

Factsheet: Gambling - the Irish situation

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Glossary of terms

Last month prevalence – refers to the proportion of the sample that reported using a named drug in the 30-day period prior to the survey. Last month prevalence is often referred to as current use. A proportion of those reporting current use may be occasional (or first-time) users who happen to have used in the period leading up to the survey. It should therefore be noted that current use is not synonymous with regular use.

Last year prevalence – refers to the proportion of the sample that reported using a named drug in the year prior to the survey. Last year prevalence is often referred to as recent use.

Prevalence – refers to the proportion of a population that has used a drug over a particular time period.

Definition of gambling

The National Drug and Alcohol Survey (NDAS) defines gambling as: buying a lottery ticket or scratch card, playing lottery games online, gambling in a bookmaker's shop (licensed premises where betting is legally permitted), gambling online or by telephone, placing a bet at a horse or dog race meeting, playing games at a casino, playing a gaming/slot machine, playing card games for money with friends/family, and playing bingo.¹

The prevalence of problem gambling was measured in NDAS through a standard screening instrument (asked of everyone who had gambled in the last 12 months): the Problem Gambling Severity Index. This is a nine-item scale which was specifically designed to measure the severity of gambling problems in population surveys.

The four gambler types may be described as follows:

- Non-problem gambler: those who gamble with no negative consequences
- Low-risk gambler: those who experience a low level of problems with few or no identified negative consequences
- Moderate-risk gambler: those who experience a moderate level of problems leading to some negative consequences, and
- Problem gambler: those with negative consequences and a possible loss of control.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) screening tool was also included in the 2019–20 NDAS.

Gambling related harms

Evidence shows that the most prevalent negative consequence of gambling is financial harm. It is recognised that problem gambling can harm the health and well-being of individuals, families, communities, and society. Other harms include: the disruption and breakdown of relationships with partners, family, friends and the broader community; psychological harms including social isolation, shame, stigma; health and wellbeing harms, cultural harms including on ones' beliefs and practices; work/study harms; criminality and life course or intergenerational harms and losses.²

A 2024 report³ looked at the prevalence of gambling and alcohol use using data from the 2019–20 NDAS. The findings indicate that drinkers were more likely to report gambling in the previous year (53.0% (low-risk drinker) – 59.3% (alcohol use disorder)) compared with non-drinkers (34.2%).

Drinkers who reported monthly heavy episodic drinking were more likely than low-risk drinkers to meet the criteria for at-risk (low-risk and moderate-risk) and problem gambling. Those who met the criteria for alcohol use disorder (AUD) were most likely to meet the criteria for at-risk gambling (11.2%) or problem gambling (1.5%).

The available evidence suggests that a public health approach to gambling can reduce gambling-related harms via the regulation of access to gambling, through to the screening of individuals at risk and the provision of services for individuals with an identified gambling problem.¹

Gambling was identified in 0.6% of suicide coronial files in Ireland over a six year period between 2015 and 2020 inclusive.⁵

How many people gamble in Ireland?

Every four years a survey of the general population takes place to estimate the number of people in Ireland who use alcohol and other drugs.¹ Surveys took place in 2002–03, 2006–07, 2010–11, 2014–15 and 2019–20. The latest two surveys included questions on gambling (Table 1). Face-to-face interviews take place with respondents aged 15+ normally resident in households in Ireland. This type of survey is not designed to include people who do not normally live in private households, such as prisoners or hostel dwellers.¹ Surveys took place in 2002–03, 2006–07, 2010–11, 2014–15 and 2019–20. The latest two surveys included questions on gambling.

The 2014–15 survey⁴ involved 7,005 respondents, and the 2019–20 NDAS survey involved 5,762 respondents, in the Republic of Ireland.¹

Table 1: Last year, last month prevalence of gambling 2014–15 and 2019–20 (%)

	2014–15	2019–20
Last year	64.5	49.0
Last month	41.4	30.7

Source: Mongan *et al*¹

The most recent survey¹ showed that:

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.
- 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 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.

A 2023 study by the ESRI⁶ shows the percentage of people who have problem gambling (PG) in Ireland is 3.3% (this figure is derived from an online sample and therefore much higher than previous estimates, which were based on in-person interviews¹).

Gambling among 15–16-year-old students in Ireland

The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) has conducted surveys of school-going children every four years since 1995, using a standardised method and a common questionnaire (see www.espad.org). The seventh survey⁷ was undertaken in 39 European countries during 2019 and collected information on gambling, alcohol, tobacco and other substance use among

15-16-year-old students. In Ireland, 1,949 questionnaires were completed by young people who were born in 2003 from 50 randomly selected post-primary schools.

Responses show that 84.3% (n=1607) had not gambled in the past 12 months (Table 2).

Table 2: Gambling in the past 12 months by gender

Gambling in the past 12 months	Male		Female		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Never	702	76.6	905	91.4	1607	84.3
Monthly or less	157	17.1	78	7.9	235	12.3
2 to 4 times a month	36	3.9	6	0.6	42	2.2
2 or more times a week	22	2.4	1	0.1	23	1.2
Total	917	100.0	990	100.0	1907	100.0

Source: Sunday *et al*⁶

The results also showed:

- Overall, betting on sports or animals (horses, dogs, etc.) was the most common gambling activity (14.5%, n=261)
- The least popular form of gambling was slot machines (8.4%, n=153)
- 26.3% (n=78) of students who had gambled in the last 12 months felt the need to bet more and more money
- 12.2% (n=36) have had to lie to the people important to them about how much they gambled (8.6%, n=85).

