

*The Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) represents national medical associations across Europe. We are committed to contributing the medical profession's point of view to EU and European policy-making through pro-active cooperation on a wide range of health and healthcare related issues.*

## Policy on Gambling and Gaming

Gambling is a public health issue of urgent concern in Europe, causing addictive behaviour with devastating effects for some individuals and families. It is legal in many European countries, but its legal status varies. The gambling industry has experienced significant and continuing growth due to the rise of online gambling and increased legalisation. Population-wide interventions and the European Union's (EU) regulatory frameworks are a viable solution to prevent and reduce harm. This paper also addresses gaming as it may have similar negative impacts on health as gambling.

European doctors recommend policymakers to:

- Treat gambling as a significant, growing and urgent public health issue that requires immediate action.
- Emphasise preventative measures when addressing gambling in policy.
- Propose an EU regulatory framework to ban gambling (including online) advertising, promotion and sponsorship, especially of sports and cultural activities, e.g. by applying similar principles to the Évin Law which restricts alcohol and tobacco advertising and sponsorship in France.
- Review the health and social impacts and addictive qualities of gambling and gaming.
- Introduce clear warning messages about the harms associated with gambling.
- Introduce age specific restrictions:
  - Recognise the interaction between gaming and gambling and the marketing of these products toward young people;
  - Restrict or ban promotional deals by influencers to stream gambling platforms;
  - Restrict the link between alcohol and gambling/gaming, as it is recognised that drugs and alcohol may lead to more risky gambling;
  - Address addictive gambling platform design and algorithms.

- Develop a harmonised and mandatory EU-wide age verification solution to protect minors.
- Provide centralised account registration to require those who gamble to set mandatory loss limits, and restrictions relating to access and availability.
- Mandate the introduction of responsible gambling tools, such as real time reminders of play time and spending with pop up messaging.
- Prohibit the cross selling of casino products alongside sports offerings to prevent targeted population groups, notably young men, from being introduced to more addictive online gambling such as online slots.
- Ensure sustainable funding of public health measures to address gambling harms including prevention, treatment, education and research.
- Require the gambling operators to make relevant data available for scientific research, in full compliance with data protection and data security regulations.
- Take measures to combat illegal gambling.
- Implement evidence-based preventive, educational and therapeutic interventions.
- Offer training programs, tools and resources to help healthcare professionals recognise and address gambling and gaming related issues.

## European doctors recommend doctors, other healthcare professionals, and students to:

- Recognise that stigma, shame and fear of disclosure can prevent people from talking about gambling, and from seeking support and treatment.
- Consider asking patients about gambling when asking them about smoking, alcohol consumption or use of other addictive substances, and/or addictive behaviours.
- Consider the potential impact of medication that may affect impulse control and gambling risk.
- Advise that support and treatment are available and recovery is possible.

## European doctors recommend the World Health Organization (WHO) to:

- Introduce a global public health day to raise awareness and understanding about addictive behaviours such as gambling and gaming.

## 1. Gambling as a public health issue

Gambling is a public health issue of urgent concern in Europe, causing harm to health and addictive behaviour. It means risking money or something else of value on an event of uncertain outcome, with the possibility of gaining an increased return. This paper also addresses gaming as it is one of the most popular hobbies nowadays across all genders and ages. For gaming the outcome is usually achieved by skill, not chance, whereas for gambling, it is the opposite. However, certain features of video games, for example loot boxes are primarily chance-based and could be a gateway to more serious problem gambling.<sup>1</sup>

Different forms of gambling include, for example betting, slot machines, casino games, lotteries and bingo. These are available both in physical venues and online. Gambling can lead to financial stress, relationship breakdown, family violence, stress, mental illness and suicide. The harm can continue throughout one's life and transmit intergenerationally.<sup>2 3</sup> In addition to the person gambling, adverse effects are often felt by the families and friends of the individual. Video game players may also experience addiction-like symptoms leading to serious negative consequences affecting personal, educational or work-related, familial, social and other areas of life. Moreover, there are other challenges related to online gambling and gaming, such as cyberbullying and toxic behaviour within online environments.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) International Statistical Classification of Diseases<sup>4</sup> recognises gambling and gaming disorders as health disorders and classifies them as such due to addictive behaviours. It also identifies hazardous gambling, betting, and gaming, and their chance to increase the risk of harmful physical or mental health consequences. People with gambling disorders have a higher suicide risk than the general population. The risk is comparable to patients with anxiety disorders, personality disorders and depression.<sup>5</sup> However, harm from gambling is experienced not just by those classified as suffering from a gambling disorder.

