

# New report raises concerns about potential abuse, manipulation and inequality in the metaverse

*A new report underscores the need for governments and regulators to take responsibility for protecting the rights and equality of individuals in the metaverse.*

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- The metaverse

has the potential to empower individuals, particularly those facing vulnerability in the real world, but could also accentuate social inequalities and increase the risk of abuse and manipulation. This is the

finding of [Human Vulnerability in the Metaverse](#), a new research paper co-

developed by the [Alliance for Universal Digital Rights \(AUDRi\)](#) and [Vulnera](#), which explores

potential risks and challenges posed by the development of the metaverse. The report emphasises the need for careful consideration and proactive measures to protect the rights and

well-being of individuals, particularly those who are vulnerable or marginalised.

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We cannot responsibly talk about the potential of the metaverse without considering safety, accessibility, and how you create a metaverse which is human-centred and respects and promotes human rights.”

*Emma Gibson, AUDRi*



Mark Zuckerberg popularised the idea of the metaverse in October 2021, by announcing that Facebook would become Meta, and laid out his very particular vision of what this digital world might be. But the metaverse is neither a new concept nor a digital fad.

AUDRi Global Coordinator, Emma Gibson, explains that the principles and considerations around the ethics of the metaverse remain as relevant and pressing as ever.

"It may seem that the debate around digital ethics has moved away from the metaverse and onto the ethics of large language models. But the ambition of creating an immersive experience replicating every aspect of our physical lives has not disappeared.

"Many governments see the metaverse as crucial to their country's economic and social development, and active discussions are taking place at the highest levels about the implications of the metaverse on development and digital transformation.

"We also see people already incorporating the metaverse into their lives, whether it be enabling remote work, facilitating social connections or for immersive entertainment like gaming."

## OVERCOMING VULNERABILITIES

The report's key findings highlight some potential benefits and pitfalls of the metaverse. On the one hand, it acknowledges the positive impact the metaverse could have in empowering individuals and enhancing human capabilities, particularly for those who experience vulnerability in the offline world. However, it also highlights the reinforcement of social inequalities due to the digital divide, limited access for certain groups, and the perpetuation of subordination and conformity within the virtual realm.

One of the most alarming aspects is the new channel for abuse that the metaverse provides, including sexual assault and image-based abuse. The hyper-realistic nature of the metaverse content is expected to amplify the trauma caused by such offences, and the lack of clear definitions and legal frameworks to address them is a pressing concern.

# Alliance For Universal Digital Rights

Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRi)



Vulnera

The report underscores the need for governments and regulators to take responsibility for protecting the rights and equality of individuals in the metaverse. There is a trend of shifting the burden of vulnerability mitigation to technology companies, which could lead to dependence on and acceptance of unfavourable terms and conditions.

Another concern is the vulnerability to mental manipulation through AI-driven emotional recognition, especially among children, people with cognitive impairments, and those with psychological vulnerabilities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESPONSIBLE AND HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRED DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

In light of these findings, the report presents a set of recommendations for governments and regulators. These include requiring businesses developing the metaverse to follow the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, involving vulnerable groups in the design process, establishing guidelines for measuring the impact on human rights, and enacting new laws and policies to address gaps in the legal framework.

As the metaverse continues to gain momentum and attract widespread interest, the potential risks and vulnerabilities must be acknowledged and mitigated.

The report serves as a wake-up call for stakeholders to take a measured approach, balancing the benefits and risks and ensuring the metaverse remains a space that upholds fundamental rights and respects diversity.

“We cannot responsibly talk about the potential of the metaverse without considering safety, accessibility, and how you create a metaverse which is human-centred and respects and promotes human rights,” Gibson says.

“We must not unintentionally roll back hard-won progress on equality as we enter this new digital space.”

About AUDRi: The Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRi) exists to explore ways of creating a digital future in which everyone can enjoy equal rights to safety, freedom, and dignity – whoever they are and wherever, whenever, and however they exist and connect in the digital world.

Co-founded by Equality Now and Women Leading in AI, AUDRi focuses on women, girls, and other people from discriminated-against groups, all of whom face intersecting forms of discrimination and gender-based stereotypes in the physical world. Because it is only when the most vulnerable in society are protected that everyone is safe. For more information, including on how to get involved in the Alliance, go to [www.audri.org](http://www.audri.org), and find AUDRi on Twitter @AUDRights and on LinkedIn at AUDRi

About Vulnera: The International Observatory on Vulnerable People in Data Protection (Vulnera) is a research dissemination and networking platform focusing on the multifaceted connotations that the notion of human 'vulnerability' may assume in the data protection and privacy domains. For more information, go to [www.brusselsprivacyhub.com/vulnera/](http://www.brusselsprivacyhub.com/vulnera/).

Lisa Van Wky

AUDRI

+27 73 285 9016

lvanwyk@equalitynow.org

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