



Topical Digest

Gambling regulation and gambling-related harms

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Information
Service



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This topical digest provides a reading list on the issue of gambling regulation and gambling-related harms in the UK and Republic of Ireland, and also draws upon the European and wider international experience. It also includes links to research papers, government department publications, parliamentary Committee reports and media articles.

Should MLAs or their constituency staff have suggestions for information they would like to see in the guide, or have links to useful sources that they would like to share, please feel free to contact the Research and Information Service at: RLS@niassembly.gov.uk

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1 Introduction

This topical digest provides a reading list on the issue of gambling regulation and gambling-related harms in the UK and Republic of Ireland, and also draws upon the European and wider international experience. It also includes links to research papers, government department publications, parliamentary Committee reports, All-Party Group inquiries, Northern Ireland Assembly questions, and local media. The digest provides a snapshot of some of the most recent publications and media articles and is not intended to be fully comprehensive.

Across both the UK and Republic of Ireland the regulatory landscape for both the control of gambling and tackling gambling-related harms is evolving. This has been necessitated by the continual advancement of technological developments in online gambling and a recognition that there is a need to strengthen the protections and controls around gambling for those experiencing gambling-related harms.

In **Northern Ireland**, gambling (aside from the National Lottery) is largely devolved. The former Minister for Communities had planned for a two-stage reform of what was outdated gambling legislation dating from 1985 and which predated the development of online gambling. The first stage of reform, reflected in the new [Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements \(Amendment\) Act \(NI\) 2022](#) contains provisions for the introduction of both industry [Codes of Practice](#) and an industry levy, the proceeds of which are intended to be expended on projects relating to gambling addiction and addressing gambling-related harms. The proposals for stage two included a much wider programme of reform to regulate online gaming and gambling. The [report](#) by the Committee for Communities on the Bill identified a number of outstanding issues requiring further exploration as part of the second stage of reform including the potential for a regulator for Northern Ireland, further measures to protect children and young people from gambling-related harms, advertising reform, consumer protection, the 'demand test' for bookmaking offices and bingo clubs, and reform of gaming machines prizes and technical standards.

In **Great Britain**, gambling is regulated by the [Gambling Act 2005](#) and gambling operators are licensed and regulated by the [Gambling Commission](#) whose role is also to provide advice and guidance. In December 2020, the UK Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport launched a [wide-ranging review](#) of gambling laws to ensure that they are 'fit for the digital age'. This included exploring the Gambling Commission's role and powers, online protections, advertising, sponsorship and branding, consumer redress, and age limits and age verification. The UK Government announced its [proposals for reform](#) in April 2023, which

included a mandatory industry levy, further powers for the Gambling Commission, new player protection checks and stake limits for online slots. A number of bodies, such as the [Royal College of Psychiatrists](#), felt that whilst the proposals were a step in the right direction, the scale and pace of the proposed reforms represented a significant missed opportunity to tackle gambling-related harms.

In the **Republic of Ireland**, a new [Gambling Regulation Bill](#) was announced in November 2022 which was to be a ‘framework for a modern, robust regulatory and licensing regime for the gambling sector’. Similar to Northern Ireland, gambling laws in the Republic of Ireland have been described as out-dated and having not kept pace with digital developments. The new framework contains provisions for a new gambling regulator ‘focused on public safety’ covering both online and land-based gambling, with powers to regulate advertising, gambling websites and apps. On 8 September 2022, the Department of Justice [announced](#) the appointment of a CEO Designate of the Gambling Regulatory Authority of Ireland, to prepare for the establishment of the Authority. The Bill reached the [Fourth Stage](#) at Dáil Éireann on 12 July 2023. The Department of Justice is currently preparing for the Bill’s Report Stage¹.

An increasing amount of attention is now being focused on identifying, assessing and addressing the impact of gambling-related harms. The Royal College of Psychiatrists [estimates](#) that ‘roughly 1 in every 100 people have a gambling disorder’, while a ‘further 4-7 people in every one hundred gambles at risky levels that can become a problem in the future’.² Whilst gambling can be an enjoyable activity for many, for some people it can lead to addiction, mental distress, social exclusion, financial hardship and even suicide. There is a growing body of literature highlighting that gambling-related harms can extend beyond individual gamblers, affecting families, friends, and communities³⁴. With the fast-paced evolution of technology and the advancement of AI, the challenges presented by online gambling consumption and advertising are issues requiring further scrutiny.

