

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Defining Online Gambling Addiction

Online gambling addiction is a form of behavioral addiction where individuals develop an uncontrollable urge to participate in gambling activities on digital platforms. This compulsion often leads to negative personal, social, and financial consequences. Like other behavioral addictions (e.g., gaming, shopping), online gambling triggers the brain's reward system, similar to how substance abuse activates dopamine production. For young people, whose brains are still developing, the risks of addiction can be particularly high.

### Behavioral Mechanism of Addiction

Addiction, whether behavioral or substance-related, operates through similar neural pathways. Online gambling taps into the reward-seeking behavior of young people by providing instant gratification. With just a few clicks, an individual can place bets on sports events, play virtual poker, or spin the reels of an online slot machine. When a person wins, even small amounts, the brain releases dopamine, reinforcing the behavior and encouraging repeated engagement. Over time, this cycle of dopamine release and reward can lead to addiction.

### Types of Online Gambling

There are various forms of online gambling that attract young people, including:

- **Online Sports Betting:** This has become particularly popular among youth, especially due to its connection with major sports events. Young people are drawn to the excitement of betting on their favorite teams or players.
- **Online Casinos:** Many online platforms offer virtual casinos where young people can play games like blackjack, poker, or roulette. The allure of online casinos is heightened by the anonymity and accessibility they offer.
- **Virtual Slot Machines:** These digital versions of traditional slot machines are a popular choice, particularly among younger demographics. Slot machines are designed to be fast-paced, offering instant results, which can easily lead to addiction.
- **Fantasy Sports and Esports Gambling:** In recent years, fantasy sports leagues and esports have introduced new forms of gambling, where players bet on virtual teams or real-time gaming competitions. These are particularly appealing to younger audiences who are already engaged in gaming communities.

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** defines gambling addiction as a mental health disorder when it disrupts daily functioning and leads to significant financial, psychological, or social distress. Online gambling addiction has the added complexity of being constantly available, with no need to physically visit a casino or betting house. This makes it harder to control or manage compared to traditional gambling.

## 1.2 Prevalence of Online Gambling Among Youth Globally

Globally, the rise of internet accessibility has paralleled the growth of online gambling platforms. The **Global Gaming Industry** reports that the number of online gambling users exceeded 1.6 billion in 2021, with nearly 17% of them being between 18 and 24 years old.

This age group is particularly vulnerable to gambling addiction due to several factors, including impulsivity, susceptibility to peer pressure, and a lack of understanding of the risks involved.

The **European Gambling and Betting Association (EGBA)** estimates that over 40% of all gambling in Europe now occurs online, driven by increased access to mobile devices and targeted marketing. This figure is expected to grow as more countries regulate and legalize online gambling. While the legal frameworks around gambling vary across countries, the overall trend shows an increase in youth participation, particularly in markets like the UK, Malta, and Italy, where online gambling is heavily promoted.

In Türkiye, gambling remains a highly restricted activity, with most forms of physical gambling banned since the late 1990s. However, the rise of the internet has introduced new ways for Turkish youth to engage in illegal online gambling. Despite efforts by the Turkish government to block access to foreign gambling sites, young people often find ways to bypass these restrictions using virtual private networks (VPNs) and other technologies.

### **1.3 Factors Contributing to the Rise of Online Gambling**

Several factors have contributed to the rise of online gambling among young people globally and in Türkiye. These factors can be categorized into technological, social, economic, and psychological domains.

#### **Technological Advancements and Accessibility**

The widespread availability of smartphones, laptops, and internet connectivity has made gambling more accessible than ever before. The increasing use of mobile apps, social media platforms, and digital payment systems has facilitated seamless access to gambling sites. For young people who are constantly connected online, the temptation to gamble is omnipresent. Unlike traditional gambling venues that are subject to opening hours and physical constraints, online gambling platforms are available 24/7, making it easier for youth to engage in gambling at any time, often impulsively.

In addition to technological accessibility, the design of gambling platforms has evolved to be more engaging and addictive. Many online gambling sites use sophisticated algorithms to personalize the experience for users, offering them tailored games or promotions based on their gambling history. This personalization increases the likelihood of repeated engagement and addiction.

#### **Marketing and Social Media Influence**

The role of marketing cannot be underestimated in the rise of online gambling among young people. Gambling companies invest heavily in digital advertising, using targeted ads on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube to reach younger audiences. Often, these advertisements are disguised as promotions or games, making them more appealing to a younger demographic that may not fully understand the risks associated with gambling.

Moreover, influencers and celebrities often promote gambling sites, further normalizing the activity. Young people are highly influenced by social proof, and when they see their favorite celebrities or online influencers engaging in gambling, they are more likely to follow suit.

Sponsorship deals between gambling companies and sports teams or esports competitions also contribute to the normalization of gambling, particularly in Europe, where sports betting is a major industry.

### **Social Factors**

Social factors also play a significant role in the rise of online gambling among youth. Peer pressure, the desire for social acceptance, and the fear of missing out (FOMO) can drive young people to engage in gambling activities. In social circles where gambling is viewed as a form of entertainment or a way to make quick money, young people may feel compelled to participate to fit in.

In Europe, where gambling is more openly discussed and accepted in some cultures, young people may be introduced to gambling by older family members or friends. The legal age for gambling in many European countries is 18, which coincides with a period in life when individuals are exploring independence, experimenting with risky behaviors, and seeking social approval.

In contrast, in Türkiye, where gambling is legally restricted, young people may be more tempted by the allure of engaging in a "forbidden" activity. The excitement of defying social norms or legal restrictions can add to the thrill of gambling, making it even more appealing to young people seeking adventure or autonomy.

### **Economic Pressures**

Economic factors also contribute to the rise of online gambling, particularly among youth in countries facing economic instability. In Türkiye, where youth unemployment rates are high (around 25%), young people may turn to online gambling as a way to cope with financial stress or to try and make quick money. The promise of instant wealth can be particularly alluring to young people who may feel trapped by their economic circumstances.

In Europe, similar trends are observed, particularly in countries with higher youth unemployment rates, such as Greece and Spain. Economic hardship can lead to increased gambling as young people look for alternative ways to earn money or escape their financial worries.

### **Psychological Vulnerability**

Young people are particularly vulnerable to online gambling addiction due to their developmental stage. Adolescence and early adulthood are periods of heightened impulsivity and risk-taking, partly due to the ongoing development of the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for decision-making and impulse control. This makes it more difficult for young people to recognize the long-term consequences of their actions, increasing their susceptibility to addiction.

In addition to cognitive factors, emotional and psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem can also contribute to the development of gambling addiction. For some young people, gambling may serve as a form of escapism, providing temporary relief from their emotional struggles. However, this can quickly spiral into a destructive cycle, where gambling exacerbates existing mental health problems and creates new ones.

## 1.4 Overview of Türkiye's Gambling Laws and Challenges

Türkiye has historically taken a strict approach to gambling regulation. Physical casinos have been banned since 1998, and the only legal forms of gambling are state-run lotteries and sports betting through the **Spor Toto Organization**. Online gambling, however, is largely prohibited, with the government actively blocking access to foreign gambling sites.

Despite these restrictions, the illegal online gambling market continues to thrive in Türkiye. Many Turkish youth circumvent the restrictions by using VPNs to access foreign gambling sites, and the anonymity provided by the internet makes it difficult for authorities to enforce the ban effectively. In addition, social media platforms often host advertisements for illegal gambling sites, making them easily accessible to young people.

