

Worried about kids playing video games?

Look at the label!

Better information and protection for users of interactive games



Video games are one of the favourite leisure activities of Europeans, regardless of age, education or social status. But a minority of video games contain content that is aggressive, offensive or harmful, especially to children and young people. The European Commission therefore advocates standards and practices that help parents to select games that are suitable for their children. The Pan-European Games Information system, PEGI, and its sister for online games, PEGI Online provide guidance to users so that they can better assess the content of video games.

Because of the potential psychological effects of video games on minors, it is important to ensure that game-playing by children is safe. While this issue lies primarily within the competence of Member States, the European Union promotes self-regulation by industry as much as possible.

In a Communication of 22 April 2008, the EU distilled principles and best practices on how young consumers can best be protected from harmful content. The Communication is based on a survey of the Member States intended to find out how they protect minors from unsuitable video games.¹ The EU policy document also promotes freedom of expression for adults and freedom of adult gamers to play any game that does not contravene criminal law.

is used in the vast majority of EU Member States, namely in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Sweden and UK. Germany and Lithuania apply specific systems.

What is PEGI?

PEGI (<http://www.pegi.info/en>) is a voluntary, self-regulatory system organized by the software industry, designed to ensure that minors are not exposed to games that are unsuitable for their particular age group. PEGI replaced a large number of existing national age-rating systems with a single European system.

PEGI provides specific age ratings and content descriptors, enabling parents to better know what their children are playing.

PEGI is supported by the major console manufacturers (e.g. Nintendo, PlayStation, Xbox). According to the survey mentioned, PEGI



¹http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/reg/minors/video/index_en.htm

PEGI Online

With PEGI Online, (<http://www.pegionline.eu>), the PEGI system was extended to the growing online games sector. Not only illegal content can spread quickly on the Internet, but also content harmful to minors – including video games. PEGI Online ensures protection by authorizing online games providers who sign up to the "PEGI Online Safety Code" to display the PEGI Online Logo once they have registered their games with the PEGI system.

All providers of technical platforms for online game playing (Microsoft Xbox, Sony Plays station and Nintendo Wii) have already signed up. Most of the main game publishers have also signed up or are in a process of signing up. Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Sweden and the UK support the PEGI Online system. Beyond that, participants from Ireland, Germany, Spain, France, Norway, Poland, Greece, Belgium, Austria and Portugal are members of the PEGI Advisory Board that is managing PEGI Online.

A rapidly growing market

In 2006, the European market for video games, which includes console and handheld games, PC games and online games, had a total revenue of more than €6.3 billion, and this is expected to rise to €7.3 billion by 2008. Its value is half that of the entire music market in Europe and already exceeds the cinema box office. It is the fastest growing and most dynamic sector in the European content industry, with a higher growth rate than in the US.

Playing video games has become a cross-generation phenomenon, moving from the children's room to the living room. The average age of European gamers has increased, and more and more adults are now playing video games with adult themes.

What needs to be done?

The Commission identified the following "to-dos" to improve the protection of minors who play video games:

- More Member States should integrate the PEGI and PEGI Online systems into their national systems and those that have already done so can improve its operation;
- The video games and console industry should further improve PEGI and in particular regularly update the criteria for age rating and labelling, advertise PEGI and PEGI Online more actively and increase the list of signatories;
- Member States and stakeholders should work together on innovative solutions for effective age verification systems and for the prevention of possible dangers for young consumers related to chat rooms associated with these games and evaluate the possible negative and positive effects of video games, notably on health;
- within two years, retailers and publishers will agree on a Pan-European Code of conduct on the sale of games to minors and on commitments to raise awareness of the PEGI system among parents and children, as well as ensure adequate resources to implement the provisions of this Code;
- Member States and all stakeholders are encouraged to take initiatives to improve media literacy applied to video games, in line with the Commission Communication of 20 December 2007.

The Commission welcomes and supports further efforts to achieve a self-regulatory or co-regulatory, pan-European age-rating system across all media. The Commission will be organising meetings of classification bodies to exchange best practices in this field and use existing networks of and platforms with consumer organisations in order to raise public awareness of both PEGI the Commission's recommendations.

For further information

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Regulatory Framework – Protection of Minors – Video Games

http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/reg/minors/video/index_en.htm

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