¹ Tithe an Oireachtais. [Question for Written Answer on the progress of the Gambling Bill](#). Answered 11 October 2023

² Royal College of Psychiatrists, [How common is gambling disorder?](#), (December 2021) [Accessed 7 September 2023]

³ J Banks, C Andersson, D Best, M Edwards, & J Waters, [Families Living with Problem Gambling: Impacts, coping strategies and help-seeking](#) (October 2018)

⁴ Public Health England. [Gambling related harms evidence review: prevalence, risk factors and public health harms associated with gambling and the economic and social burden](#) (October 2019)

2 Northern Ireland

- [Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1985](#)
- [Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements \(Amendment\) Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#)
- Department for Communities, [Experience of gambling by young people in Northern Ireland 2022: findings from the 2022 Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey](#) (December 2023)
- Department for Communities, [Overview of the current law on betting, gaming, lotteries and amusements in Northern Ireland](#)
- Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Communities, [Report on the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements \(Amendment\) Bill](#) (January 2022)
- NI Assembly Research and Information Service, [Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements \(Amendment\) Bill](#) (November 2021)
- Department for Communities, [Consultation on Regulation of Gambling in Northern Ireland](#) (December 2019). [Survey report](#) is available here.
- [Northern Ireland All-Party Group on Reducing Harm Related to Gambling:](#)
 - [Current inquiry into public health approaches to tackling gambling-related harms in Northern Ireland](#) (April 2023)
 - [Response to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport White Paper on Gambling and response to the follow-up call for evidence](#) (July 2023)
 - [Inquiry report on Gaming Machines in Northern Ireland](#) (September 2022)
 - [Inquiry report on the Future Regulation of Gambling in Northern Ireland](#) (November 2021)
- [Northern Ireland Gambling and Licensing and Industry Data 2022](#) – data on the number of gaming machines, amusement permits, bookmaking office licences, bingo clubs. This includes economic data on the number of people employed in the gambling sector and annual gambling turnover. This is published by NISRA and the Department for Communities; data to be released 20 December 2023.
- NISRA/Department for Communities, [2016 Northern Ireland Gambling Prevalence Survey](#) (May 2017)
- [Institute of Public Health](#) (webpage on gambling in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland); includes links to latest research and blog articles.

3 Great Britain

- [Gambling Act 2005](#)
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [High stakes: gambling reform for the digital age](#) (April 2023)
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Review of the Gambling Act 2005: Terms of Reference and Call for Evidence](#) (December 2020)

- House of Lords Select Committee on the Social and Economic Impact of the Gambling Industry, [Gambling Harm – Time for Action](#) (July 2020). The Government response to the report is available [here](#).
- House of Commons Library Research:
 - [Gambling advertising: how is it regulated?](#) (October 2023)
 - [Loot boxes in video games](#) (October 2023)
 - [The future of horseracing](#) (October 2023)
 - [Potential merits of removing the cap on charity lottery fundraising](#) (June 2023)
 - [Gambling-related harm](#) (March 2022)
- Westminster [All-Party Parliamentary Group on Gambling Related Harm](#):
 - [Gambling White Paper Inquiry](#)
 - [Response to the review of the Gambling Act 2005](#)
 - [Online Gambling Harm Inquiry](#) (June 2020)
- [Gambling Commission](#) research publications (for additional publications see [here](#)):
 - Gambling Commission, [Advice to Government on the Review of the Gambling Act 2005](#) (April 2023)
 - [Understanding the impact of the increased cost of living crisis on gambling behaviour](#) (October 2023)
 - [Young People and Gambling 2023](#) (2023)
 - [Taking a more in-depth look at online gambling](#) (2021)

4 Republic of Ireland

- [Gambling Regulation Bill 2022](#)
- Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, [Report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Gambling Regulation Bill](#) (May 2022)
- Department of Justice, [Gambling Regulation Bill Regulatory Impact Analysis](#) (October 2021)
- [Gambling \(Prohibition of Advertising\) Bill 2021](#) (April 2021)
- [Inter-Departmental Working Group on Future Licensing and Regulation of Gambling](#). (March 2019)
- McCann Fitzgerald, [Final report on the establishment of a modern regulatory environment and authority for all gambling activities licensed in Ireland](#) (December 2019)
- H McAvoy, CME Reynolds, S Sunday, J Hanafin, L Clancy [Children and gambling – evidence to inform regulation and responses in Ireland. Based on a secondary analysis of the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs \(ESPAD\)](#) (2023)
- Health Research Board, [Report on gambling trends](#) (February 2022)

- Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI), [Measures of problem gambling, gambling behaviours and perceptions of gambling in Ireland](#) (October 2023)
- [Economic & Social Research Institute \(ESRI\)](#) – research programme with the Gambling Authority of Ireland examining gambling behaviour.
- D Mongan, SR Millar, A Doyle, S Chakraborty, and B Galvin, [Gambling in the Republic of Ireland: Results from the 2019–20 National Drug and Alcohol Survey](#). Health Research Board (2022)