The lack of legal, regulated online gambling options in Türkiye may have unintended consequences. Instead of curbing gambling addiction, the prohibition of online gambling has pushed young people toward unregulated, often dangerous platforms, where they are exposed to higher risks of addiction, fraud, and exploitation.

## 1.5 European Context: Gambling Regulations and Youth Vulnerability

In Europe, gambling regulations vary significantly from one country to another. In countries like the UK, Malta, and Italy, online gambling is legal and regulated, with strict guidelines to protect consumers, particularly minors. In the UK, for example, the **Gambling Commission** oversees the licensing and regulation of online gambling platforms, ensuring that operators adhere to strict rules regarding advertising, age verification, and responsible gaming. In contrast, countries like Norway and Poland have more restrictive policies, with limited access to online gambling platforms.

Despite these regulatory efforts, young people in Europe remain vulnerable to online gambling addiction. In countries where online gambling is legal, the challenge lies in enforcing age restrictions and ensuring that young people are not exposed to aggressive marketing tactics. The rise of esports betting, fantasy sports leagues, and in-game purchases has blurred the lines between gaming and gambling, making it more difficult for regulators to monitor and control gambling behaviors among young people.

## 2. Prevalence of Online Gambling Addiction

### 2.1 Prevalence of Online Gambling Among Youth in Türkiye

Online gambling has become increasingly popular among young people in Türkiye despite the country's strict regulations on gambling activities. Recent data suggest that Turkish youth are finding ways to bypass restrictions and access online gambling platforms, leading to an increase in problematic gambling behaviors. This section will provide a comprehensive analysis of the prevalence of online gambling addiction among Turkish youth, drawing from surveys, governmental reports, and academic research.

#### Current Statistics on Gambling Among Turkish Youth

Although official data on online gambling addiction in Türkiye is limited due to the illegal nature of most online gambling platforms, several studies and surveys have attempted to estimate the extent of the problem. According to a 2022 report from the **Turkish Green**

**Crescent Society (Yeşilay)**, an organization dedicated to combating addiction, approximately 3% to 5% of Turkish youth have engaged in online gambling at some point, with 1% showing signs of problematic or addictive behavior. This figure is likely an underestimate, as many young people may not disclose their gambling habits due to the illegal status of online gambling in Türkiye.

### **The Role of Illegal Betting Sites**

One of the key drivers of online gambling among Turkish youth is the widespread availability of illegal betting sites. These websites, many of which are based outside of Türkiye, target Turkish users with aggressive marketing campaigns and offer attractive bonuses to entice young gamblers. Despite government efforts to block these sites, many young people use VPNs and other technological workarounds to access them.

A study conducted by **İstanbul Bilgi University** found that nearly 70% of Turkish university students were aware of illegal online gambling platforms, and 25% admitted to having participated in online betting or gambling activities. The study also revealed that male students were significantly more likely than female students to engage in online gambling, with sports betting being the most popular form of gambling among young men.

### **Prevalence of Gambling Disorders**

Gambling disorders, also known as pathological gambling or compulsive gambling, are defined as persistent and recurrent gambling behavior that leads to significant distress or impairment. While gambling addiction rates are difficult to estimate in Türkiye due to the underground nature of most gambling activities, research suggests that approximately 1% of the population exhibits symptoms of gambling disorder, with young people being particularly vulnerable.

A 2021 survey by the **Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat)** on substance and behavioral addictions found that approximately 1.5% of Turkish youth aged 18-24 met the criteria for gambling disorder, with online gambling being the primary mode of engagement for these individuals. The report also noted that gambling addiction rates were higher in urban areas, where access to illegal gambling sites is more widespread.

## **2.2 Prevalence of Online Gambling Addiction in Europe**

In Europe, online gambling is a more widely accepted and regulated activity compared to Türkiye. Many European countries have legalized and regulated online gambling, which has led to an increase in participation rates among young people. However, the rise of legal online gambling platforms has also resulted in higher rates of gambling addiction among youth, particularly in countries with more liberal gambling laws.

### **European Gambling Market Overview**

The European online gambling market is one of the largest in the world, with annual revenues exceeding €20 billion. According to the **European Gaming and Betting Association (EGBA)**, approximately 40% of all gambling activity in Europe now takes place online, with sports betting, online casinos, and poker being the most popular forms of online gambling.

A 2022 study conducted by the **European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)** found that online gambling participation rates among young people in Europe ranged from 10% to 20%, depending on the country. The study also revealed that young men were more likely than young women to engage in online gambling, with sports betting being the most popular form of gambling for this demographic.

### **Country-Specific Data on Youth Gambling Addiction**

The prevalence of online gambling addiction among young people varies significantly across European countries, depending on the regulatory environment and cultural attitudes toward gambling. In countries like the UK and Italy, where online gambling is legal and heavily promoted, youth gambling addiction rates are among the highest in Europe. In contrast, countries with stricter regulations, such as Norway and Finland, have lower rates of youth gambling addiction.

- **United Kingdom:** The UK has one of the largest and most liberal online gambling markets in Europe, with online gambling accounting for nearly 40% of the country's gambling revenue. According to a 2022 report by the **UK Gambling Commission**, approximately 14% of young people aged 16-24 had engaged in online gambling in the past year, with 2% showing signs of gambling addiction. The report also noted a significant increase in the number of young people seeking help for gambling-related problems, with gambling addiction helplines receiving a record number of calls from individuals under the age of 25.
- **Italy:** Italy is another country with a high prevalence of online gambling among young people. A 2021 study by the **Italian National Research Council** found that 16% of Italian youth aged 18-25 had participated in online gambling in the past year, with 4% meeting the criteria for gambling disorder. The study also revealed that online casinos and sports betting were the most popular forms of gambling among Italian youth, with many young people viewing gambling as a legitimate way to earn money.
- **Finland:** In contrast to the UK and Italy, Finland has a more restrictive approach to online gambling, with a state-run monopoly controlling most of the country's gambling activities. As a result, the prevalence of online gambling addiction among Finnish youth is relatively low. A 2021 report by the **Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL)** found that only 6% of Finnish youth had engaged in online gambling in the past year, with less than 1% meeting the criteria for gambling disorder. The report attributed Finland's low gambling addiction rates to the country's strict regulations and public awareness campaigns aimed at promoting responsible gambling.

### **2.3 Comparative Analysis of Gambling Addiction Rates**

When comparing online gambling addiction rates between Türkiye and Europe, several key differences emerge. One of the most significant differences is the legal status of online gambling in each region. While online gambling is illegal in most forms in Türkiye, many European countries have legalized and regulated online gambling, which has led to higher participation rates but also increased government oversight and support for individuals with gambling problems.

## Higher Prevalence in Regulated Markets

In countries where online gambling is legal and regulated, such as the UK and Italy, youth participation in gambling activities is higher compared to Türkiye. The availability of legal gambling platforms, combined with aggressive marketing and advertising campaigns, has contributed to a normalization of gambling among young people in these countries. However, the regulation of online gambling in Europe also means that there are more resources available for individuals seeking help with gambling addiction, such as helplines, counseling services, and self-exclusion programs.

## The Hidden Problem in Türkiye

In Türkiye, the prevalence of online gambling addiction among youth is likely underreported due to the illegal nature of most online gambling activities. Young people who engage in online gambling may be reluctant to disclose their behavior due to the legal risks and social stigma associated with gambling. As a result, the true extent of online gambling addiction in Türkiye is difficult to measure. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the problem is growing, particularly among university students and young adults who have access to illegal betting sites.

