

# POPULATION PROTECTION POLICIES ON GAMBLING

## COUNTRY REPORT: SPAIN (Iulie 2025)

AYUNTAMIENTO DE CEUTÍ  
AUTHOR



Co-funded by  
the European Union



AYUNTAMIENTO DE  
**Ceutí**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction ..... 3
- General framework ..... 4
- Policies for measurement, research, data transparency ..... 5
- Gambling Marketing Protection Policies ..... 6
- Protection policies for gaming machines and gaming halls ..... 8
- Remote gambling restrictions (online) 9
- Treatment and support for problem gambling behaviour ..... 10
- Index of policies to protect against social harm caused by gambling ..... 12
- Recommendations for improving policies to protect the population against harmful gambling behaviors ..... 14
- References ..... 17

# INTRODUCTION

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

Our report begins by presenting a general overview of the situation in Spain regarding the implementation of a diverse range of policies aimed at preventing and reducing the individual and social harms caused by gambling. The policy map, a descriptive approach, allows policymakers and stakeholders to understand the full range of options for protecting against the social harms caused by gambling from a European perspective and to identify gaps.

Additionally, we continue to evaluate this system for protecting public health from the harm caused by gambling, using the Index developed within the framework of this project. This index shows us where we stand on the scale of implementing effective harm reduction measures.

The final chapter is devoted to recommendations for improving the system of protecting the population from the harm caused by gambling.

This country report was developed within the framework of the 'Play Your Cards Right' project (2023-1-RO01-KA220-VET-000160621), co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and implemented by a consortium led by Asociatia Educatie Pentru Viata Reala, in partnership with Produções Fixe Unipessoal Lda, Asociatia Aliat pentru Sanatate Mintala, Ayuntamiento de Ceutí, and Klinika za psihijatriju Vrapce.

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of its contents, which reflect the views only of the authors. The Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

# GENERAL FRAMEWORK

Gambling has a long tradition in Spain, with its regulation having evolved throughout history, with state institutions being the first precursors to legal gambling (Royal Lottery in 1763).

In 1977, gambling and private betting were authorized, and in 1978, it was established that the Autonomous Communities would be responsible for regulating gambling in their respective territories, while the State would regulate betting and lotteries from that point forward. However, despite the existence of a multitude of rules and regulations on gambling in Spain, both at the state and regional levels, Law 13/2011, of May 27, on the regulation of gambling (hereinafter, LRJ), stands out above the rest.

Depending on the entity offering it, gambling can be public or private. Public gambling is offered by the Spanish Government and consists primarily of the State Lottery and Betting Society (SELAE) and the Spanish National Organization for the Blind (ONCE). Their task is to offer these types of games, which are much simpler to regulate and manage, and where it is easier to maintain the concept of safe gambling, raising funds through the public offering of these games. On the other hand, there is private gambling, which requires a series of licenses and concessions for its offering and includes all other types of games.

As a general rule, each Autonomous Community regulates its own gambling legislation autonomously, provided that gambling is offered exclusively within the territory of its Autonomous Community. This jurisprudential decision stems from the lack of express distribution of powers under the Spanish Constitution. On the other hand, digital gambling is gambling offered online, without depending on or being linked to a physical establishment, being practically or completely independent of them. This type of gambling has undergone the most recent development, with the first legislative projects beginning to be drafted in the early years of the 21st century. However, the LRJ (Loyal Law of Judiciary) was the first real embodiment of the legislator's intention, offering a regulatory perspective on online gambling and, at the same time, creating the Directorate General for the Regulation of Gambling (DGOJ) in the First Transitional Provision of the Law to exercise control and authorization of powers relating to gambling and its licenses. Online gambling is regulated exclusively by the State when the game is offered in more than one Autonomous Community.

Therefore, the main laws applicable to the gaming sector in Spain include:

- **Law 13/2011** – The purpose of this law is the regulation of gambling activity, in its different forms. modalities, which is developed at the level state, in order to guarantee the protection of order public, the fight against fraud , prevention of conduct addictive , protection of the rights of the minors and the safeguarding of rights of the participants in the games , without prejudice to the provisions in the Statutes of Autonomy . It regulates,

in particular, the activity of gambling when it is carried out through electronic, computer, telematic and interactive channels, in those who media in-person must have a character accessory.

