

## HRB publish first report on Irish gambling trends

**New figures show overall drop in gambling while close links remain between problem gambling, social deprivation and substance use disorders**

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A new report from the Health Research Board (HRB) looks at gambling trends among people aged 15-years and over in Ireland. The HRB findings, based on a survey of 5,762 people, show that while fewer people are gambling than in 2014, problem gambling remains higher in deprived communities and among those with substance use disorders.

### Key findings

#### Type of gambling

- Almost half (49%) of people aged 15+ say they gambled in the twelve-months prior to the survey. The most common type of gambling sees four-in-ten people buying a lottery ticket or scratch card in person, with one-in-ten gambling in a bookmaker's shop, and just under one-in-ten placing a bet on horse or dog racing.
- There is a notable decrease in the number of people gambling since the previous survey, from 2,377,000 in 2014/15 to 1,900,000 in 2019/20. The sharpest decrease is among those buying lottery tickets or scratch cards, falling from 57% in 2014/15 to 42% in 2019/20.
- Placing a bet at a horse or dog race, gambling online, over the phone or in a bookmakers are the gambling activities associated with the highest spend.
- Almost everyone who gambled in a bookmaker's shop or online, did so by placing a bet on a sports event.
- When lottery activities are excluded, men are more likely than women to gamble.

#### Problem gambling

- The survey measured three types of problem gambler:
  - Low risk – those experiencing a low level of problems;
  - Moderate risk – those experiencing a moderate level of problems;
  - Problem gambling – those who gamble with negative consequences and a possible loss of control.
- The survey shows that in Ireland, around 90,000 adults are low-risk gamblers, 35,000 are moderate-risk gamblers and 12,000 adults are problem gamblers.
- Problem gambling is associated with living in a deprived area and being unemployed.
- There is a marked correlation between problem gambling and substance use (drug use, alcohol use disorder and/or smoking), with 13% of those with an alcohol use disorder classified as an at-risk or problem gambler compared with 2% of low-risk drinkers.

According to Dr Deirdre Mongan, Research Officer at the Health Research Board and lead author of the report:

*“Men are five times more likely than women to be at-risk gamblers. In terms of the profile of at-risk or problem gamblers, commonly, it is men aged 25–34, who are living in a deprived area, are unemployed and experience substance use problems such as drug use, an alcohol use disorder or smoking.”*

## **Comparison with UK and NI**

Gambling figures are lower in the Republic of Ireland (49%) than in the UK, where figures ranged from 50% in Wales, to 67% in Northern Ireland. At-risk and problem gambling in the Republic of Ireland was similar to that reported in England, Scotland, and Wales, and considerably lower than in Northern Ireland.

Commenting on the findings of the report, Dr Mongan says:

*“This new HRB data indicates that most people who gamble, do so safely. It also shows that gambling problems affect the lives of 135,000 people in Ireland, in particular, young men and people experiencing socioeconomic deprivation. The correlation between problem gambling and harmful alcohol or drug use is of real concern as the presence of substance use disorders can lead to difficulties in treatment. This is reflected in a [recent Irish study](#) which found that almost one-half of problem gambling treatment cases have a substance use problem.*

*The report highlights the need to understand both the social and psychological risk factors that lead to problem gambling, in order to shape regulatory and public health responses. This could include the regulation of access to gambling, the screening of individuals at-risk, and the provision of and greater access to dedicated treatment services.”*

## **ENDS**

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The full report and supporting infographics are available for download from the HRB website. [Download the report.](#)

## **Notes to editors**

### **Background on the survey**

The gambling trends were captured as part of the 2019/20 National Drug and Alcohol Survey (NDAS)\*. The household survey interviewed 5,762 people to examine drug, alcohol and tobacco use, as well as the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling in the general population in Ireland. The main findings of the report in relation to drug, alcohol and tobacco use were published in June 2021. The full report and supporting infographics are available on the HRB website. [Download the report.](#)

This is the second time that gambling questions have been included in the survey which was first conducted in 2002/03.

\*NDAS only includes private households and consequently does not allow for people in prison or other institutionalised individuals, homeless individuals, or Travellers to be included.

### **About the Health Research Board**

The Health Research Board (HRB) is Ireland’s lead public funding agency supporting innovative health research and delivering data and evidence that improves people’s health and patient care. We are committed to putting people first, and ensuring data and evidence are used in policy and practice to overcome health challenges, advance health systems, and benefit society and the economy.