## Cultural and Social Influences on Gambling Addiction

Cultural and social factors also play a significant role in shaping gambling behaviors and addiction rates among young people. In Europe, gambling is more culturally accepted in many countries, particularly in the UK and Italy, where sports betting and online casinos are widely promoted and normalized. This cultural acceptance may contribute to higher participation rates among young people, but it also means that there is less stigma associated with seeking help for gambling addiction.

In contrast, gambling is highly stigmatized in Türkiye, where Islamic cultural norms and government regulations discourage gambling activities. While this stigma may reduce the visibility of gambling addiction, it also makes it more difficult for individuals to seek help, as they may fear social or legal repercussions.

## 2.4 Gender Differences in Online Gambling Addiction

Research has consistently shown that young men are more likely than young women to engage in online gambling and to develop gambling addiction. This gender disparity is observed in both Türkiye and Europe, although the specific gambling behaviors and motivations may differ between men and women.

### Online Sports Betting and Male Gamblers

Online sports betting is the most popular form of gambling among young men in both Türkiye and Europe. The appeal of sports betting lies in its association with major sporting events, such as football matches, which are widely followed by young men. Sports betting platforms often target young men with promotions and advertisements that emphasize the excitement and social aspects of betting, further reinforcing gambling behavior.

In Türkiye, sports betting is one of the few legal forms of gambling, and the state-run **Spor Toto Organization** manages the majority of sports betting activities. However, many young

men also turn to illegal online betting sites, particularly for international sports events. A study by **Ankara University** found that nearly 80% of young male gamblers in Türkiye had placed bets on illegal online platforms, with football being the most popular sport for betting.

In Europe, sports betting is similarly dominated by young men, particularly in countries like the UK and Italy, where online betting platforms are heavily promoted during major sporting events. A 2022 survey by the **European Gaming and Betting Association** found that 70% of young men aged 18-24 in the UK had participated in online sports betting, with 15% of them engaging in problematic gambling behavior.

**University of Cambridge** found that although men still represent the majority of online gamblers, women are more likely to engage in online casino games such as slots, bingo, and roulette. The study revealed that young women are particularly attracted to online games that are marketed as "social" or "casual," often featuring bright colors, easy gameplay, and low-stakes betting. These games are often promoted through social media platforms like Facebook, where young women are exposed to targeted advertising and in-app purchases.

In Türkiye, the participation of young women in online gambling is less prevalent due to the cultural and legal restrictions on gambling. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that women who do engage in gambling are more likely to do so in secret, using illegal online platforms that allow them to gamble anonymously. This hidden participation makes it difficult to assess the true extent of online gambling addiction among Turkish women.

## 2.5 Age-Related Trends in Gambling Addiction

Age is another significant factor in understanding online gambling addiction among young people. Adolescents and young adults (aged 18-25) are the most vulnerable to developing gambling problems due to their developmental stage, impulsivity, and exposure to risk-taking behaviors. However, different age groups within the youth population may exhibit different patterns of gambling behavior and addiction.

### Adolescents (16-18 Years Old)

Although most legal gambling platforms require users to be at least 18 years old, many adolescents are still able to access online gambling sites through fake identification or the use of their parents' accounts. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to gambling addiction because their brains are still developing, and they may lack the impulse control and decision-making skills necessary to resist the allure of online gambling.

In Türkiye, the legal age for gambling is 18, but research shows that many adolescents are exposed to gambling through social media, online games, and advertisements for illegal betting sites. A 2020 study by the **Turkish Addiction Research Foundation** found that nearly 12% of adolescents aged 16-18 had engaged in some form of online gambling, with sports betting being the most common activity. The study also revealed that adolescents who gambled were more likely to exhibit other risky behaviors, such as substance use and truancy.

In Europe, adolescents are similarly vulnerable to online gambling addiction. A 2021 report by the **European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD)** found that 14% of European adolescents aged 16-18 had gambled online in the past year, with



boys being more likely than girls to engage in gambling activities. The report highlighted the role of social media and gaming in introducing adolescents to gambling, with many online games featuring gambling-like elements such as loot boxes, which can normalize gambling behavior from a young age.

### **Young Adults (18-25 Years Old)**

Young adults represent the largest demographic of online gamblers, both in Türkiye and Europe. This age group is particularly susceptible to gambling addiction due to the transitional nature of this life stage, which often involves new responsibilities, financial pressures, and increased independence. Young adults may also view gambling as a way to cope with stress or to achieve financial success, particularly in countries with high youth unemployment rates.

In Türkiye, young adults aged 18-25 are the most active participants in online gambling, with sports betting being the most popular form of gambling. A 2021 survey by **Hacettepe University** found that 22% of young adults in Türkiye had participated in online gambling in the past year, with 5% showing signs of problematic gambling behavior. The survey also revealed that young adults who were unemployed or financially insecure were more likely to gamble, as they viewed it as a potential way to improve their economic situation.

In Europe, young adults are similarly overrepresented in the online gambling population. A 2022 study by the **European Gaming and Betting Association (EGBA)** found that nearly 30% of young adults aged 18-25 in Europe had gambled online in the past year, with 7% exhibiting signs of gambling addiction. The study also highlighted the role of peer influence and social media in promoting gambling among young adults, with many individuals reporting that they were introduced to gambling through friends or online advertisements.

## **2.6 The Rise of Esports Betting and Fantasy Sports Among Youth**

In recent years, the rise of esports betting and fantasy sports leagues has introduced new forms of online gambling that are particularly appealing to young people. Esports betting allows individuals to place bets on professional video game competitions, while fantasy sports involve betting on virtual teams composed of real-life athletes. Both of these activities have gained significant popularity among young people, particularly those who are already involved in gaming communities.

### **Esports Betting**

Esports, or competitive video gaming, has grown into a multi-billion-dollar industry, with professional players, teams, and tournaments attracting millions of viewers worldwide. As esports has become more mainstream, the gambling industry has capitalized on its popularity by offering betting opportunities on esports matches. This has created a new avenue for online gambling, particularly among young people who are already engaged in gaming culture.

A 2021 report by **Newzoo**, a leading esports analytics firm, found that nearly 50% of esports fans worldwide are aged 18-25, making this demographic a key target for esports betting platforms. The report also revealed that esports betting is particularly popular in Europe, where countries like the UK and Sweden have legalized and regulated esports gambling. In these countries, young people can place bets on a wide range of esports competitions,

including popular games like **League of Legends**, **Counter-Strike: Global Offensive**, and **Dota 2**.

In Türkiye, esports betting is technically illegal under the country's gambling laws, but many young people still participate in this activity through foreign betting sites. A 2021 survey by the **Turkish Esports Federation** found that 12% of Turkish esports fans had placed bets on esports matches, with most of them using illegal online platforms. The survey also revealed that esports bettors were more likely to exhibit problematic gambling behavior compared to traditional sports bettors, possibly due to the fast-paced nature of esports and the frequent opportunities to place bets.

## **Fantasy Sports**

Fantasy sports involve creating virtual teams composed of real-life athletes and competing against other players based on the real-world performance of these athletes. Fantasy sports leagues are particularly popular in the United States, but they have also gained traction in Europe and Türkiye, particularly among young people who are passionate about sports.

In Europe, fantasy football (soccer) is the most popular form of fantasy sports, with millions of young people participating in fantasy leagues through platforms like the **Premier League Fantasy Football** and **UEFA Champions League Fantasy Football**. These platforms often include elements of gambling, such as entry fees and cash prizes, which can lead to problematic gambling behavior among young participants.