The gambling industry is growing due to the rise of online gambling and increased legalisation. The industry has also developed partnerships in media and social media. Sponsoring and partnering with professional sports organisations provides gambling operators with marketing opportunities with huge new audiences.<sup>6</sup> Gambling and also gaming can therefore be seen as

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<sup>1</sup> Li et al. [The relationship of loot box purchases to problem video gaming and problem gambling](#). Addictive Behaviors, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> [Gambling](#). The World Health Organization (WHO), 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Reynolds C. et al. [A qualitative analysis of people who died by suicide and had gambling documented in their coronial file](#). Addictive Behaviors, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> [International classification of diseases 11th revision \(ICD-11\)](#). The World Health Organization (WHO), 2018.

<sup>5</sup> [Association between gambling disorder and suicide mortality: a comparative cohort study using Norwegian health registry data](#). The Lancet Regional Health Europe, 2025

<sup>6</sup> Wardle H. et al. [The Lancet Public Health Commission on gambling](#). The Lancet Public Health, 2024.

commercial determinants of health, where industry strategies to maximise profit cause severe health harms.<sup>7</sup> The digital transformation makes gambling widely accessible even where it is not legally permitted. Moreover, addictive algorithms can be seen as a public health challenge as they are designed to maximise user engagement for profit by exploiting psychological vulnerabilities.<sup>8</sup>

The WHO estimates that 1.2% of the world's adult population suffers from a gambling disorder. It is also estimated that around 6% of women and 12% of men globally experience some level of harm from gambling. Certain groups face a higher risk of gambling harms. These include children and young people who are routinely exposed to gambling product advertising and industry messaging and sponsorship, particularly online.<sup>9</sup> In addition, poorer neighbourhoods have more betting shops, which leads to higher rates of addiction and harm in those communities. This may exacerbate health inequities directly through exposures to commercial products and their marketing.<sup>10</sup>

Studies show that while substance use among 15–16-year-old students in Europe continues its long-term decline, new behavioural and health risks are on the rise, particularly with online gaming and gambling, and notably among girls.<sup>11</sup> Gambling is already common among adolescent boys. This is evident in sports betting, loot boxes in video games, and other reward systems that blur the line between playing and paying. Moreover, gambling shows up in social media feeds through algorithmic recommendations.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Current regulation in the EU and its member states

Gambling is legal in many European countries but its legal status varies between them. As gambling is available online, it is accessible almost anywhere, at any time, even in places where it is prohibited. In the EU, gambling is a national competence of the Member States and there is no sector-specific EU legislation.<sup>13</sup> EU countries are autonomous in the way they organise their gambling regulation.

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<sup>7</sup> [Policy on Commercial Determinants of Health](#). Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME), 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Van Kolfschooten, H. [Addictive Algorithms and the Digital Fairness Act: A New Chapter in EU Public Health Policy?](#) Petrie-Flom Center, 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Newall, P. et al. [Gambling marketing from 2014 to 2018: a literature review](#). Current Addiction Reports, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> [Commercial Determinants of Noncommunicable Diseases in the WHO European Region](#). WHO/Europe, 2024.

<sup>11</sup> [Key findings from the 2024 European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs \(ESPAD\)](#). European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA), 2025.

<sup>12</sup> Robb M. et al. [Betting on Boys: Understanding Gambling Among Adolescent Boys](#). Common Sense Media, 2026.

<sup>13</sup> [Online gambling in the EU](#). European Commission, 2025.

Regulation is also lacking for the video game industry, where measures to reduce excessive gaming among minors have shown limited effectiveness.<sup>14</sup> Achieving regulatory compliance and effective monitoring of video games may be even more difficult than of gambling products due to the historical lack of regulation in this field and the vast number of small video game companies and game developers.<sup>15</sup>

While there is no EU-wide legislation, the EU does exert influence through court decisions and policy recommendations. In a number of judgments, the Court of Justice of the EU has ruled on the compliance of national regulatory frameworks with EU law, and recognised EU countries' rights to restrict the cross-border supply of certain gambling services where necessary to protect public interest objectives such as the protection of minors, and the fight against gambling addiction.<sup>16</sup>

Despite EU countries' diverse regulatory frameworks, some new and upcoming legislative measures present implications for gambling operators within and outside of EU borders. They aim to ensure fair and transparent gambling practices, protect consumers, prevent money laundering, and promote responsible gambling.