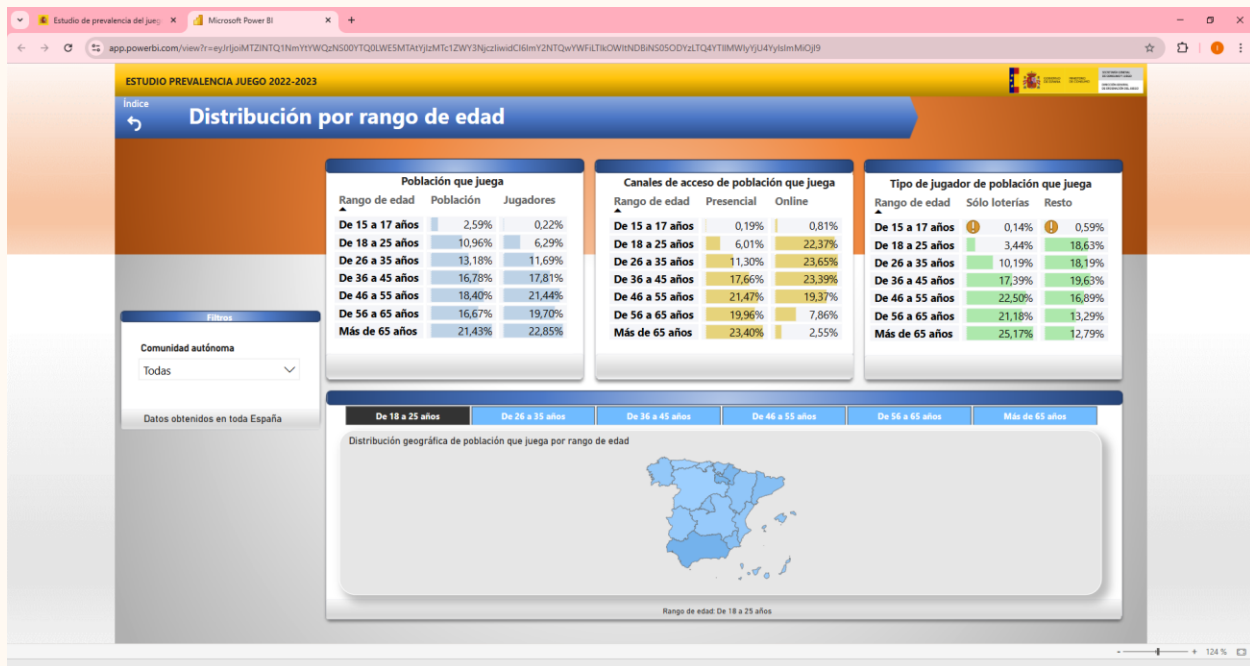
- **Royal Decree 958/2020 on Commercial Communications of Gaming Activities** – Regulates advertising. However, it has been appealed judicially and, in early 2024, the Supreme Court overturned several of its measures.
- **17 regulations different for the face-to-face game** – The face-to-face game this regulated mostly by authority competent within the corresponding Autonomous Community, of which there are 17.
- **Royal Decree 2110/1998, of October 2** – Regulates machines recreational and gaming.

The game can have impacts significant in health public, especially when associated with behaviors problematic. Gambling addiction is recognized as a disorder psychological that can carry difficulties economic problems family and mental health issues, including anxiety and depression. To mitigate these risks, Spain implements responsible gaming measures, such as self-exclusion. However, the experts They point out that it is still necessary invest further in prevention and treatment of gambling addiction.

This is completely aligned with the objectives of the Play your Cards Right project, which seeks sensitize about the problem of gambling addiction.

## POLICIES FOR MEASUREMENT, RESEARCH, DATA TRANSPARENCY

The General Directorate of Gaming Regulation belonging to the Ministry of Social Rights, Consumer Affairs and Agenda 2030 publishes regular reports on market performance, as well as different types of gamblers: by age, online versus physical, lottery versus other kinds of gambling, as a way to give transparency:



These data are of a big help. It shows, for example, that children between 15 and 17 gamble, when it is forbidden.

Also a study and analysis of risk factors for gambling disorder from 2017 can be found.

