



# POPULATION PROTECTION POLICIES ON GAMBLING

## COUNTRY REPORT: PORTUGAL (2025)

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# INTRODUCTION

Regulations to protect against social harms created by gambling have not always been as widespread or as politically significant as they have been in recent years. Twenty years ago, when most states in Europe began to liberalize gambling, very few restrictions and rules were created to prevent harmful gambling behaviors, because the harms associated with gambling were not well understood. As gambling became widespread and its impact more visible, harm reduction regulations gradually began to take shape.

Our report begins by presenting a broad framework of Portugal's situation in terms of the implementation of the diversified range of policies aimed at preventing and reducing the individual and social harms created by gambling. The policy map, a descriptive approach, allows policymakers and stakeholders to understand the full landscape of options to protect against social harm caused by gambling from a European perspective and identify gaps.

In a complementary way, we continue with the evaluation of this system of public health protection against harm caused by gambling using the Index developed in this regard through this project. This index shows us where we are on the scale of implementing effective harm reduction measures.

The last chapter is dedicated to recommendations to improve the system of protecting the population against damage caused by gambling.

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# GENERAL FRAMEWORK

Gambling has a long tradition in Portugal, with the first casinos appearing in the 19th century. The legalization and regulation of the sector has evolved over time, with the creation of specific concessions to operate casinos.

Portugal follows a regulatory model similar to that of other European countries, but faces challenges in implementing some measures.

The gambling sector in Portugal includes both games of chance, which are regulated by the state. Land-based casinos, sports betting and online games are regulated by the Gaming Regulation and Inspection Service (SRIJ). The gambling market represents a significant part of the economy, generating significant revenue and contributing to tourism and employment.

The main laws applicable to the gambling sector in Portugal include:

- **Law no. 8/2006** - Regulates the operation and practice of games of chance in casinos.
- **Decree-Law no. 422/89 (Legal Regime for Games of Fortune or Chance)** - Defines the legal framework for the operation of physical and online gambling.
- **Law no. 66/2015** - Establishes the legal framework for online gaming and betting, determining the rules for granting licenses and supervising operating entities.
- **Decree-Law no. 282/2003** - Regulates the operation of gaming machine parlours.
- **Ordinance no. 130/2020** - Defines rules for responsible gambling measures and the prevention of gambling addiction.

Gambling can have significant impacts on public health, especially when associated with problematic behavior. Gambling addiction is recognized as a psychological disorder that can lead to financial difficulties, family problems and mental health problems, including anxiety and depression. To mitigate these risks, Portugal implements responsible gambling measures such as betting limits, self-exclusion and awareness campaigns. However, experts point out that there is still a need for more investment in the prevention and treatment of gambling addiction.

This is completely in line with the objectives of the Play your Cards Right Project, to raise awareness of the problem of gambling addiction.

# POLICIES FOR MEASUREMENT, RESEARCH, DATA TRANSPARENCY



SRIJ monitors the sector and publishes regular reports on market performance. Research into the economic and social impacts of gambling has been increasing, although there is room for greater transparency in making data available to the public and for more in-depth studies into problematic behavior associated with gambling.

Measurement and research into the impact of gambling is carried out through:

- **Periodic SRIJ reports** - The regulatory body publishes data on revenues, the number of licensed operators and trends in the sector. The periodicity of the reports varies, but there are daily and hourly reporting obligations for licensed operators.
- **Academic and institutional studies** - Some universities and independent institutions carry out research into the impacts of gambling on society, albeit in limited numbers.
- **Monitoring player behavior** - Through licensed operators, who are obliged to provide information on gambling patterns, self-exclusion measures and responsible gambling practices.
- **International collaboration** - Portugal participates in European networks of gambling regulators to exchange information and best practices.

Recent studies reveal worrying data on the impact of gambling in Portugal:

- A study by the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Porto (FMUP) indicated that 3.1% of university students present criteria for gambling addiction and 16.6% show signs of problematic behavior.
- SICAD's 5th National Survey on the Consumption of Psychoactive Substances in the General Population 2022 revealed that 55.6% of the Portuguese population takes part in games of chance, an increase of 7.6 % compared to 2017. The study also highlighted that the prevalence of gambling is higher among men (62.7 per cent) than among women (49 per cent).
- The studies recommend measures such as financial education, greater regulation of gambling advertising and prevention programs aimed at young people and vulnerable groups.

Despite these efforts, there are still challenges in the transparency and accessibility of data to the public, and greater standardization and publication of in-depth studies on the social and economic impacts of gambling are recommended.

## GAMBLING MARKETING PROTECTION POLICIES

The commercialization of games of chance is heavily regulated to protect consumers, especially the most vulnerable. Advertising campaigns are subject to restrictions and cannot be aimed at minors or present gambling as a financial solution.