- The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Anti-Money Laundering Directive (AMLD) aim at least to ensure that online gaming operators handle personal data responsibly and to prevent illicit financial activities in the EU.
- The Digital Services Act (DSA) regulates online intermediaries and platforms, with the goal of preventing illegal and harmful activities online and the spread of disinformation.
- The European Accessibility Act (EAA) mandates that digital services provided to EU consumers meet specific accessibility standards.
- The Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act) aims to foster responsible artificial intelligence development and deployment, and affects gambling operators deploying AI tools.
- The Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (UCPD) prohibits misleading or aggressive advertising affecting consumers' transactional decisions, especially when it targets vulnerable consumers.
- The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) governs EU-wide coordination of national legislation on all audiovisual media and acknowledges that it is important to

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<sup>14</sup> [Risks and harms associated with online gaming and gambling](#). The Pompidou Group (Council of Europe International Co-operation Group on Drugs and Addictions), 2024.

<sup>15</sup> [Policy paper on strategies and regulatory options aimed at reducing risks and harms related to online gaming and online gambling](#). The Pompidou Group (Council of Europe International Co-operation Group on Drugs and Addictions), 2024.

<sup>16</sup> [Gambling case law](#). European Commission. 2025.

protect minors from exposure to audiovisual commercial communications relating to the promotion of gambling.

- Its current form does not regulate gambling advertising but its potential revision could change the situation.
- Moreover, the Digital Fairness Act (DFA) is an upcoming EU legislative proposal to tackle unethical techniques and commercial practices related to dark patterns, marketing by social media influencers, the addictive design of digital products and online profiling, including gambling-simulating features (loot boxes) in video games, especially when consumer vulnerabilities are exploited for commercial purposes.

In addition, the Council of the EU has invited EU member states to consider pursuing preventive policies protecting children from addictive design practices such as deceptive designs, manipulative online choice architecture, as well as online gambling and gambling within games. It has also invited the European Commission and the member states to call on online intermediary service providers to comply with their responsibilities for creating a safe online environment for minors, including online gaming sites.<sup>17</sup> The European Parliament has called on the Commission to put forward a European video game strategy with a harmonised European regulatory framework ensuring a high level of consumer protection.<sup>18</sup> The Parliament has also suggested that loot boxes in online games could be regulated at EU level if existing practices are insufficient to protect players from potentially harmful effects.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the Parliament's Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee (IMCO) has called on the Commission to ban gambling-like mechanisms such as loot boxes in games accessible to minors.<sup>20</sup>

Most European countries have established licensing systems that allow more than one operator to offer services on the market. In a few countries, monopolistic regimes offering online gambling services are in place. For example, according to Norwegian gambling regulations, only one company can legally offer online casino games and betting.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the types of games allowed can vary from one EU country to another. Cyprus is one of the few European countries that bans certain types of gambling, such as slot machines, online casinos and betting exchanges.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> [Council conclusions on promoting and protecting the mental health of children and adolescents in the digital era](#). Council of the EU, 2025.

<sup>18</sup> [Report on consumer protection in online video games: a European single market approach](#). European Parliament, 2023.

<sup>19</sup> [Loot boxes in online games and their effect on consumers, in particular young consumers](#). European Parliament, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> [New EU measures needed to make online services safer for minors](#). European Parliament, 2025.

<sup>21</sup> [Gambling in Norway](#). The Norwegian Gambling and Foundation Authority, 2025.

<sup>22</sup> [The Betting Law of 2012](#). The National Betting Authority of Cyprus, 2012.

Many European countries have introduced restrictions on advertising, most recently Lithuania.<sup>23</sup> Countries have also adopted other types of measures to tackle particularly online gambling problems. Belgium has recently introduced a €200-a-week deposit cap for online gambling accounts which can only be increased after customer safety checks.<sup>24</sup> The UK government has expressed that they need to ensure there are proper protections when gambling poses the risk of becoming a clinical addiction. They have also modernised the rules for online gambling, advertising, sponsorship and branding, safeguarding children in particular.<sup>25</sup> Ireland has announced that the country will have the heaviest penalties in Europe for companies that allow children to gamble, carrying a potential penalty of eight years' imprisonment.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, the gambling industry's lobbying is threatening to water these efforts down.<sup>27</sup> Bulgaria has proposed loss limits and gaming session time limits, which would vary depending on player's age.<sup>28</sup>

While some countries strictly legislate, other countries have a more liberal approach. Malta has become a European centre for the online gambling and gaming industry due to its lenient laws. In 2022, the total gross value added (GVA) generated by the gaming industry represented around 10% of the country's economy.<sup>29</sup> The recently adopted Bill 55 prevents the recognition and enforcement of foreign judgments against gaming companies registered in Malta.<sup>30</sup> This has been contested, for example, by the members of the European Parliament, as it creates an even freer playing field for the gambling industry.<sup>31</sup>

In countries where gambling is legal, governments typically receive significant tax revenues. This creates a perverse incentive as the perceived economic benefits of gambling markets take precedence over harm reduction.<sup>32</sup>

Regarding gaming, in Belgium and the Netherlands, the national authorities have banned loot boxes from video games as they are considered gambling. As a result, the loot box features have been removed or games were completely pulled from the markets.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Gaming Advertising Requirements from July 1, 2025. Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania, 2025.

