

PRESS RELEASE

**From games in democracy to innovation: gamescom congress
2026 announces program**



Program for the 2026 gamescom congress announced +++ 85 program entries and 165 speakers +++ Opening panels on the topic of “Games and Democracy”, featuring North Rhine-Westphalia Minister of Media Nathanael Liminski and PietSmiet, amongst others

A historic event and a packed program: On August 27, the gamescom congress 2026 welcomes guests across education, culture, business, science, and society. The program, now fully announced, features 165 renowned speakers in 85 talks and panels, promising numerous insights into the diverse potential of computer and

video games across a wide range of fields. This year's key themes are "Playing Field Democracy" and "The Games Effect".

Part of the opening ceremony of the gamescom congress, at which German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier will deliver his first speech, are two panel discussions featuring top-class speakers. The first panel will focus on the topic **"Saving the World Through Play: What Games and Their Communities Are Achieving"**. Discussing this topic will be Jörg Friedrich, Founder of Paintbucket Games, Prof. Dr. Sabiha Ghellal, Professor of Experience and Game Design, and Peter Smits, Content Creator and Founder of "PietSmiet". Right after that, Nathanael Liminski, Minister and Head of the State Chancellery of North Rhine-Westphalia, Nandita Wegehaupt, Executive Director of the Foundation for Digital Games Culture; and Olaf Zimmermann, Executive Director of the German Cultural Council, will discuss the opportunities and limitations of games in democracy education titled **"Games for Democracy: What They Can and Cannot Do"**.

"Games spark excitement for the future—in entertainment as well as in education, health, society, and industry", says Felix Falk, Managing Director of game and co-organizer of the gamescom congress. "This year, with its high-profile program, the gamescom congress showcases exactly this unique positive power of games, their creators, and their communities. This is not only underscored by the opening address from the Federal President, but also by partnerships with organizations such as the World Health Organization, the United Nations, EUROPOL, and the German Cultural Council."

Other program highlights at a glance

This year, numerous world-renowned institutions—including the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), EUROPOL, the German Cultural

Council, and other prominent organizations, are highlighting the global relevance and diverse applications of gaming technologies.

As such, Andy Pattison (WHO) and Justin Thomas (Sync/Ithra) will present the latest research findings on the health benefits and challenges of gaming, in the session **“Beyond Good or Bad: Rethinking Video Games and Health”**.

In **“Beyond Entertainment: The Evidence Gap Holding Policy, Industry, and Society Back”**, Rachel Addley (OKRE) shows how a new framework makes it possible to measure the societal impact of games. In **“FathomVerse: Explore the Depths in an Interactive Community Science Experience”**, Ellemieke Berings and Wouter Krijger (&ranj) explain how their ocean exploration game mobilizes over 40,000 people to playfully provide reliable AI training data for deep-sea research.

Another program highlight combines linear and interactive entertainment: In a session titled **“A Night at Moka Efti: How the Babylon Berlin Game Brings the Series’ World to Life”**, WDR Managing Director Katrin Vernau, Game Director Jörg Friedrich, and representatives from SWR and ARD will offer insights into the development of the game, set to be released in September 2026, based on the final season of the successful series.

The event will also focus on technological trends in the gaming sector: In **“Building a New & European Game Engine in the Age of AI”**, game developer and industry veteran Arjan Brussee and host Matthijs Dierckx will discuss a new European, AI-powered engine that can be utilized in sensitive industries such as logistics, in addition to gaming.

In **“Insights from the UN AI Report: What Is Relevant for (Serious) Game Development and Games Research?”**, Johanna Pirker (Professor, Technical University of Munich & Graz University of Technology) provides an overview of

current developments related to AI in game development and game research. Her analysis is based on findings from the preliminary report of the United Nations Independent International Scientific Panel on AI. Among other topics, the report focuses on generative AI, transparency, intellectual property, child safety, sustainability, and trustworthy AI.

You can find the full program [here](#). The program was curated with generous support from Curatomic.

The gamescom congress this year is supported by media partnerships with ARD, brand eins, n-tv, and Wikimedia.

About gamescom congress

gamescom congress is the world's leading conference on the potential of computer games in a digitalized world and offers interfaces far beyond the digital and media industry. International speakers present their topics in lectures, seminars and panel discussions. The gamescom congress takes place annually as part of gamescom in Cologne and is organized by Koelnmesse GmbH and game, the association of the German games industry. The gamescom congress is sponsored by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

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