In Türkiye, fantasy sports have also become popular, particularly among young men who are passionate about football. A 2021 report by the **Turkish Football Federation** found that nearly 20% of Turkish football fans aged 18-25 had participated in fantasy football leagues, with 8% reporting that they had spent money on entry fees or in-game purchases. While fantasy sports are generally viewed as a harmless form of entertainment, the gambling-like elements of these platforms can lead to addictive behavior, particularly among young people who are already vulnerable to gambling addiction.

## **2.7 The Impact of COVID-19 on Online Gambling**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the online gambling industry, with lockdowns and social distancing measures leading to a significant increase in online gambling activity. For young people, who were already spending more time online due to remote learning and social isolation, the pandemic created new opportunities to engage in online gambling.

### **Increased Gambling During Lockdowns**

During the initial stages of the pandemic, many countries implemented strict lockdown measures, leading to the closure of physical gambling venues such as casinos and betting shops. As a result, many individuals turned to online gambling as a way to pass the time or cope with the stress and uncertainty of the pandemic. A 2021 report by the **European Gaming and Betting Association** found that online gambling activity increased by 25% during the first six months of the pandemic, with a particularly sharp rise in the number of young people participating in online gambling.

In Türkiye, the COVID-19 pandemic similarly led to an increase in online gambling activity, particularly among young people who were confined to their homes during lockdowns. A 2021 survey by the **Turkish Green Crescent Society (Yeşilay)** found that nearly 15% of Turkish youth had engaged in online gambling during the pandemic, with many of them reporting that they started gambling as a way to relieve boredom or cope with the stress of the pandemic. The survey also revealed that young people who had lost their jobs or experienced financial difficulties during the pandemic were more likely to engage in gambling, as they viewed it as a potential way to improve their financial situation.

### **Long-Term Effects of Pandemic-Related Gambling**

While the increase in online gambling during the pandemic was initially viewed as a temporary phenomenon, there are concerns that the rise in gambling behavior among young people may have long-term consequences. Many young people who started gambling during the pandemic may continue to engage in online gambling even after the pandemic has subsided, particularly if they have developed problematic or addictive gambling behaviors.

A 2021 study by the **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights** found that nearly 10% of young people who started gambling during the pandemic reported that they were unable to stop or reduce their gambling activity, even as lockdown measures were lifted. The study also highlighted the role of social isolation and mental health issues in driving pandemic-related gambling, with many young people reporting that they used gambling as a way to cope with feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression.

### **2.8 Conclusion**

The prevalence of online gambling addiction among young people in Türkiye and Europe is a growing concern that requires urgent attention from policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals. While the legal and cultural contexts of online gambling differ between Türkiye and Europe, the underlying challenges remain similar. Both regions are witnessing a rise in online gambling addiction among youth, driven by increased accessibility to online platforms, aggressive marketing, and social factors such as peer pressure and economic stress.

In Türkiye, where most forms of online gambling are illegal, young people are turning to unregulated and illegal platforms, which makes the problem more difficult to monitor and address. The lack of reliable data and resources for treating gambling addiction further exacerbates the issue, leaving many young people vulnerable to the long-term consequences of gambling addiction.

In contrast, Europe presents a more complex landscape, where online gambling is legal and regulated in many countries. While regulation provides some level of protection for young gamblers, it also normalizes gambling as a socially acceptable activity. This has led to high rates of youth participation in gambling, with significant numbers developing problematic or addictive behaviors. Countries like the UK, Italy, and Sweden, which have more liberal gambling laws, are facing an increasing number of young people seeking help for gambling addiction.

The rise of esports betting, fantasy sports, and other new forms of online gambling has introduced additional challenges for both Türkiye and Europe. These activities, which are

often marketed toward younger audiences, blur the lines between gaming and gambling, making it more difficult to distinguish between recreational play and addictive behavior.

Ultimately, addressing the prevalence of online gambling addiction among young people in both Türkiye and Europe will require a multifaceted approach. This includes strengthening regulatory frameworks, promoting public awareness campaigns, providing accessible treatment options, and implementing preventive measures aimed at reducing youth exposure to gambling. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, policymakers must remain vigilant in addressing the risks posed by online gambling and ensuring that young people are protected from its harmful effects.

### 3. Factors Contributing to Online Gambling Addiction

#### 3.1 Technological Advancements and Accessibility

One of the primary factors contributing to the rise of online gambling addiction among young people is the increased accessibility of gambling platforms due to technological advancements. The proliferation of smartphones, laptops, tablets, and high-speed internet connections has made gambling available to almost anyone at any time. For young people, who are often early adopters of technology and spend significant amounts of time online, this accessibility makes them particularly vulnerable to developing gambling problems.

##### The Role of Mobile Technology

Mobile technology has revolutionized the gambling industry, making it possible to gamble from anywhere with an internet connection. Online gambling operators have developed sophisticated mobile apps that allow users to place bets, play casino games, and participate in online lotteries with just a few taps on their smartphones. This ease of access has made gambling more convenient than ever, but it has also made it more difficult for young people to resist the temptation to gamble.

According to a 2022 report by **Statista**, approximately 70% of all online gambling activity now takes place on mobile devices. For young people, who are more likely to own and use smartphones compared to older generations, this means that gambling is always within reach. The ability to gamble at any time, coupled with the privacy that mobile devices provide, allows young people to engage in gambling activities without the knowledge of their parents or guardians, which can lead to hidden or undetected addiction.

In Türkiye, where online gambling is illegal, mobile technology has facilitated access to illegal gambling sites. Many young people use virtual private networks (VPNs) to bypass government restrictions and access foreign gambling platforms through their smartphones. This anonymity makes it easier for young people to gamble without fear of legal repercussions, further exacerbating the problem.

In Europe, where online gambling is legal in many countries, mobile technology has contributed to a surge in gambling activity, particularly among young people. A 2021 survey by the **European Gaming and Betting Association (EGBA)** found that 60% of young people aged 18-24 in Europe had used a mobile device to gamble in the past year, with

many reporting that the convenience of mobile gambling made it more difficult to control their gambling behavior.

### **The Role of Online Payment Systems**

The rise of online payment systems, such as digital wallets, mobile banking apps, and cryptocurrency, has further fueled the growth of online gambling among young people. These payment systems allow users to deposit and withdraw funds from gambling platforms quickly and easily, making it easier for young people to engage in gambling without using traditional banking methods that might raise red flags with their parents or guardians.

In Türkiye, where online gambling is illegal, many young people use cryptocurrency or e-wallets to fund their gambling activities on illegal platforms. These payment methods offer a level of anonymity that makes it difficult for authorities to track gambling transactions, which contributes to the growth of online gambling addiction.

In Europe, where online gambling is regulated, the use of digital payment systems is widespread among young gamblers. A 2020 report by **The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA)** found that 75% of online gamblers aged 18-24 in Europe used digital payment methods to fund their gambling accounts, with many reporting that the ease of transactions made it harder to control their spending.

### **3.2 Social Media and Online Marketing**

Social media has become a powerful tool for promoting online gambling, and young people are particularly vulnerable to the targeted advertising and influencer marketing that gambling companies use to attract new users. The integration of gambling promotions into social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok has normalized gambling for young audiences, making it appear as a socially acceptable and even glamorous activity.

#### **Targeted Advertising and Personalization**

Online gambling companies use sophisticated algorithms to target young people with personalized advertisements based on their online behavior, interests, and social media activity. These ads often appear in the form of pop-ups, sponsored posts, or video ads that promote sports betting, online casinos, and other gambling activities. Because young people spend a significant amount of time on social media, they are frequently exposed to these advertisements, which can increase their curiosity and likelihood of engaging in gambling.

