooms, there is a lack of empirical evidence to show the value and there is of course the need for technology. Roblox' contribution to education: A Roblox community fund to help build games to launch in schools including "Mission Mars", "Roboco" and "Pathogen Patrol".

**Closing remarks by MEP Alexis Georgoulis (The Left, GR)**

**MEP Alexis Georgoulis** wrapped up the session by stating that it was a good moment, on International Women's Day 2023, to acknowledge that video games can help close the gender gap.

He reiterated that video games can help acquire skills and competences, transform teaching, help learners with special needs, increase inclusion and participation. He said we need to promote video games – to invest in the sector. Finally, he stated that there was a need to find a balance between playing in the digital space and in the physical space.



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## How video game companies are promoting female talent in top-tier competitions (also known as esports)



**47.8%**  
of European game players are women

**Laurence Farreng:** "With a focus on International Women's Day 2023, the panel presented the initiatives, the wins and the challenges facing video games and esports in the context of gender equality. It was highlighted that many of the issues were not exclusive of video gameplay but shared with or originated by social media or being an internet-endemic sector. There was a call to participants to encourage young girls to play esports in an environment that is free of toxicity at all levels of competition."

**Ann Becker, Head of Policy and Public Affairs ISFE** talked about how today about 22% of the workforce in the video games sector are women – with the industry aiming to grow that further. However, to put that figure in perspective, it is already above the number of women in the ICT sector as a whole (17% according to EU Commission data).

ISFE is a Corporate Ambassador of Women in Games, and a big achievement has been the launch of the Women in Games guide "Level Playing Field". It is a guide that aims at inspiring companies to do more

in terms of Women in the video game sector (representation in companies, in games, etc.) with examples of best practice and input from video game companies. WIG France has recently released an important guide on how to improve diversity in the sector. There are a lot more initiatives at the national level led by video games trade bodies.

<https://www.isfe.eu/games-in-society/our-diversity-pledges/>  
<https://www.womeningames.org/the-women-in-games-guide-building-a-fair-playing-field/>  
<https://www.isfe.eu/news/video-game-industry-establishes-universal-esports-principles-for-fun-fair-play/>

**Claudia Beaton, ESL Face IT Group - GG for All** is about anti-toxicity and is an ESL CSR initiative. GG for All is structured around 4 pillars:

- 1) Toxicity and fair play: Three years ago, the AI program Minerva was launched with the goal of moderating toxicity and bullying at the FACEIT platform, allowing the automatic moderation of toxic players. This is a game changer because, previously, moderation could only be achieved through human intervention.
- 2) Universal Participation: ESL advocates for marginalised populations to participate in esports as well.
- 3) Metal and Physical Well Being: There is collaboration with key esports players to promote messages to newcomers about the importance of focusing on their mental health.
- 4) Environmental impact: Meeting the Paris Agreement and reducing climate impact has also meant significant investment in sustainability.

Women players saw this as "the time has come" and they had been waiting for this opportunity for years.

**Charlie Sirc, ESL FACEIT Group** explained that Women's esports competitions or organisations typically have lower budgets as well as smaller sponsorships. The initiative's major goal was thus to make it equal. The competitions are open to everyone, but only a few



**32**

is the average age of women who play video games

women were participating, so ESL spoke with professional players to determine the biggest barrier, which resulted in the creation of ESL Impact. The barriers are discrimination and harassment, as well as abusive language, which causes many female gamers to switch games or simply stop competing. The circuit, therefore, is divided into seasons with two phases: online for six weeks, followed by in-person events for the top teams. Europe is the region that has sparked the most participation. Season 3 has officially begun, and ESL has raised the number of places available to teams in the EU divisions. Most of the teams will be multi-national.

**Daniel Ringland, Head of VALORANT Esports, EMEA:** "VALORANT, which had been in development for ten years, was released by Riot Games in mid-2020.

When VALORANT was launched, they wanted esports to be unique and diverse, which led to the development of Game Changers in 2021. Last year, the inaugural worldwide competition was held with a 500k prize fund. In EMEA alone, almost 1,000 women competed and/or worked on the competition. VALORANT was created with the intention of being more inclusive."



**Hege Botman's story:** Hege is a former professional player who spent almost two decades playing Counter-Strike, VALORANT, and League of Legends. She is a CSGO expert. She now works as an on-air analyst.

Hege made the decision to leave it to the new generations the chance to compete when ESL Impact was introduced. ESL Impact provided also other work prospects and allowed her to participate in the broadcasting of the competition. Hege has an IT background that she says she would not have had if it hadn't been for video games. She also stated that she was fortunate to grow up in a welcoming community in Norway. Hege pointed out that the online environment is very aggressive.

This creates a climate that is not welcoming to women, and many desire to stop or form women-only teams to feel safer. She maintained that attempts to solve this issue must continue.



