

PEGI expands age rating criteria with interactive risk categories

IRIS 2026-8:1/4

Dirk Bosmans
PEGI

On 1 June 2026, PEGI (*Pan-European Game Information*), the Pan-European system for the age classification of video games, added several new categories to its classification criteria: newly submitted games are now classified based not only on content but also on functionality, including purchases of in-game content, paid random items, communication features, and mechanisms that incentivise players to return to the game. Games to which these additional criteria apply may receive a higher PEGI age rating as a result. It is a substantive change for the PEGI age rating system and part of the efforts to address the concerns and questions of today's parents.

To develop these criteria, PEGI worked with its internal committees of experts, and also cooperated closely with the German age-rating authority (*Unterhaltungssoftware Selbstkontrolle* - USK), which implemented similar changes in 2023 following an update of the German Youth Protection Act. These were immediately impactful: approximately 30% of all games submitted to USK meet at least one of the new criteria. Around one in three of those games get a higher age rating as a result.

PEGI already informs parents about the presence of some of these features in video games, such as in-game purchases and paid random items, but from now they will be tied to specific age categories:

- **Purchases of in-game content:** games with time-limited offers are classified as PEGI 12, games with NFTs or blockchain-related mechanisms are PEGI 18.
- **Paid random items:** the base rating is PEGI 16 if the game contains paid random items (like loot boxes or card packs).
- **Play-by-appointment:** mechanisms that reward returning to the game (e.g. daily quests) receive a PEGI 7. If these mechanisms punish players for not returning (e.g. by losing content or reducing progress), they become PEGI 12.
- **Safe online gameplay:** if a game has an online gameplay environment, the publisher must submit documentation to the PEGI Admins: 1) a privacy policy; 2) community standards that explicitly ban illegal/harmful content and behaviour; 3) reporting mechanisms to have such content removed.

Should a game contain communication features without any restrictions (disabling, muting), it will receive a PEGI 18.

The games that have been submitted for examination in recent months are now slowly appearing on the market, which means that the first changes are starting to become visible. From October onwards, PEGI will also retroactively update a specific selection of video games that have been on the market for some time. Re-examining a database that contains hundreds of thousands of games is practically infeasible, but on the basis of information that is already available to the PEGI administrators, a number of online games can expect to see a rating change in the following weeks.

PEGI and its administrators have been working with a broad group of stakeholders and experts to define the boundaries of these new criteria. Central to this determination process was the goal to help parents make informed decisions by providing clear warnings, but the existence of other protective measures like parental tools were also considered. Parental tools are available on all video game platforms that make use of PEGI ratings, and they allow parents to limit or block features like online interaction, in-game spending, and the amount of playtime.

The video games market will continue to evolve, which means that PEGI will need to continue to keep a finger on the pulse to ensure that the information it provides to parents and players remains relevant. Another reason to stay ahead of the curve is that the regulatory landscape for video games in the European Union will see significant changes. The extent to which the recently announced EU Kids Act, but also the Digital Services Act and the Digital Fairness Act will shape how games are developed, marketed, and played, will also impact how they are classified.

The PEGI organisation

<https://pegi.info/page/pegi-organisation>

