

1st Meeting of the Virtual Worlds Steering Group (VWSG)¹

7 March 2024, online meeting via Webex

Minutes of the meeting

1. Approval of the agenda and of the minutes of previous meeting

The meeting was chaired by the Head of Unit of DG CONNECT Unit G.2. Interactive Technologies, Digital for Culture and Education (hereby “Chair”).

At the start of the meeting, the Director of DG CONNECT G, Data, warmly welcomed the Member States’ representatives and gave the vision of DG CONNECT G for this formal group.

The meeting agenda was **approved** by the representatives without comments.

2. Nature of the meeting

The meeting of 7 March was the 1st meeting of the VWSG. It was held fully online via Webex and was non-public.

3. List of points discussed

The Chair welcomed the nominated Member States’ representatives and Commission colleagues attending this first meeting.

DG CONNECT Unit G.2. provided an update on the Commission’s strategy on Virtual Worlds that was adopted on 11 July 2023 and the state of play of the actions contained within. Many actions are being implemented or will materialise in the near future.

The proposal for a Horizon Europe Virtual Worlds partnership was presented, as well as the status and activities of the Virtual Reality (VR)/Augmented Reality (AR) Industrial Coalition.

DG CONNECT Unit E.3.001, Internet Governance and Multistakeholder Relations, gave a short presentation of the work and activities of the High-Level Group on Internet Governance (HLIG), its objectives, and a focus on the forthcoming Global Multistakeholder conference (Q1 2025). The Steering Group will work closely with the HLIG which brings together and coordinates the competent Member States authorities and stakeholders dealing with Internet governance and participating in the relevant international fora.

The Chair opened the floor for a dedicated questions and answers session. No questions were raised by the representatives.

The Chair gave the floor to DG CONNECT Unit G.2. for a short presentation of the mandate, tasks and functioning of the Steering Group.

The mandate and main tasks of the group were presented, highlighting the importance of coordination and cooperation at national, regional and local levels. The objectives of the

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group include developing and promoting common and consistent European approach on the development of Virtual Worlds and the wider technological transition to Web 4.0 to avoid a potential fragmentation of the Single Market.

DG CONNECT Unit G.2. presented the main communication tools used for exchanging information within the group. More specifically, a dedicated Teams group has been created and the Member States' appointed representatives have been added to it. A reminder on the reimbursement rules and participation to the meetings was given, indicating that a maximum of 2 Member States' representatives per meeting, whether online, hybrid or in-person. Travel costs for maximum one representative can be reimbursed in case of in-person meetings. Invitations are personal, forwarding them should be avoided.

The importance of the privacy statement, data protection aspects and transparency obligations were also presented to the group. Member States' appointed representatives need to accept the privacy statement, for each meeting they participate in, on the AGM platform. A reminder regarding the fact that the group is a non-public group was given, with a focus on Article 10 of C(2024) 149 of 17 January 2024, regarding professional secrecy.

The Rules of Procedure (RoP) which were distributed ahead of the meeting were presented. They govern the functioning of the group for its duration. The RoP **were adopted** without comments from the group and will be published in the Commission Register of Expert Groups.

The delegates of the Horizon Europe Programme Committee for Cluster Digital, Industry and Space ("Cluster 4") have expressed interest to know the professional contact details of the Member States' representatives to the group. This information would enable smooth contact and synergies, between the Programme Committee delegates and the representatives in the Virtual Worlds Steering Group, at national level, in cross-cutting domains. The exchange of professional details would be on a case-by-case and ad hoc basis, in the context of Article 6 of Regulation (EU) Data Protection Regulation 2018/1725 ("Processing for another compatible purpose"). Member States' representatives have until mid-March 2024 to opt out of this exchange by sending an email to the secretariat of the group.

The round-table discussion on Member States' initiatives and priorities in the area of Virtual Worlds and the wider technological transition to Web 4.0 focused on the following 3 questions:

- Are there initiatives linked to virtual worlds in your member state? Do you have or are you planning to develop a virtual worlds strategy (at national or regional/local level)?
- In what application domains do you consider the take-up of virtual worlds as a priority in your member state / in the EU? (public services, industrial, societal)?
- In what application domains for virtual worlds would you be interested to experiment with regulatory sandboxes in your member state, to support innovation, particularly for start-ups?

And more broadly: What are the member states' expectations from this group?

During the round-table discussion, many representatives shared their national/regional approaches with regards to a Virtual Worlds strategy. Most Member States address virtual

worlds within wider strategies focusing on digital or innovation. Education, healthcare, media/culture and gaming, cultural heritage, climate change, industry and manufacturing are some of the application domains mentioned by representatives as a priority for their Member State. Priority is given to ensure effective and efficient implementation of existing acts such as DSA/DMA. Member States expressed their interest in regulatory sandboxes. Some representatives shared that their Member State is already implementing or planning to implement sandboxes in different areas, mostly for AI. A consensus from the representatives was expressed on the timeliness and importance of this Virtual Worlds Steering Group to exchange best practices, a European common approach for Virtual Worlds, encompassing EU values and ethics. Standardisation and interoperability would be a key aspect of this common approach.

4. Conclusions/recommendations/opinions

The agenda of the meeting and the Rules of Procedure **were adopted**.

The principle of exchange of professional contact details with Horizon Europe Programme Committee for Cluster Digital, Industry and Space (“Cluster 4”) **was agreed**, with the possibility to opt out by emailing the secretariat before mid-March 2024.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their fruitful input. Timeliness and expectations from the group were acknowledged. Many initiatives are ongoing in the Member States, and many others are in the process or planned. There is a need to deep dive and to define further the priorities. The diversity in profiles of the representatives shows the broad scope of the mandate and tasks of this group.

5. Next steps

Minutes of this meeting will be drafted and presented to the meeting participants for comments before publication.

All documents presented during this meeting will be posted on the dedicated Microsoft Teams collaborative platform for the group.

6. Next meeting

Next meeting should be in person, in Luxembourg, on **20 June 2024** tentatively.

7. List of participants

Members of the Virtual Worlds Steering Group:

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

Representatives of European Commission services:

Directorate-General for Communications, Networks, Content and Technology – Unit G.2.
Interactive Technologies, Digital for Culture and Education

Directorate-General for Communications, Networks, Content and Technology – Unit E3.001
Internet Governance and Multistakeholder Relations

Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs – Unit G.3.
Digital Transformation of Industry

Joint Research Centre – Unit T.1. Digital Economy