# Virtual worlds day 03



## Sustainability Day How video games can be used to deliver on the Green Deal

### MODERATOR

**Benjamin Seignovert**, Policy & Public Affairs Manager ISFE

### PANEL

**MEP Niklas Nienaß**, CULT Committee - Introductory remarks

**Sam Barratt**, Chief Environmental Educational Youth, UNEP: Playing for the Planet Alliance impact report

**Nicolas Hunsinger**, Environmental Sustainability Director, Ubisoft: How video games include content related to climate preservation objectives and what does it mean for a company

**Karin Edner Karlsson**, Group Sustainability Manager, Embracer: How a video game company works towards measuring and reducing its carbon impact

**Kieren Mayers**, Senior Director of Environment, Social, & Governance, Sony Interactive Entertainment: A technical approach to energy use and efficiency – the perspective of a hardware manufacturer



### Did you know?

The UN-facilitated Playing for the Planet Alliance unites game studios to support the global environmental agenda.

In 2021, The Green Game Jam helped 130 million video game players worldwide learn about climate change, prompting many to take actions.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE ROUNDTABLE

- 1) The video game sector leads by example among the creative and cultural sectors, and has developed innovative ways to collaborate and inspire action, notably through global partnerships under the aegis of the UNEP-facilitated Playing for the Planet Alliance.
- 2) Video games have a unique opportunity to inspire change and raise awareness towards its players through gameplay and innovative storytelling. More and more games include content related to climate change and this is something that is positively welcomed by players.
- 3) Assessing its environmental impact as a video game studio is an essential step towards understanding and reducing its carbon emissions, but many challenges lie ahead and retrieving data among various stakeholders in the value chain is cumbersome and difficult.
- 4) The shadow of regulation is needed, building and strengthening instruments that have already proven their ability to start change, such as the Games Consoles Voluntary Agreement to increase energy and resource efficiency for video games devices.

### PRESENTATIONS

**Member of the European Parliament Niklas Nienaß introduced the roundtable.** The presentations highlighted that the objective of the EU Climate Law is to achieve climate neutrality in the EU by 2050 and by reducing carbon emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. The video games sector, like any industry, has a responsibility to act to reduce its impact but also has the unique ability to use its medium to raise awareness on climate change.

**UNEP** insisted on the seriousness of the climate emergency and called on all actors to act for a better future: individuals, the industry but also regulators. Video games have the power to change the hearts and minds of players, notably by including powerful messages on climate change as part of their content. In 2022, 42 studios participated to the Green Game Jam, potentially reaching more than 275 million players globally. 81% of players that have responded to the Alliance's survey indicated that they would be eager to see more sustainability themed content. The Alliance's Annual Impact Report was also published during the event, showcasing the collective action the games industry is taking to reduce its carbon footprint.

<https://www.isfe.eu/news/2022playing-for-the-planet-alliance-impact-report/>

**Ubisoft**, stressed that, when including sustainability themed content in their games, the aim was for players to learn and grow, while still having fun because video games remain an entertainment product. In-game activations are a key part of Ubisoft's strategy to create content that

can inspire action towards fighting climate change. But integrating climate messaging in games is only one part on how to address the issue, and companies must also develop ambitious sustainability strategies to reduce their own carbon footprint. This is why Ubisoft developed the "Play Green" pledge, an example for a company strategy to be in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

**Embracer** presented its decentralised structure, and mentioned the challenges arising when establishing a sustainability strategy that is implementable by all its subsidiaries. Embracer's sustainability work is core to the business and organisation where there is the desire to keep the planet green and for Embracer to be part of the solution rather than the problem. Embracer's environmental focus is carbon emission reduction, mitigating impact, and raising awareness and comes with the ambition to reduce emissions in accordance with the Paris Agreement.

**SIE** spoke about the efforts made by console manufacturers to further reduce the environmental impact of game consoles, and the work that Sony PlayStation has achieved in this regard. One instrument in particular has been key in driving innovations within the sector, also with the involvement of Member States and of the European Commission: the Games Consoles Voluntary Agreement (the GCVA). The GCVA allowed for the new generation of PlayStation consoles to achieve significant increases in computing power while still consuming as much energy than the previous generation of consoles. This alone constitutes a massive technological achievement only made possible by the GCVA providing a framework driving change

### Europe's video games sector is committed to sustainable production and consumption.



in how consoles are designed. Circular economy aspects (so-called "resource efficiency") are also not forgotten and many requirements of the GCVA relates to information to consumers on reparability and availability of spare parts.

In the **Q&A session** that followed, discussion focused in particular on how to ensure that both future and current generations benefit from the right set of skills to lead the green transition. Mr. Nienaß mentioned that working on educational pathways only work up to a certain point, and that companies must also do their part to provide adequate training to their workforce. The discussion also approached the issue of data collection and participants outlined how retrieving data from all actors in the value chain can be difficult and cumbersome.



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