The main measures include:

- **Restrictions on advertising:** Gambling advertising cannot be aimed at minors, cannot suggest that gambling is a financial solution and must include responsible gambling messages.
- **Rules for licensed operators:** Only entities duly licensed by SRIJ can operate games of chance in Portugal.
- **Prohibition of misleading promotions:** Operators may not offer bonuses or incentives that induce excessive gambling practices.
- **Awareness-raising campaigns:** SRIJ and other entities promote campaigns to inform the population about the risks of gambling and the importance of responsible gambling.
- **Monitoring and sanctions:** Failure to comply with the rules can result in severe sanctions, including fines and revocation of licenses.

Advertising for gambling on audiovisual channels (television and radio) is also subject to restrictions, according to **Law no. 66/2015** and **Ordinance no. 130/2020**, advertising cannot be aimed at minors and must respect specific times to avoid exposure to vulnerable audiences. **Advertising for games of chance is only allowed at night, usually after 10pm**, to minimize the impact on minors and groups susceptible to gambling addiction.

Advertising for games of chance on the Internet is permitted during the day, but with restrictions. The same legislation again states that online gambling advertising cannot be directed at minors or vulnerable groups. In addition, it must contain messages about responsible gambling and cannot suggest that gambling is a guaranteed form of income. However, it's also easy to see that

children and games are caught up in advertising, even indirectly, since online filters and controls are not always obvious.

As for the promotion of games at sporting events, this is possible without directly targeting children or associating them with public figures who could influence young people. Licensed sports bookmakers can sponsor competitions, clubs and players, if they comply with the rules laid down by the regulator.

The same laws (Law no. 66/2015 and Ordinance no. 130/2020) also regulate the display of billboards, namely:

- Location - Outdoor billboard advertising may not be located in areas close to schools, hospitals or other places frequented by minors.
- Content - Communication must be clear and not induce excessive gambling, and messages about responsible gambling must be included.
- Target audience - The use of images or figures that could attract minors, such as cartoon characters or digital influencers popular with young people, is not permitted.
- Supervision - The Gaming Regulation and Inspection Service (SRIJ) has the authority to monitor and apply sanctions in cases of non-compliance.

Despite all these restrictions, Portuguese law does not define the size of outdoor billboards.

## PROTECTION POLICIES FOR GAMING MACHINES AND GAMING HALLS

The general availability of gaming machines in Portugal, measured by the number of gaming machines per capita, is not widely publicized in official sources. However, existing regulations set limits on the number of machines allowed per establishment and region.

Decree-Law 282/2003 regulates the operation of gaming machine rooms and defines the maximum number of machines allowed per establishment, depending on the type of license and the category of the room. Casinos have a set number of machines in their concession contracts, while machine rooms are subject to stricter limits.

The presence of gaming machines is mainly concentrated in casinos and licensed halls, and their installation in unauthorized premises is prohibited.

The country is divided into specific gaming zones where casinos can operate legally. Currently, the main concessions include:

- Estoril Gaming Zone - Casino Estoril
- Figueira da Foz Gaming Zone - Casino Figueira
- Algarve Gaming Zone - Vilamoura, Monte Gordo and Portimão casinos
- Madeira Gaming Zone - Madeira Casino
- Azores Gaming Zone - Ponta Delgada Casino
- Tróia Gaming Zone - Tróia Casino
- Porto/Santa Maria da Feira Gaming Zone - Casino Espinho
- Chaves Gaming Zone - Casino de Chaves

In casinos, the number of gaming machines is defined in the concession contract for each casino and may vary depending on the space and the conditions agreed with the State.

Decree-Law no. 282/2003 also defines the conditions for installing gaming rooms and machines, including the compulsory licensing by SRIJ to operate gaming machines. In gambling halls there are also maximum limits for the number of machines allowed in these places, depending on the category of the hall and the license issued by the Gaming Regulation and Inspection Service (SRIJ).

In both cases there are also measures and restrictions:

- Access control: Compulsory identification to prevent minors and self-excluded individuals from entering.
- Real-time monitoring: Gaming systems must allow for constant supervision by the SRIJ, ensuring that operations are conducted in a transparent and legal manner.
- Security measures: Implementation of video surveillance circuits and financial transaction records to prevent fraud and money laundering.

Portugal currently has 12 casinos and 14 duly licensed gaming halls

## REMOTE GAMBLING RESTRICTIONS (ONLINE)

Online gambling has been legal and regulated in Portugal since 2015. Operators must obtain licenses from SRIJ to operate legally and comply with rules on security, transparency and player protection. There are restrictions on advertising and there are measures to prevent compulsive gambling

The main restrictions include:

- **Licensing obligation by SRIJ** - Only licensed operators can offer online games.