<sup>24</sup> [The Gaming Commission protects the players](#). The Gaming Commission Belgium, 2024.

<sup>25</sup> [High stakes: gambling reform for the digital age](#). The Government of the UK - Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2023.

<sup>26</sup> [Gambling Safety. Protecting the Public. Children](#). Gambling Regulatory Authority of Ireland, 2025.

<sup>27</sup> Harte, S. [The Government has bottled it on gambling – our young people will pay](#). Irish Examiner, 2025.

<sup>28</sup> [Gambling Bill](#). National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2025.

<sup>29</sup> [Annual Report – Gaming Industry Performance in 2022](#). Malta Gaming Authority, 2023.

<sup>30</sup> [Bill No. 55](#). Parliament of Malta, 2023.

<sup>31</sup> [Parliamentary question – E-001136/2025 – Regulation of gambling advertising and Maltese breach of EU law](#). European Parliament, 2025.

<sup>32</sup> [Gambling](#). The World Health Organization (WHO), 2024.

<sup>33</sup> [Loot boxes in online games and their effect on consumers, in particular young consumers](#). European Parliament, 2020.

### 3. What can be done

Population-wide interventions can help prevent and reduce harm. An integrated approach to gambling and gaming policies is key. This means considering the impact of gambling and gaming on both the physical and mental health of individuals, as well as the broader effects on other domains, such as finances, social relationships, and the health of others in their environment.

There is an urgent need for regulation, especially of online gambling. Therefore, European harmonisation of national regulations would be beneficial as online gambling and gaming are accessible and available across borders.

Advertising, marketing, promotion and sponsorship of gambling and gaming must be ended. This would protect especially vulnerable populations such as children and young people. As mentioned above, many countries have already introduced restrictions. Advertising of gambling activities is considered a major contextual factor that contributes to the social acceptance of gambling, gambling participation and problematic gambling behaviour.<sup>34</sup> It is estimated that ending gambling advertising could prevent harm to millions of adults and children solely in the United Kingdom.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, gambling companies have become prominent sponsors in sports, particularly in football, with almost 300 top-flight clubs across Europe having deals with betting firms.<sup>36</sup> Belgium has introduced a law restricting betting sponsorships to sleeves and the back of shirts.<sup>37</sup> However, a loophole allows to use sub-brands that incorporate part of the company's name on the front of shirts.

Industry self-regulation is a common feature of gambling regulation. However, this has persistently failed. In the UK, the government's white paper mentions the Premier League's decision to remove gambling logos from the front of football shirts from August 2026 onwards. While strong self-regulatory action would mean that government regulation is unnecessary, a study suggests that this action would only remove around 7% of all gambling logos from an average Premier League football match.<sup>38</sup> Policy-making in areas that affect health should be protected from undue influence by the gambling and gaming industries. EU mandated change must have urgency as many countries have failed to implement gambling harm protection in a timely manner.

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<sup>34</sup> [Gambling Advertising](#). Ghent University, 2025.

<sup>35</sup> Fenton K. & Prochaska, W. [Ending gambling adverts could prevent harm to millions of adults and children in the UK](#). BMJ, 2025.

<sup>36</sup> Buzzoni L. et al. [Revealed: how gambling embedded itself into European football](#). Investigate Europe, 2025.

<sup>37</sup> [Sports sponsorship from 1/01/2025](#). Gaming Commission, 2024.

<sup>38</sup> Newall, P. [One year on from the UK Government's gambling White Paper: Where are we now?](#). The Society for the Study of Addiction, 2024.

Warning messages, such as real time pop up messages, can be considered as one piece of a larger and responsible gambling strategy. They can address financial issues, relationship problems, mental health issues, and the negative consequences of gambling on well-being in general. They can also highlight the signs of a gambling problem, such as increased gambling time or spending, and the potential for gambling to negatively impact work. It is however estimated that there is only a limited impact of warning messages on gambling behaviour and cognition.<sup>39</sup>

Age verification is crucial to protect minors. The European Commission is working towards an EU-harmonised approach to age verification. A unified age verification solution should allow EU users to prove they are old enough to access legally age restricted sites, starting with a minimum age of 18 years for accessing adult-restricted online content, such as gambling.<sup>40</sup>

Other population-wide interventions include centralised account registration to require those who gamble to set binding loss limits, and restrictions relating to access and availability. For example in Finland, gambling declined during 2019–2022 mainly due to reduced land-based electronic gambling machine usage.<sup>41</sup> Beyond this, school-based prevention programmes can be successful.

