

Gaming & The Metaverse Fact Sheet

The Problem:

New gaming platforms combined with the metaverse are making children online more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Increasing risks to children due to new digital technology include;

- Online grooming, including tactics such as catfishing and sextortion have increased by 70% since 2019;
- Continued growth of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) with 1.1 million reports in 2014 to 29.3 million in 2020, covering 84 million CSAM images and videos;
- Self-generated images, often referred to as “nudes,” has increased by 168% from 68,000 in 2020 to 182 thousand in 2021; and
- Cyberbullying has affected 48% of children and minors between the ages of 9 and 17 years old.

Why:

Technology is ever-changing and minors are overrepresented on metaverse gaming platforms. This poses content, contact, and conduct risks;

- Immersive intensity and lifelike character of interactions make it easier for predators to build relationships with minors;
- Anonymity and ease of interactions increase the chance of interacting with a predator;
- Actions in social gaming platforms are difficult to moderate;
- Parents may struggle to monitor what their child is accessing, especially if the child is using headsets; and
- In-game currencies are needed to improve the gaming experience and give predators the chance to exchange game currency for CSAM.

Companies are only focused on growth, rather than the safety of the users, following a reactive approach;

- A new online gaming platform is launched aiming to have as many users as possible;
- Abuse occurs on the new platform and is exposed, whether that is by society, investigative journalism, or class-actions;
- The company only then reacts by implementing safety features.

Solutions:

There are effective solutions to the exploitation and abuse of children on online gaming platforms through prevention, detection, and prosecution;

- By means of design; age assurance, parental control, ease of reporting and blocking, as well as institutional structure and internal processes;
- By means of AI and Machine Learning; Natural language processing (NLP), Image recognition, age assurance, player matching, and groomer detection; and
- By means of transparency; reporting.

Current US legislation to tackle this rising issue;

- Children’s Online Privacy Protection Rule; and
- Kids Online Safety Act (Proposed).