5 Additional academic research papers

- B Lelonek-Kulet and RP Bartczuk, '[Online gambling activity, pay-to-win payments, motivation to gamble and coping strategies as predictors of gambling disorder among e-sports bettors](#)' *Journal of Gambling Studies* (2021) Vol. 37, 1079-1098
- M Marcos and F Bueno, '[Ludens: A gambling addiction prevention program based on the principles of ethical gambling](#)' *Journal of Gambling Studies* (2021)
- N Darvesh et al., '[Exploring the prevalence of gaming disorder and Internet gaming disorder: A rapid scoping review](#)' *Systematic Reviews* (2020) Vol. 9:68, 1-10
- J Reynolds et al., '[Responsible gambling: A scoping review](#)' *Critical Gambling Studies* (2020) Vol. 1:1, 23-39
- S Rolando et al., '[The social debate about gambling regulation in Italy: an analysis of stakeholders' arguments](#)', *International Gambling Studies* (2020) Vol. 20(2), pp296-314
- S Kabiri et al., '[Illegal gambling on sports: a mediational model of general strain theory](#)' *Criminal Justice Studies* (2020) Vol. 33(4), pp354-372
- J Torrance et al., '["It's basically everywhere": young adults' perceptions of gambling advertising in the UK](#)' *Health Promotion International* (2020) Vol. 36(4), pp976-988
- J Hörnle et al., '[Regulating online advertising for gambling – once the genie is out of the bottle ...](#)' *Information & Communications Technology Law* (2019) Vol. 28(3), pp311-334
- S Rolando and A Scavarda, '[Italian gambling regulation: Justifications and counter-arguments](#)' in M Egerer, V Marionneau and J Nikkinen, *Gambling policies in European welfare states: Current challenges and future prospects* (2018) Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan pp37-57
- X Deng, T Lesch and L Clark, '[Applying Data Science to Behavioural Analysis of Online Gambling](#)' *Current Addiction Reports* (2019) Vol. 6, 159-164
- A Baxter et al. '[Gender differences in felt stigma and barriers to help-seeking for problem gambling](#)' *Addictive Behaviors Reports* (2016) Vol. 3, 1-8
- See also Bibliography of evidence compiled by the Gambling Commission [here](#)

6 Selection of local media and other articles

- [‘Belfast man: £1 slot machine bet turned into 10 year gambling addiction and loss of £31,000 life savings’](#), Irish News, 12 November 2023
- [‘NI recovering gambling addict on how online betting became a ‘way of life’](#), Belfast Live, 30 October 2023
- [‘Gambling epidemic needs urgent action say NI charities’](#), BBC News NI, 21 June 2023
- [‘Charities highlight scourge of gambling addiction ahead of International Gaming Summit being held in NI’](#), Belfast Telegraph, 20 June 2023
- [‘NI keeper: I gambled my daughter’s birthday money’](#), BBC News NI, 3 May 2023
- [‘Northern Ireland international bravely opens up on gambling addiction’](#), News Letter, 26 April 2023
- [‘Former GAA star on his gambling addiction: ‘I had loans from the whole country’](#), Belfast Telegraph, 15 February 2022
- [‘Illegal casinos are “rife” in Northern Ireland, bookmakers claim’](#), BBC News NI, 25 November 2021
- [‘Northern Ireland gambling: “strong support” for industry regulator’](#), BBC News NI, 24 September 2020
- [‘Online gambling biggest cause of mental health issues for young footballers’](#), Northern Echo, 6 March 2019
- [‘ESRI estimates 1-in-30 adults in Ireland now suffers from problem gambling’](#), ESRI, 5 October 2023
- Northern Ireland Executive. [‘Gambling reform reaches final stage – Hargey’](#). 8 March 2022
- Northern Ireland Assembly. [‘Communities Committee publishes report on new gambling legislation’](#), 14 February 2022
- European Betting and Gaming Association (EGBA), [“Significant differences exist in problem gambling monitoring in Europe”](#), 26 April 2022 (blog post)

7 Assembly questions

Assembly Questions on the topic of gambling can be accessed via this [link](#), or by navigating to the [AIMS Portal](#) on the Assembly website.

8 Useful websites

- [Northern Ireland All-Party Group on Reducing harm Related to Gambling](#)
- Westminster [All-Party Parliamentary Group on Gambling Related Harm](#)
- [NI Direct](#) webpage on gambling-related support – includes information on impact of gambling, local support available and tools to help manage a gambling problem.

- [Gambling Commission](#) – regulates gambling in GB but has useful information on [safer gambling](#) and a [statistics and research hub](#).
- [Care](#) – Christian insight into the policies and laws affecting society see webpage on gambling [here](#).
- [Dunlewey Problem Gambling Service](#) – local service providing free and confidential counselling for individuals over the age of 18 directly or indirectly affected by gambling.
- [Extern Gambling Clinic](#) – offers a problem gambling helpline.
- [Gamblers Anonymous](#) – information, advice and meetings for those experiencing compulsive gambling.
- [Gamble Aware](#) – charity and commissioner of gambling harm education, prevention, early intervention and treatment across Great Britain.
- [GamCare](#) – provider of information, advice and support for anyone affected by gambling harms.
- [Gambling with Lives](#) – a charity set up by families bereaved by gambling-related suicide.
- [Community NI](#) – provides a list of support services in Northern Ireland including [support services](#) for young people.
- [University of Bristol Hub for Gambling Harms Research](#) – contains links to further recent research on gambling related harms.

This information is provided to MLAs in support of their Assembly duties and is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual or organisation. Whilst we strive to ensure that the information provided here is up to date, the information on external websites referred to may change frequently. This leaflet should not be relied upon as providing legal or professional advice, nor as a substitute for it. A suitably qualified professional should be consulted if specific advice or information is required.

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