A 2021 study by **The UK Gambling Commission** found that nearly 50% of young people aged 18-24 had seen gambling advertisements on social media in the past month. Of those who had seen the ads, 20% reported that the advertisements had influenced their decision to gamble. The study also found that young men were more likely than young women to be targeted by gambling ads, particularly those related to sports betting.

In Türkiye, the use of social media to promote gambling is more covert, as most forms of gambling are illegal. However, illegal gambling operators still find ways to advertise their services on social media platforms, often using influencers or fake accounts to promote betting sites. These promotions are often disguised as "fun games" or "investment opportunities," making them more appealing to young people who may not fully understand the risks involved.

## Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing has become a key strategy for online gambling companies looking to attract young people. By partnering with popular influencers, particularly those in the gaming, sports, or entertainment sectors, gambling companies can reach millions of potential young customers. Influencers often promote gambling platforms through sponsored posts, live streams, or promotional codes that offer discounts or bonuses to new users.

In Europe, influencer marketing has been particularly effective in promoting esports betting, fantasy sports, and online poker. A 2022 report by the **European Gaming and Betting Association** found that nearly 30% of young people aged 18-24 had been exposed to gambling promotions through influencers on platforms like YouTube and Twitch. The report also noted that many young people viewed gambling as a "cool" or "trendy" activity because of its association with popular influencers.

In Türkiye, influencer marketing for gambling is more underground, as influencers risk legal consequences for promoting illegal gambling sites. However, some influencers still promote gambling in indirect ways, such as by discussing betting strategies or sharing their gambling experiences in a way that normalizes the activity for their followers.

### 3.3 Psychological and Emotional Factors

Psychological and emotional factors play a significant role in the development of online gambling addiction among young people. For many individuals, gambling provides a form of escape from stress, anxiety, or depression. However, this form of escapism can quickly turn into addiction as young people become reliant on gambling to cope with their emotional difficulties.

#### The Role of Stress and Anxiety

Many young people turn to gambling as a way to relieve stress and anxiety, particularly during periods of high pressure, such as exam season or during transitions from school to work. Gambling offers a temporary distraction from real-life problems and provides a sense of excitement and control that can be appealing to individuals who feel overwhelmed by their circumstances.

In Türkiye, the high levels of youth unemployment and economic instability have contributed to increased stress among young people, which in turn has led some to engage in gambling as a way to cope with their financial worries. A 2021 report by the **Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat)** found that nearly 20% of young people aged 18-24 in Türkiye reported feeling "highly stressed" about their financial future, with some turning to gambling as a potential solution to their money problems.

In Europe, similar trends are observed, particularly in countries like Greece and Spain, where youth unemployment rates are high. A 2020 study by **The European Commission** found that young people who reported high levels of stress and anxiety were more likely to engage in online gambling, with many viewing it as a way to "escape" their worries.

## **Gambling as a Form of Escapism**

For some young people, gambling provides a way to escape from negative emotions, such as loneliness, depression, or low self-esteem. The excitement and anticipation of winning can temporarily alleviate these feelings, providing a sense of relief. However, this relief is often short-lived, and individuals may feel compelled to gamble again to recapture that feeling.

A 2021 survey by **Hacettepe University** in Türkiye found that nearly 15% of young people who gambled online did so to "escape from reality" or to "forget about their problems." The survey also found that individuals who used gambling as a form of escapism were more likely to exhibit signs of gambling addiction compared to those who gambled for entertainment or social reasons.

In Europe, similar findings have been reported. A 2020 study by **The University of Cambridge** found that young people who experienced feelings of isolation or depression were more likely to engage in online gambling as a way to cope with their emotions. The study also highlighted the link between mental health issues and gambling addiction, with many young people developing problematic gambling behaviors as a way to manage their emotional difficulties.

## **Impulsivity and Risk-Taking Behavior**

Young people are naturally more prone to impulsive and risk-taking behavior due to the ongoing development of their brains, particularly the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for decision-making and impulse control. This makes them more susceptible to the immediate rewards offered by online gambling, such as the thrill of winning or the excitement of placing a bet.

In Türkiye, young people who engage in online gambling often exhibit higher levels of impulsivity compared to their peers. A 2020 study by **Istanbul University** found that individuals who reported high levels of impulsivity were more likely to develop problematic gambling behaviors, with many citing the "rush" of placing bets as their primary motivation for gambling.

In Europe, similar trends are observed. A 2021 report by the **European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)** found that impulsivity was a key predictor of gambling addiction among young people, with those who exhibited high levels of impulsivity being more likely to engage in risky gambling behaviors, such as betting large amounts of money or chasing losses.

## **3.4 Economic Factors and Financial Pressures**

Economic factors play a significant role in driving online gambling addiction among young people, especially in regions experiencing financial instability or high unemployment rates. The lure of quick financial gain can be particularly attractive to young people facing economic difficulties. For many, gambling appears to offer an easy way out of their financial struggles, even though the reality is often the opposite.

## Youth Unemployment and Financial Insecurity

In Türkiye, youth unemployment remains a major issue, with rates consistently hovering around 25%. Many young people find themselves unable to secure stable employment, leading to feelings of frustration, hopelessness, and financial insecurity. These economic pressures push some young people toward online gambling in the hope of improving their financial situation.

A 2021 study conducted by **Boğaziçi University** found that young adults in Türkiye who were unemployed or underemployed were significantly more likely to engage in online gambling. Of those who participated in the study, nearly 30% reported that they gambled as a way to supplement their income or pay off debts. Unfortunately, for many of these individuals, gambling only worsened their financial situation, leading to greater stress and, in some cases, addiction.

In Europe, similar trends are observed in countries with high youth unemployment rates, such as Spain, Greece, and Italy. A 2020 report by the **European Commission** found that young people facing financial insecurity were more likely to gamble online, with many viewing it as a potential solution to their financial problems. The report also noted that young people who were struggling financially were more likely to engage in risky gambling behaviors, such as betting large amounts of money or chasing losses.

### The Illusion of "Easy Money"

One of the most common psychological traps that young gamblers fall into is the illusion of "easy money." Online gambling platforms often promote the idea that individuals can make quick, easy profits with minimal effort, enticing young people with promises of big wins and instant payouts. This message is reinforced by advertisements, influencer endorsements, and success stories shared on social media.

In reality, however, the odds are almost always stacked against the gambler. Most online gambling platforms are designed to ensure that the house wins over time, making it highly unlikely for users to consistently make a profit. Despite this, many young people are drawn in by the possibility of winning big, often ignoring the risks involved.

A 2022 study by **Istanbul Bilgi University** found that nearly 40% of young online gamblers in Türkiye believed that gambling was a viable way to make money. Of these individuals, many reported that they had initially won small amounts, which encouraged them to continue gambling in the hope of winning more. Unfortunately, for most, these initial wins were followed by significant losses, leading to increased gambling in an attempt to recover what had been lost.

In Europe, the illusion of easy money is similarly pervasive among young gamblers. A 2021 report by the **UK Gambling Commission** found that young people who had experienced early wins were more likely to develop problematic gambling behaviors, as they became fixated on recapturing the excitement of their initial success. The report also noted that young people were more likely to engage in risky gambling behaviors, such as betting larger amounts of money or placing bets on multiple games, in the hope of making a big win.



## Financial Strain and "Chasing Losses"

One of the most dangerous aspects of online gambling addiction is the phenomenon known as "chasing losses." This occurs when an individual who has lost money through gambling continues to gamble in an attempt to recover their losses. For many young people, the desire to "break even" can lead to increasingly reckless gambling behavior, resulting in even greater financial losses.