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

Advertising production floods public and private spaces, with no time restrictions, and sometimes the contents have been expressly designed for the youngest audiences. The proportion of adolescents who often see gambling advertising exceeds 70%. And studies among underage population show that there is a significant relationship between exposure to advertising and gambling (Deans et al., 2016; Deans et al., 2017b; Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2015; Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2012). Given this reality, it became necessary to limit these practices. So, almost a decade after the entry into force of the Spanish gambling law, Royal Decree 958/2020, of November 3, on commercial communications of gambling activities is published, which comes

fully into force in August 2021. This regulation takes measures that concretely restrict gambling advertising activities.

However, although Royal Decree 958/2020 was very good news, the gambling industry protested and Supreme Court admitted some of their allegations: annulling paragraphs 1 and 3 of Article 13, referring to promotional activities aimed at attracting new customers; Article 15, relating to the appearance of celebrities in game advertising; paragraph 1 of Article 23, which establishes a “general prohibition on the dissemination of commercial communications through information society services”; Article 25.3 on game advertising on video-sharing platforms; and paragraphs 2 and 3 of Article 26, which restrict the possibility of advertising the game through social networks. For example, the use of well-known figures in gambling advertisements was banned by Royal Decree 958/2020, prohibiting the participation of public figures or popular fictional characters. However, in 2024, the Supreme Court overturned this provision, creating a legal loophole. Some autonomous communities, such as Madrid, have maintained the ban at the regional level.

The almost universal use of smartphones and computers by adolescents increases the accessibility of gambling, as well as its intensity and the immediate reinforcement of the prize, creating a new user profile of gambling games, while at the same time making control by tutors and parents more difficult. Contributing to this availability, immediacy and accessibility is the modality of online sports betting and gambling through any device (Gainsbury, 2015; Griffiths, 2003) and in the case of minors: anonymity (McCormack and Griffiths, 2013). Thus, online gambling knows no time limitation, no physical restrictions, and no geographical limitations. These strategies facilitate the initiation and maintenance of gambling among young people and sometimes contribute to the maintenance of gambling disorder.

Moreover, as established before, gambling is regulated in a different way in the 17 Autonomous Communities. In some cases, the way the law is written allows a promotion very wide. For example, the law for the Region of Murcia allows advertising through a tourism offer or when sponsoring events. Therefore, for example, betting shops have a huge visibility in Burial of the Sardine, a parade attended by over 1 million people, many of them children. Floats which advertise betting houses parade during that evening in front of the children and they give out toys, balls with the logo of the betting company on it. Children are playing during the whole year with a ball with the logo of the betting company on it. Another example was the Christmas tree in Murcia, which was sponsored by different companies, including casinos and betting companies. A big electronic dashboard showed the logos of the companies that financed the huge Christmas tree.

# PROTECTION POLICIES FOR GAMING MACHINES AND GAMING HALLS

Spain has approximately 200,000 slot machines, equivalent to around 4,000 machines per million inhabitants. This places Spain among the European countries with the highest density of gambling machines.

## **Restrictions on the Location of Betting Establishments**

Autonomous communities set rules on the distribution and density of betting venues, implementing measures to limit their proximity to schools and vulnerable areas. Notable regulations include:

Castilla and León: Betting venues must be at least 300 meters apart and 150 meters away from educational institutions.

Canary Islands: The installation of betting terminals in bars is prohibited, with a minimum distance requirement of 200 meters between gambling venues and 300 meters from schools.

Murcia: Requires a distance of 500 meters between gambling venues and educational institutions and 1,000 meters between betting establishments, although this rule is not always enforced in practice.

Despite these restrictions, some reports indicate that in certain regions, betting establishments have been authorized near schools and high schools.

## **Identification Requirements to Enter Gambling Venues**

The law requires players to present their national ID card (DNI) or passport to enter gambling establishments. However, the enforcement of these controls varies by autonomous community, and in some regions, they are not strictly applied.

In the Basque Country, regulations prohibit access to individuals on self-exclusion lists and those sanctioned for gambling-related infractions. Additionally, operators may implement admission control systems to enhance security.

## **Minors' Access to Gambling Venues**

National legislation prohibits minors from entering betting venues and using slot machines. However, reports suggest that access controls are not uniformly enforced across the

country, and in some regions, minors can enter in bars with gambling machines without effective supervision.