Sustainable funding of public health measures to address gambling harms is critical. Gambling research, education and treatment are often funded by voluntary contributions from the industry or fines issued by the regulator.<sup>42</sup> However, voluntary contributions often lack transparency and independence from the gambling industry.<sup>43</sup> Taxation is often used to direct the consumption and provision of harmful commodities. However, taxation of gambling is unlikely to significantly direct consumption, but it can be a tool in preventing some gambling harms by making the provision of certain product categories less attractive to consumers and operators.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, individuals with gambling and gaming problems should have access to effective and evidence-based treatment options. Substantial resources are needed to develop treatment centres, but also to train mental health professionals, and provide them with the necessary tools

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<sup>39</sup> Caillon J. et al. [Impact of Warning Pop-Up Messages on the Gambling Behavior, Craving, and Cognitions of Online Gamblers: A Randomized Controlled Trial](#). Front Psychiatry, 2021.

<sup>40</sup> [The EU approach to age verification](#). European Commission, 2025.

<sup>41</sup> Marionneau, V. et al. [Availability restrictions and mandatory precommitment in land-based gambling: effects on online substitutes and total consumption in longitudinal sales data](#). BMC Public Health, 2024.

<sup>42</sup> [Protecting the public from being harmed or exploited by gambling and the gambling industry](#). The Association of Directors of Public Health (UK), 2022.

<sup>43</sup> [Response to consultation on the structure, distribution and governance of the statutory levy on gambling operators](#). British Medical Association, 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Marionneau, V. et al. [Channelling and taxation in European online gambling markets: evolution and policy implications](#). Harm Reduction Journal, 2025.

and resources for evidence-based effective and efficient treatment. It is also crucial to ensure the competence of professionals in healthcare and educational sectors for early identification of individuals with issues related to gambling and gaming.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, measures need to be taken to increase the understanding of parents of the potential risks and harms associated with gaming and gambling.

Doctors and other healthcare professionals must be able to recognise and take action to ensure that stigma, shame, and fear of disclosure does not prevent people from seeking and accessing support and treatment. Stigma surrounding gambling disorders has been well documented, as has the public perception of gaming disorders.<sup>46</sup> Doctors should consider asking people about gambling and gaming when speaking to them about smoking, alcohol consumption and use of other substances during a health check or general practitioner appointment.<sup>47</sup> This should be done especially when they present with a mental health problem, particularly thoughts about self-harm or suicide, depression, anxiety, psychosis, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), personality disorder, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or when they are taking medicines that may affect impulse control. This includes dopamine agonists for Parkinson's disease, or aripiprazole for psychosis.<sup>48</sup> Tools and guidance already exist. For example in the UK, the professional membership body for general practitioners has created the Gambling Harms Hub which aims to offer tools to identify and diagnose gambling harms and make appropriate referrals for patients. Moreover, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has developed guidelines on gambling-related harms.<sup>49 50</sup>

Constant monitoring is needed to identify emerging challenges. Due to rapid technological advancement, online gambling and gaming are continuously changing, posing challenges to individuals, families and society. To address this change, monitoring systems should be established to detect new products, monetisation models, marketing strategies and structural characteristics that may contribute to an increased potential for addiction at an early stage.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> [Policy paper on strategies and regulatory options aimed at reducing risks and harms related to online gaming and online gambling](#). The Pempidou Group (Council of Europe International Co-operation Group on Drugs and Addictions), 2024.

<sup>46</sup> Casale S. et al. [Stigmatizing attitudes toward Internet gaming disorder, Problematic smartphone use and Problematic social networking site use](#). Addictive Behaviors, 2023.

<sup>47</sup> [NICE guideline: Gambling-related harms: identification, assessment and management](#). UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), 2025.

<sup>48</sup> [NICE guideline: Parkinson's disease in adults](#). UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), 2017.

<sup>49</sup> [Gambling Harms Hub](#). The Royal College of General Practitioners, 2026.

<sup>50</sup> [Gambling-related harms: identification, assessment and management](#). The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), 2025.

<sup>51</sup> [Risks and harms associated with online gaming and gambling](#). The Pempidou Group (Council of Europe International Co-operation Group on Drugs and Addictions), 2024.