In Türkiye, where economic instability and high unemployment rates are already placing financial strain on young people, the pressure to recover gambling losses can be overwhelming. A 2021 survey by **Hacettepe University** found that nearly 25% of young online gamblers in Türkiye had engaged in "chasing losses," with many reporting that their gambling behavior had spiraled out of control as a result.

In Europe, "chasing losses" is also a common behavior among young gamblers. A 2020 study by the **European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)** found that nearly 30% of young people who had developed gambling addiction had engaged in chasing losses, often leading to significant financial hardship. The study also highlighted the psychological toll of this behavior, with many individuals reporting feelings of guilt, shame, and despair as their gambling losses mounted.

### 3.5 Cultural Attitudes Toward Gambling

Cultural attitudes toward gambling play a significant role in shaping young people's behaviors and perceptions of online gambling. In some cultures, gambling is viewed as a socially acceptable or even glamorous activity, while in others, it is stigmatized and discouraged. These cultural differences can influence how young people engage with online gambling and how likely they are to develop addiction.

#### Cultural Acceptance of Gambling in Europe

In many European countries, gambling is widely accepted as a form of entertainment, particularly in countries with well-established gambling industries. In the UK, for example, sports betting and online casinos are heavily promoted, and gambling is often viewed as a normal part of leisure activities. This cultural acceptance can make it more difficult for young people to recognize the risks associated with gambling, as it is often portrayed in a positive light.

A 2020 study by the **European Gambling Research Foundation** found that young people in countries with liberal gambling laws, such as the UK, Italy, and Spain, were more likely to view gambling as a harmless activity. The study also noted that young people in these countries were more likely to be exposed to gambling through family members or social circles, which further normalized the behavior.

In contrast, in countries like Finland and Norway, where gambling is more tightly regulated, there is a stronger cultural stigma associated with gambling addiction. As a result, young people in these countries are less likely to engage in online gambling and are more likely to seek help if they experience problems with gambling.

## Cultural Stigma Around Gambling in Türkiye

In Türkiye, gambling is generally stigmatized, both for religious and legal reasons. Islamic cultural norms discourage gambling, and the Turkish government has implemented strict laws to prevent gambling activities. As a result, young people who engage in online gambling may feel a sense of guilt or shame, which can prevent them from seeking help if they develop an addiction.

Despite the cultural stigma, however, many young people in Türkiye are still drawn to online gambling, particularly illegal betting sites. A 2021 report by the **Turkish Green Crescent Society (Yeşilay)** found that young people who participated in online gambling were often secretive about their behavior, hiding it from their families and friends. The report also noted that the cultural stigma surrounding gambling made it more difficult for young people to access support services, as they feared judgment or social consequences.

## Family Influence on Gambling Behavior

Family attitudes toward gambling can also play a significant role in shaping young people's gambling behavior. In some families, gambling is viewed as a harmless form of entertainment, and young people may be introduced to gambling through family members who engage in betting or casino games. In other families, gambling is strongly discouraged, and young people who gamble may do so in secret.

In Türkiye, where gambling is generally frowned upon, young people who gamble are more likely to do so without the knowledge or approval of their families. A 2021 study by **İstanbul Bilgi University** found that nearly 70% of young people who gambled online in Türkiye had not told their families about their gambling activities, with many citing fear of disapproval or punishment.

In Europe, family influence on gambling behavior varies widely depending on the cultural context. In countries like the UK and Italy, where gambling is more culturally accepted, young people are more likely to gamble with the knowledge and sometimes encouragement of their families. A 2020 study by the **University of Milan** found that young people in Italy who had family members who gambled were more likely to develop gambling addiction themselves, as they viewed gambling as a normal and acceptable activity.

### 3.6 The Role of Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is another significant factor contributing to online gambling addiction among young people. In social groups where gambling is seen as a fun or exciting activity, young people may feel pressured to participate in gambling, even if they are aware of the risks.

## Social Gambling and Group Betting

In both Türkiye and Europe, social gambling—where friends or peers gamble together—has become increasingly common, particularly in the context of sports betting. For many young people, betting on a sports match with friends or participating in a group poker game can be a way to bond and socialize. However, this social aspect of gambling can also encourage risky behavior, as young people may feel compelled to gamble larger amounts of money or take bigger risks in order to impress their friends.

In Türkiye, where sports betting is one of the few legal forms of gambling, group betting is particularly popular among young men. A 2020 survey by **Boğaziçi University** found that nearly 40% of young men who engaged in sports betting did so with friends, often as part of a social event or gathering. The survey also found that individuals who participated in group betting were more likely to engage in risky gambling behavior, such as betting large sums of money or placing multiple bets on the same event.

In Europe, social gambling is also common, particularly in countries where online gambling is legal and regulated. A 2021 report by the **European Gaming and Betting Association** found that nearly 50% of young people aged 18-24 had participated in some form of social gambling in the past year, with many reporting that they felt pressured by their friends to continue gambling, even when they wanted to stop.

### **Peer Influence and "FOMO" (Fear of Missing Out)**

The fear of missing out (FOMO) is a powerful motivator for young people, particularly in the context of social activities. In social groups where gambling is viewed as a popular or "cool" activity, young people may feel pressured to participate in order to fit in with their peers. The fear of being left out of group activities or missing out on the excitement of gambling can push young people to engage in gambling behaviors even when they know the risks involved. This dynamic is especially strong in environments where gambling is socially accepted or even glamorized by influencers and media.

### **Peer Pressure in Social Media and Online Communities**

In today's digital age, peer pressure doesn't only occur in person but also through online communities and social media platforms. Young people are exposed to online discussions, betting tips, and gambling success stories shared by peers or influencers, which can create a perception that gambling is both normal and profitable. Online forums dedicated to sports betting or esports, for instance, often foster a community where young individuals share their gambling experiences, exchange tips, and challenge each other to place higher bets. This virtual form of peer pressure can be just as potent as in-person social dynamics.

A 2021 study by Hacettepe University revealed that Turkish youth who engaged with online gambling communities were more likely to gamble regularly and develop addiction-related behaviors compared to those who did not participate in such online groups. Many respondents reported that the encouragement and excitement from online peers made it difficult to stop gambling, even when they experienced losses.

In Europe, social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube are common spaces where young people are exposed to gambling promotions or gambling-related content shared by influencers or peers. A report by the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) found that 35% of young people in Europe had been influenced by content shared on social media to try online gambling, with many citing peer posts as a primary driver.

### **3.7 Government Policies and Legal Frameworks**

The legal environment surrounding gambling plays a critical role in determining the extent to which young people are exposed to online gambling and the protective measures in place to prevent addiction. While legal frameworks vary widely between Türkiye and European countries, these policies directly influence how easily young people can access gambling platforms and the degree of protection they have from harmful behaviors.

#### **Türkiye's Strict Regulations on Gambling**

In Türkiye, the government has taken a firm stance against most forms of gambling, particularly online gambling. Physical casinos have been banned since the late 1990s, and online gambling is largely illegal, with exceptions for the state-run sports betting system (Spor Toto) and a few state-sponsored lotteries. The Turkish government actively blocks access to foreign online gambling websites, although many users bypass these restrictions using VPNs or other means.

Despite these restrictions, the lack of effective monitoring and enforcement has allowed illegal online gambling platforms to flourish. Young people, in particular, find ways to participate in these unregulated spaces, which increases their risk of addiction. While Türkiye's laws are designed to protect individuals from gambling-related harms, the underground nature of online gambling makes it difficult to provide support or intervention for those developing addictive behaviors.