A concerning case is that of Murcia, where recent studies show that **25.6% of teenagers have gambled online in the past year, while 28.9% have participated in land-based gambling.** Some minors have been found using their parents' identification documents to access betting activities.

Therefore, despite efforts to regulate the expansion of land-based gambling in Spain, differences between autonomous communities and the lack of strict enforcement have allowed the proliferation of betting establishments and, in some regions, access by minors. Spain has a high density of slot machines, and while location restrictions and identification requirements exist, their enforcement is not uniform across the country. Compared to other countries, the Spanish system is more fragmented and presents greater challenges in protecting the most vulnerable players.

## REMOTE GAMBLING RESTRICTIONS (ONLINE)

Online gambling in Spain is regulated at the national level under Law 13/2011 on Gambling Regulation, which establishes the requirements for legal operation and player protection measures. The Directorate General for the Regulation of Gambling (DGOJ) oversees this sector, granting licenses, ensuring regulatory compliance, and sanctioning operators that violate the law.

### **Minors' Access to Online Gambling**

In Spain, individuals under 18 years old are prohibited from participating in online gambling. To enforce this restriction, gambling platforms are required to implement identity verification systems, where players must provide their name, identification document, and a payment method linked to their personal information.

Additionally, operators have real-time access to a government database that verifies users' age and personal details. However, despite these restrictions, studies indicate that a significant percentage of minors have managed to access betting platforms by using family members' documents or third-party accounts.

## **Control of Unlicensed Operators**

Spain has a system for blocking illegal operators, managed by the DGOJ. Measures to prevent access to unauthorized betting platforms include:

- A blacklist of illegal operators, published and updated by the DGOJ.
- Blocking unauthorized websites, with notifications sent to internet service providers (ISPs) to restrict access.
- Financial and legal sanctions against operators offering gambling services without a license.

Despite these efforts, some players continue accessing foreign platforms through VPN networks or alternative payment methods.

## **Self-Exclusion Measures**

Spain has a voluntary self-exclusion system, managed by the DGOJ, called the General Register of Access Prohibitions to Gambling (RGIAJ). Anyone wishing to limit their access to online gambling can enroll in this register, preventing licensed operators from allowing them to register or place bets.

However, unlike other countries such as Portugal, where the self-exclusion system is centralized and covers both online and land-based gambling, in Spain, access to physical casinos and gambling halls still depends on regional regulations, leading to inconsistencies in protecting vulnerable players.

# **TREATMENT AND SUPPORT FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING BEHAVIOUR**

The issue of pathological gambling in Spain has led to the implementation of various strategies to treat and support affected individuals. These measures include treatment programs within the public health system, initiatives by private organizations, and self-exclusion mechanisms. However, access to and quality of services vary by autonomous community.

## **Public Treatment Centers and Coverage within the Health System**

The National Health System (SNS) recognizes gambling addiction as an addictive disorder and offers treatment through psychiatry, psychology, and primary care services. However,

coverage and specialization in treating gambling addiction depend on the specific autonomous community.

Key measures include:

- **Psychological and psychiatric care** in mental health centers.
- **Rehabilitation programs** in public hospitals in some communities.
- **Referral to specialized associations** for complementary treatment.

Access to these services is free of charge, but there are waiting lists and a lack of specialized units in many regions, which makes effective and timely treatment difficult.

### **Private Programs and NGO Support**

Due to the limitations of the public system, several private organizations and non-profit associations have emerged to offer treatment for gambling addiction. Some of the most recognized include:

- **FEJAR** (Spanish Federation of Rehabilitated Gamblers): Provides group therapy, psychological support, and legal counseling.
- Regional associations such as **ACENCAS** in Catalonia and **APAL** in Andalusia, which focus on rehabilitation and the prevention of gambling problems.
- **Private addiction clinics**, offering specialized treatment, but at a high cost, which limits access for people with fewer resources.

### **Prevention and Self-Exclusion Strategies**

In addition to treatment, Spain has tools for the prevention and control of gambling addiction, such as:

- **General Register of Access Prohibitions to Gambling (RGIAJ)**: Allows players to self-exclude from online gambling platforms and, in some communities, from physical establishments.
- **Awareness campaigns** promoted by the **DGOJ** and civil associations to raise awareness of the risks of gambling.
- **Helplines and counseling services** for individuals with gambling problems and their families.