- **Identification and access control** - Players must be identified and verify their age (over 18).
- **Self-exclusion** - Players can request to be excluded from accessing online games.
- **Betting and deposit limits** - Measures to prevent compulsive behavior.
- **Restrictive advertising rules** - A ban on advertising aimed at minors or that encourages irresponsible behavior.
- **Monitoring and enforcement by SRIJ** - Companies must provide data on player behavior and ensure compliance with responsible gaming measures.

These measures ensure that online gambling is practiced in a regulated manner, protecting consumers from the financial and behavioral risks associated with uncontrolled gambling.

Children can indirectly be exposed to gambling adverts, despite legal restrictions. Gambling advertising in Portugal is subject to strict rules, including a ban on targeting under 18 years old and on content that associates gambling with social or economic success. However, there are concerns about indirect exposure, especially on digital platforms and social networks, where algorithms may not completely filter out such content for younger audiences.

## TREATMENT AND SUPPORT FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING BEHAVIOR

Portugal has support programs for problematic gamblers, including counselling services, helplines and rehabilitation programs.

- **Self-exclusion** - The SRIJ allows players to voluntarily exclude themselves from online and physical gambling.
- **Treatment centers** - Mental health services and associations offer psychological and therapeutic support.
- **Awareness-raising campaigns** - The state promotes educational activities on the risks of excessive gambling.

Through the National Health Service (SNS), there are psychology and psychiatry consultations available to treat gambling addiction, as well as specific programs in some health units. In addition:

- The **National Plan for the Reduction of Addictive Behaviors and Dependencies (PNRCAD)** includes pathological gambling as one of its priority areas.
- **SICAD (Serviço de Intervenção nos Comportamentos Aditivos e nas Dependências)** develops prevention and treatment strategies, as well as studies on the prevalence of the problem.
- Some NGOs and associations, such as the **Portuguese Association for Gambling Support (APAJ)**, also offer support and counselling.

In September 2023, the Portuguese government approved the National Plan for the Reduction of Addictive Behaviors and Addictions 2030 and the Action Plan for the Reduction of Addictive Behaviors and Addictions. These plans aim to significantly reduce a wide range of addictive behaviors and dependencies, addressing both psychoactive substance use and non-substance addictions, including problematic gambling.

In January 2024, a single structure came into operation, the Institute for Addictive Behaviors (ICAD), which integrates planning, coordination, policy design and healthcare provision in the field of different addictions, from illicit substances to alcohol and non-substance addictions, with a public investment of around 19.7 million euros.

For 2025, the State Budget provides for an increase of 15 million euros. This investment reinforces the government's commitment to tackling the challenges associated with addictive behaviors.

The private healthcare system in Portugal also offers treatment and support solutions for gambling-related problems. Some of the options include:

- **Psychology and Psychiatry Consultations** - Private clinics and hospitals offer specialized psychological and psychiatric care to treat gambling addiction, including cognitive and behavioral therapies.
- **Rehabilitation programs** - Some private facilities offer treatment programs for gambling addiction, including hospitalization in more serious cases.
- **Private Support Groups** - In addition to public associations, there are private support groups that offer support to gamblers and their families.

Private health insurance in Portugal generally doesn't cover specific treatment for gambling addiction, but may include psychological or psychiatric mental health support. Some more comprehensive plans may cover consultations with specialists or therapy, but hospitalization and rehabilitation programs are usually excluded.

## INDEX OF POLICIES TO PROTECT AGAINST SOCIAL HARM CAUSED BY GAMBLING

Domain Indicator	Domain Indicator		
<b>Measurement, Research, Data Transparency</b>	Problematic gambling monitoring	Is there a strategy to monitor the prevalence of problematic gambling at a societal level?	Yes
	Gambling research funding	Is research funded and organized to monitor the social problems created by gambling?	Yes
	Data transparency	Are data collected and publicly available on gambling behavior and gross revenue?	Yes
<b>Marketing</b>	Daytime TV Restrictions	Is daytime gambling advertising allowed on broadcast media (TV, Radio)?	Yes
	Daytime internet marketing restrictions	Is internet advertising allowed during daytime?	No
	Sporting events marketing restrictions	Can gambling be advertised at sporting events?	No
	Sports sponsorship restrictions	Can the gambling industry market itself through sports sponsorship?	No
	Advertising content restrictions	Are there content restrictions for ads? Like not allowing exaggerating the chances of winning or presenting participation in gambling as the way to solve financial and personal problems or improving social status.	Yes
	Famous people marketing gambling restrictions	Can famous people appear in the marketing products of gambling organizations?	No