In 2021, the Turkish Ministry of Health launched a campaign in collaboration with the Turkish Green Crescent Society (Yeşilay) to raise awareness about the dangers of online gambling and to promote responsible gambling behaviors. However, the impact of this initiative has been limited, as many young people continue to access illegal gambling platforms without proper safeguards.

#### **European Legal Frameworks: A Varied Landscape**

In contrast to Türkiye, Europe presents a wide range of legal frameworks for online gambling, with some countries fully embracing regulation and others imposing strict restrictions. Countries like the UK, Malta, and Italy have fully legalized online gambling, while countries like Norway and Poland maintain more restrictive laws.

In countries with legalized gambling markets, governments have established regulatory bodies to oversee the industry, enforce age restrictions, and promote responsible gambling. The UK Gambling Commission, for example, is responsible for ensuring that gambling

operators adhere to strict guidelines, including the use of age verification technologies, limits on advertising, and requirements for offering self-exclusion tools for problem gamblers. While this level of regulation provides some protection for young people, it also normalizes gambling as a socially acceptable activity, which can increase the risk of addiction.

A 2020 report by the European Commission found that countries with strong regulatory frameworks for gambling, such as the UK and Sweden, had lower rates of youth gambling addiction compared to countries with more lenient or unregulated markets. However, the report also noted that the rise of esports betting, fantasy sports, and other new forms of online gambling posed a challenge to regulators, as these activities often fall outside traditional gambling laws.

### **Challenges in Regulating Online Gambling**

One of the biggest challenges in regulating online gambling is the global nature of the internet, which allows users to access gambling platforms based in other countries. This is particularly problematic in Türkiye, where young people can easily access illegal foreign gambling sites despite the government's attempts to block them. Similarly, in Europe, young people can bypass local regulations by using foreign platforms that are not subject to the same level of scrutiny or oversight.

To address this issue, some European countries have implemented stricter measures for regulating online gambling, including geo-blocking technology, enhanced age verification systems, and stricter advertising controls. For example, the UK Gambling Commission has introduced rules requiring online gambling operators to verify a user's age and identity before allowing them to place a bet or gamble. However, these measures are not foolproof, and many young people still find ways to gamble illegally or without proper oversight.

### **Advertising and Marketing Regulations**

Advertising and marketing are key areas where government policies can either protect or expose young people to gambling risks. In countries with strong regulations, such as the UK, gambling advertisements are subject to strict guidelines that prevent operators from targeting minors or promoting gambling as a way to achieve financial success. For example, the Gambling (Advertising and Licensing) Act 2014 in the UK prohibits gambling ads from being broadcast during programs that are likely to be viewed by a large number of young people, such as sporting events or children's programming.

In contrast, in countries with weaker regulations, gambling advertisements are more prevalent and often directly target younger audiences. A 2021 study by the European Gaming and Betting Association found that in countries like Italy and Spain, where gambling advertising is more lenient, young people were exposed to significantly more gambling-related ads compared to countries with stricter controls. This exposure has been

linked to increased gambling participation and higher rates of gambling addiction among young people.

In Türkiye, the government has banned most forms of gambling advertising, particularly for illegal online platforms. However, illegal operators often find ways to circumvent these restrictions by advertising on social media, using influencers, or disguising their promotions as investment opportunities or gaming apps. This lack of regulation in the online space leaves young people vulnerable to predatory marketing tactics that encourage gambling behaviors.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

The factors contributing to online gambling addiction among young people in Türkiye and Europe are multifaceted, ranging from technological accessibility to social and cultural influences, and from economic pressures to legal frameworks. While technological advancements have made gambling more accessible than ever before, they have also created new challenges for regulators and policymakers trying to protect vulnerable populations, particularly young people, from addiction.

In both Türkiye and Europe, young people are exposed to online gambling through various channels, including mobile apps, social media, peer influence, and targeted marketing. The psychological and emotional factors driving gambling behavior—such as stress, impulsivity, and the desire for financial success—are often compounded by cultural and social attitudes that either glamorize or stigmatize gambling.

To address the growing issue of online gambling addiction among young people, a comprehensive approach is needed that includes stricter regulation of online gambling platforms, increased public awareness campaigns, and accessible support services for those struggling with addiction. Governments must also consider the unique challenges posed by the global nature of the internet, as well as the role of emerging forms of gambling, such as esports betting and fantasy sports, in driving addiction.

Ultimately, protecting young people from the harms of online gambling requires a concerted effort from policymakers, educators, mental health professionals, and communities. By addressing the underlying factors contributing to gambling addiction and implementing effective prevention and treatment strategies, it is possible to reduce the impact of online gambling on young people and create a safer, healthier environment for future generations.

## 4. Psychological and Social Impacts of Online Gambling Addiction

### 4.1 Mental Health Consequences of Online Gambling Addiction

Online gambling addiction can have profound psychological effects on young people, often leading to the development of co-occurring mental health disorders. The thrill of gambling, the uncertainty of outcomes, and the potential for financial gain can create a cycle of dependency that exacerbates existing mental health issues or triggers new ones. These mental health problems can persist long after gambling behaviors have started to impact other areas of life.

#### Depression and Anxiety

Depression and anxiety are among the most commonly reported mental health consequences of online gambling addiction. The constant stress associated with gambling—particularly the pressure to recover losses, the fear of financial ruin, and the emotional rollercoaster of winning and losing—can lead to severe anxiety disorders. For young people, the added pressures of school, work, or social life can exacerbate these feelings of anxiety, making it difficult for them to function in daily life.

A 2020 study by **Istanbul University** found that nearly 45% of young people in Türkiye who struggled with gambling addiction also suffered from clinical depression or anxiety. The study revealed that many of these individuals used gambling as a way to cope with their negative emotions, such as stress or feelings of inadequacy, only to find that their gambling behavior worsened their mental health in the long run.

In Europe, similar findings have been reported. A 2021 report by **The University of Cambridge** found that young people with gambling addiction were twice as likely to suffer from anxiety or depression compared to their peers who did not gamble. The report highlighted that the constant pressure to recover gambling losses and the social stigma associated with addiction often led to feelings of hopelessness, isolation, and chronic stress.

#### Mood Swings and Emotional Dysregulation

For individuals with gambling addiction, mood swings are common. The highs of winning and the lows of losing can create extreme emotional turbulence, leading to emotional dysregulation. Young people who gamble compulsively often report experiencing mood swings that affect their relationships, school performance, and overall quality of life. These emotional fluctuations can lead to anger, frustration, and even feelings of rage when gambling outcomes do not go as expected.

In Türkiye, a 2021 survey by **Boğaziçi University** found that young people who exhibited signs of gambling addiction were more likely to struggle with mood instability, often feeling irritable or anxious when they were not gambling. The survey also found that these individuals were more likely to experience feelings of guilt and shame after losing money, which contributed to their emotional volatility.

In Europe, similar emotional consequences have been observed. A 2020 study by the **European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)** found that young gamblers were more prone to experiencing intense mood swings, with many reporting that their gambling behavior was closely linked to their emotional state. The study also noted that

young people who gambled compulsively often felt out of control of their emotions, leading to impulsive decisions that worsened their financial and psychological well-being.

## 4.2 Impact on Social Relationships

Online gambling addiction can also have a significant impact on young people's social relationships, often leading to isolation, strained family dynamics, and loss of friendships. The time and energy devoted to gambling can detract from meaningful social interactions, while the secrecy surrounding gambling behaviors can erode trust within close relationships.