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

The **Gambling Protection Index (GPI)** is a tool that measures the effectiveness of harm reduction policies in different countries, assessing key areas such as data transparency, advertising restrictions, regulation of land-based and online gambling, as well as access to treatment and support for problem gamblers.

According to this index, Spain has implemented significant measures, but still shows gaps in the application and effectiveness of its policies when compared to other European countries.

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 Restrictions	TV	Is daytime gambling advertising allowed on broadcast media (TV, Radio)? Yes
	Daytime marketing restrictions	internet	Is internet advertising allowed during daytime? Yes
	Sporting marketing restrictions	events	Can gambling be advertised at sporting events? Yes
	Sports sponsorship restrictions		Can the gambling industry market itself through sports sponsorship? Yes
	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 marketing gambling restrictions	people	Can famous people appear in the marketing products of gambling organizations? Yes

	Outdoor advertising restrictions	Are there restrictions on marketing campaigns for gambling organizations' usage of billboards, wallscape or mural?	Yes
<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?	High
	EGM location restrictions	What are the rules governing the spatial distribution of gambling establishments?	No
	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?	
	Private healthcare solutions for gambling problems	Does the private health care system offer treatment and support solutions?	
	Public funding for treatment	Is treatment for gambling problems paid for by public funds?	

# 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 Spain 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, protection of minors (as shown in the statistics, they are gambling despite being forbidden) and land-based premises location (there are some extremely closed to schools).

## 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. As said before, the last one included on the General Directorate for Gaming Regulation dates from 2017.

### 3. Improving Self-Exclusion Policies

- ✓ Better disseminate 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: the fact that social networks and tourist events allow for gambling advertising sets a clear danger, especially for youngsters.
- ✓ 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. “Qué te juegas” (What’s at stake?) is a good practice which could be exported to other regions.
- ✓ Raising awareness about the risks of gambling and ways to prevent it.
- ✓ Raising awareness about the enormous danger that youtubers and other famous people do when they advertise gambling activities, in order to create a bad opinion about these practices, so that famous people no longer want to take part in these activities and it may affect their image.

## 6. Expanding Access to Treatment and Support

- ✓ Greater investment in public psychological support services for problematic gamblers.
- ✓ Partnerships with private organizations and associations to expand treatment and support options.
- ✓ Provide specific competences on gambling prevention and intervention to different professionals.



## REFERENCES

### Legislation and Official Regulations

- ✓ **Law 13/2011, of May 27, 2011**, on gaming regulation.
- ✓ **Royal Decree 958/2020** - Commercial Information on Gambling Activities
- ✓ **Royal Decree 2110/1998, of October 2** - Recreational and Gaming Machines.
- ✓ **Autonomous regulations for land-based gambling.**

### Academic Studies and Scientific Research

- ✓ **Faculty of Economic Sciences of the University of Comillas (Madrid)**
  - TECHNICAL ANALYSIS OF GAMBLING IN SPAIN-EVOLUTION, PREDICTION AND CONSEQUENCES
  - Pathological gambling is indeed a serious problem for the psyche of the gambler, and that the argumentative consensus of the entire gambling research sector is that the problem of pathological gambling is an underestimated problem.
  - Gambling in Spain is indeed a latent problem, integrated in society, whose growth is certain, however there is the possibility of affecting it and causing changes in it through a more rigid and consistent legislation, especially in the online sector.
- ✓ **General Directorate for Gaming Regulation, together with Bellvitge, Hospital Universitari, Institut Catalá de la Salut and Generalitat de Catalunya. Departament de Salut**
  - Study and analysis of risk factors of gambling disorder in Spanish clinical population 2017

### Other Relevant Sources

- ✓ **Program Manual “What's at stake?”** – Preventive program for teenagers, accredited by the Conselleria de Sanitat Universal i Salut Pública de la Comunidad Pública de la Comunidad Valenciana and the Consejería de Salud de la Región de Murcia. It has been recognized as a Good Practice in Prevention by the Portal of Good Practices of the National Plan on Drugs.