	Outdoor advertising restrictions	Are there restrictions on marketing campaigns for gambling organizations' usage of billboards, wallscape or mural?	No
<b>Land-based gambling</b>	EGM penetration	What is the general availability of land-based gambling, specifically measured by the number of EGMs per capita?	
	EGM spatial density	Are there restrictions for land-based gambling spatial density?	Low
	EGM location restrictions	What are the rules governing the spatial distribution of gambling establishments?	Yes
	Multi-product premises	Can EGMs and other gambling services be found on the same premises?	Yes
	Mandatory player identification	Is there mandatory player identification for access to the gambling services on the land-based premises?	yes
	Minors on gambling premises	Can minors gamble on land-based premises?	No
	Self-exclusion from gambling premises	Can people self-exclude from access to land-based gambling facilities?	Yes
<b>Online gambling</b>	Minors in online gambling	Can children engage in online gambling? Are they targeted by ads for gambling?	No
	Unlicensed	Can people gamble on sites not licensed to provide gambling services in your country?	No
		Is there an option for individuals to voluntarily exclude themselves from access to online gambling?	Yes
<b>Treatment and support</b>	Public healthcare solutions for gambling problems	Do public healthcare services offer support and treatment options for gambling-related issues?	Yes
	Private healthcare solutions for gambling problems	Does the private health care system offer treatment and support solutions?	Yes
	Public funding for treatment	Is treatment for gambling problems paid for by public funds?	Yes

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING POLICIES TO PROTECT THE POPULATION AGAINST HARMFUL GAMBLING BEHAVIORS

This report aims to contribute to an informed debate on the gambling situation in Portugal and to suggest improvements to minimize the negative impacts on society.

Here are some recommendations for improving policies to protect the population from harmful gambling behavior:

## 1. Strengthening Supervision and Law Enforcement

- Increase surveillance of illegal operators and unlicensed platforms.
- Improve the application of sanctions to entities that do not comply with the rules, especially with regard to advertising and the protection of minors.

## 2. Improving Access to Data and Transparency

- Publishing more detailed and accessible data on the impact of gambling on society.
- Encouraging independent studies on the social and economic effects of gambling.

## 3. Improving Self-Exclusion Policies

- Better publicized self-exclusion mechanisms so that more players are aware of the option.

- Better integration between physical and online operators to ensure that self-exclusion is effective on all platforms.

#### **4. Stricter Advertising Rules**

- Stricter restrictions on gambling advertising, especially at times and in media accessible to minors, especially online.
- A ban on aggressive marketing strategies that encourage risky behavior.

#### **5. Strengthening Education and Prevention Programs**

- Introduction of education programs on responsible gambling in schools and among the general population.
- Raising awareness about the risks of gambling and ways to prevent it.

#### **6. Expanding Access to Treatment and Support**

- Greater investment in public psychological support services for problem gamblers.
- Partnerships with private organizations and associations to expand treatment and support options.



## REFERENCES

### Legislation and Official Regulations

- ✓ **Law no. 8/2006** - Regulates the operation and practice of games of chance in casinos.
- ✓ **Decree-Law no. 422/89** - Establishes the Legal Framework for Games of Fortune and Chance.
- ✓ **Law no. 66/2015** - Defines the legal regime for online gaming and betting.
- ✓ **Decree-Law no. 282/2003** - Regulates the operation of gaming machine parlours.
- ✓ **Ordinance no. 130/2020** - Establishes responsible gambling measures.
- ✓ **Regulation of the Gaming Regulation and Inspection Service (SRIJ)** - Rules for licensed operators.

### Official Reports and Statistics

- ✓ **Gaming Regulation and Inspection Service (SRIJ)**
  - Quarterly and annual reports on the gaming sector in Portugal.
  - Statistics on licensed operators, revenue and inspection.
  - Available at: <https://www.srij.turismodeportugal.pt>
- ✓ **Service for Intervention in Addictive Behaviors and Dependencies (SICAD)**
  - V National Survey on the Consumption of Psychoactive Substances in the General Population 2022.
  - Studies on problematic behavior related to gambling.
  - Available at: <https://www.sicad.pt>

## Academic Studies and Scientific Research

### ✓ Faculty of Medicine of the University of Porto (FMUP)

- Study on the prevalence of problem gambling among university students.
- It concluded that 3.1% of students meet criteria for gambling addiction and 16.6% have problematic behavior.
- Publication available on scientific databases.

### ✓ Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon (ICS-ULisboa)

- Research into the social and economic impacts of gambling regulation in Portugal.
- Comparison with international models of gambling regulation.

### ✓ Reports by the European Gaming and Betting Association (EGBA)

- Analyses of gambling regulation in the European Union.
- Available at: <https://www.egba.eu>

## Other Relevant Sources

✓ **World Health Organization (WHO)** - Guidelines on gambling addiction and impacts on public health.

✓ **European Gambling Research** - Comparative studies on the regulation and social impact of gambling in different countries.