A 2023 report based on a secondary analysis of ESPAD data found that:⁸

- Male gender, alcohol use, serious arguments and trouble with the police were the variables most strongly associated with gambling at age 16.
- Online gambling was associated with male gender, social media use on a school day, parental monitoring, gaming, tobacco use, e-cigarette use, alcohol use heavy episodic drinking, having been intoxicated, cannabis use and experiencing trouble with the police in the last 12 months on univariable regression analysis.
- Univariable regression analysis also showed that:
 - Online gambling was significantly associated with betting on sports or animals but not with any other forms of gambling.
 - Betting on sports or animals was associated with male gender, higher academic attainment, alcohol use and experiencing trouble with the police.
 - Using lotteries had conflicting associations with maternal and paternal educational level and consistent associations with tobacco use and having serious arguments.
 - Playing card or dice was associated with having serious arguments and experiencing trouble with the police.
 - Slot machine use was associated with male gender, experiencing trouble with the police and lower parental awareness of the child's whereabouts.

Is engaging in online gambling at 17 and 20 years associated with mental health and financial well-being among young people at 20 years?

[Growing Up in Ireland \(GUI\)](#) is a Government-funded study of children being carried out jointly by the ESRI and Trinity College Dublin. The study started in 2006 and follows the progress of two groups of children: 8,000 9-year-olds (Cohort '98) and 10,000 9-month-olds (Cohort '08).⁹

Results of this study show

- 7.2% reported gambling at least weekly, and a further 7.6% reported gambling on at least a monthly basis, with more males frequently gambling than females. Between 17 and 20 years the growth in online gambling was of a magnitude of approximately three (2.8% to 9%).
- 20-year-olds met the threshold for depressive symptoms according to the CESD-8 indicator, with a large gender differential, where over 1-in-5 females met this criterion, compared to approximately 1-in-8 males.
- Approximately 8% reported difficulties making ends meet, while around 1-in-20 reported they had difficulties repaying loans.
- The regression analysis did not find a statistically association between gambling activities and indicators of depression or life satisfaction.

Comparison with Great Britain and Northern Ireland

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 (Table 3). 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.

The prevalence of at-risk gambling among adults in the Republic of Ireland was similar to that reported in England, Scotland, and Wales, while the prevalence of problem gambling was lower.¹

Table 3 Comparison of the prevalence of last year, at-risk, and problem gambling between the Republic of Ireland and England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales (%)

	Republic of Ireland (2019-20)	England (2018)	Northern Ireland (2016)	Scotland (2017)	Wales (2018)
Last year gambling	49.0	54.0	67.2	63.0	50.2
Problem gambling					
Low-risk gambler	2.3	2.7	6.7	2.7	2.0
Moderate-risk gambler	0.9	0.8	4.9	0.9	0.9
Problem gambler	0.3	0.5	2.3	0.8	0.7

Mongan *et al*¹

How many people receive treatment for gambling?

The [National Drug Treatment Reporting System](#) (NDTRS) provides data on treated drug and alcohol misuse in Ireland^a. The NDTRS also collect data on episodes of treatment for gambling. Gambling may have been the main reason for referral or recorded as an additional problem. Treatment cases^a who

^a The NDTRS contains information only on those who started treatment in a particular year (for the first time or returning to treatment). It does not include the number in continuous care. Note: Cases are episodes of treatment not individuals, which means there is a possibility that individuals appear more than once in the data; for example, where a person receives treatment at more than one centre, or at the same centre more than once in a calendar year.

reported gambling as their only problem were compared with those who reported gambling either as a main or secondary problem alongside additional problems.¹⁰

The most recent published data from the NDTRS shows that:

- A total of 3,000 episodes entered treatment for gambling in the 11-year period from 2008–2019
- 1,580 treatment episodes, (52.7%) reported gambling as their sole problem
- 1,419 treatment episodes (47.3%) reported problem gambling in combination with other problems
- The majority were male (93.8%)
- The median age entering treatment was 34 years
- Cases primarily attended inpatient services (56.1%) or outpatient services (38.7%) for treatment
- Almost half (47.3%) of all treatment cases reported problem use of at least one drug

What does the law say about gambling?

The [Gambling Regulatory Authority of Ireland \(GRAI\)](#) was established on the 4th March 2025.¹¹ You can find more information about Irish gambling laws at the [Citizens Information Board website](#).

The functions of the GRAI include:

- Regulating the provision of gambling services and activities, both online and in-person
- Developing safeguards to protect consumers from problem gambling, particularly to protect children from accessing places or services where gambling activities are offered
- Establishing both a National Gambling Exclusion Register
- Establishing a Social Impact Fund to finance research, training, and education on gambling addiction
- Licensing of gambling services and activities, including maintaining a register of all licensed operators and determining licence fees
- Ensuring compliance by gambling providers with restrictions imposed on advertising and sponsorship, including a statutory watershed prohibiting gambling advertising between the hours of 5.30am and 9.00pm on television, radio or on-demand audio-visual media
- Receiving, investigating and addressing complaints about gambling providers
- Ensuring compliance by gambling providers with the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010, and addressing money laundering activities in the context of gambling services
- Keeping the Minister of Justice informed of developments relating to the regulation and licensing of gambling services and making recommendations on policies
- Promoting public awareness and providing information to the public about the regulation and licensing of gambling activities

The gambling industry in Ireland

In Ireland, 8,000 people were estimated to be directly employed in the gambling industry in 2017.¹² Gross gambling revenue in Ireland was approximately €2 billion in 2022, with online gambling representing just under one half of those. To put the size of the gambling industry in Ireland in context, revenues from gambling in 2022 were approximately the same as those from Irish beef exports (€2.3 billion).

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