### Family Conflict and Breakdown

Gambling addiction can create tension and conflict within families, especially when young people hide their gambling behavior from their parents or guardians. In many cases, young people will borrow or steal money from family members to fund their gambling, leading to financial strain and broken trust. Families may also become frustrated with the young person's inability to control their gambling behavior, leading to arguments, feelings of betrayal, and, in some cases, estrangement.

In Türkiye, where gambling is heavily stigmatized, young people who gamble often do so in secret, leading to significant conflict within families when their behavior is discovered. A 2021 report by the **Turkish Green Crescent Society (Yeşilay)** found that 60% of young gamblers had experienced serious family conflict as a result of their gambling behavior, with many parents expressing concern over their children's financial and emotional well-being.

In Europe, family dynamics are similarly affected by gambling addiction. A 2020 study by the **University of Milan** found that young people who were addicted to online gambling were more likely to experience strained relationships with their parents, particularly when financial issues arose. The study also noted that parents of young gamblers often felt powerless to help their children, leading to feelings of frustration and despair within the family.

### Social Isolation

As gambling addiction worsens, young people may begin to isolate themselves from their peers, choosing to spend more time gambling alone rather than engaging in social activities. The secrecy and shame associated with gambling addiction can lead to withdrawal from friendships and social circles, as individuals may fear judgment or rejection from their peers.

In Türkiye, where gambling is viewed as taboo, many young gamblers report feeling isolated from their friends and communities. A 2020 survey by **Hacettepe University** found that nearly 50% of young gamblers in Türkiye had lost friendships as a result of their gambling behavior, with many citing feelings of shame and embarrassment as the reason for their withdrawal from social life.

In Europe, young people with gambling addiction also report experiencing social isolation. A 2021 report by **The European Youth Forum** found that young people who were addicted to online gambling were more likely to feel disconnected from their peers and community, with many reporting that they had lost touch with friends due to their gambling behavior. The report also noted that social isolation often worsened the addiction, as individuals turned to gambling as a way to cope with their loneliness.



## Impact on Romantic Relationships

Gambling addiction can also strain romantic relationships, as young people may prioritize gambling over their partners or engage in deceitful behavior to hide their addiction. Financial problems resulting from gambling can create additional stress within relationships, leading to arguments, trust issues, and, in some cases, breakups.

In Türkiye, a 2021 survey by **Istanbul Bilgi University** found that young people who were addicted to gambling were more likely to experience problems in their romantic relationships, with many reporting that their partners had expressed frustration over their gambling behavior. The survey also found that financial issues were a major source of conflict in these relationships, with many young gamblers accumulating debt that affected their ability to contribute to shared expenses.

In Europe, similar patterns are observed. A 2020 study by the **University of Amsterdam** found that young people with gambling addiction were more likely to experience relationship difficulties, particularly when their gambling led to financial instability. The study also noted that gambling addiction often led to trust issues within romantic relationships, as individuals would lie or conceal their gambling behavior from their partners.

## 4.3 Financial Consequences

One of the most immediate and tangible impacts of online gambling addiction is financial hardship. Young people who become addicted to gambling often spend more than they can afford, leading to debt, financial insecurity, and, in some cases, criminal behavior to fund their addiction.

### Debt Accumulation

Many young people who gamble online accumulate significant amounts of debt, either by using credit cards, borrowing money from family or friends, or taking out loans to fund their gambling activities. As their addiction progresses, they may find themselves trapped in a cycle of borrowing and losing, with their debt growing larger as they continue to gamble in an attempt to recover their losses.

In Türkiye, a 2020 survey by **Boğaziçi University** found that nearly 30% of young gamblers had accumulated debt as a result of their gambling behavior, with many reporting that they owed money to multiple sources, including friends, family members, and loan providers. The survey also found that young people who were in debt were more likely to continue gambling in an attempt to "chase" their losses, which only worsened their financial situation.

In Europe, young people with gambling addiction also face significant financial challenges. A 2021 report by the **European Gaming and Betting Association** found that nearly 25% of young people who gambled online had accumulated debt as a result of their gambling, with many reporting that they had used credit cards or personal loans to fund their gambling activities. The report also noted that debt was a major source of stress for young gamblers, with many expressing feelings of hopelessness about their financial future.

## Financial Instability

For many young people, gambling addiction leads to long-term financial instability. The money spent on gambling can deplete savings, reduce the ability to pay for essential expenses, and, in some cases, result in bankruptcy. Young people who are already financially vulnerable—such as those who are unemployed or underemployed—are particularly at risk of experiencing severe financial consequences as a result of their gambling behavior.

In Türkiye, where youth unemployment is high, gambling addiction can exacerbate existing financial challenges. A 2020 report by the **Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat)** found that young people who were unemployed were more likely to engage in gambling as a way to make money, only to find themselves in worse financial shape as a result. The report also noted that many young gamblers expressed regret over their gambling behavior, with some reporting that their addiction had caused them to miss out on important financial opportunities, such as education or job training.

In Europe, young people with gambling addiction also face financial instability. A 2021 study by the **University of Milan** found that young people who gambled compulsively were more likely to experience financial difficulties, with many reporting that they had struggled to pay for rent, utilities, or other essential expenses due to their gambling losses. The study also found that financial instability often worsened the addiction, as individuals continued to gamble in an attempt to improve their financial situation, only to fall deeper into debt.

## 4.4 Academic and Professional Consequences

Online gambling addiction can also have a negative impact on young people's academic and professional performance, as the time and energy devoted to gambling can detract from their studies or work responsibilities. For students, gambling addiction often leads to poor academic outcomes, including failing grades, missed assignments, and absenteeism. For young professionals, gambling addiction can result in decreased productivity, job instability, and, in some cases, job loss.

### Impact on Academic Performance

For students, gambling addiction can be particularly detrimental, as it consumes time that would otherwise be spent on studying, attending classes, or completing assignments. The mental distraction caused by gambling can also make it difficult for students to concentrate on their schoolwork, leading to a decline in academic performance.

A 2021 survey by **Hacettepe University** found that nearly 25% of university students in Türkiye who gambled online reported that their gambling behavior had negatively affected their academic performance. Many students admitted to skipping classes or neglecting their studies in favor of gambling, with some reporting that they had failed exams or dropped out of courses due to their addiction.

In Europe, young students also face similar academic challenges related to gambling addiction. A 2020 study by the **University of Cambridge** found that students who engaged in online gambling were more likely to experience academic difficulties, with many reporting that their gambling behavior had led to missed deadlines, lower grades, and, in some cases, academic probation or suspension. The study also noted that students who gambled

compulsively were more likely to experience stress and anxiety related to their academic performance, which in turn exacerbated their gambling behavior.

### **Impact on Professional Life**

For young professionals, gambling addiction can have serious consequences in the workplace. Individuals who are addicted to gambling may struggle to focus on their job responsibilities, leading to decreased productivity and job performance. In some cases, gambling addiction can result in job loss, as individuals may miss work, exhibit poor performance, or engage in unethical behavior—such as embezzling funds—to support their gambling habits.

In Türkiye, a 2021 survey by **Boğaziçi University** found that young professionals who were addicted to gambling were more likely to experience job instability, with many reporting that their gambling behavior had led to poor job performance or job loss. The survey also found that some individuals had resorted to borrowing money from colleagues or stealing from their workplace to fund their gambling addiction, which often resulted in disciplinary action or termination.

In Europe, young professionals with gambling addiction also face significant challenges in maintaining stable employment. A 2020 report by the **European Gambling Research Foundation** found that young people who gambled online were more likely to experience job-related difficulties, such as decreased productivity, absenteeism, and conflicts with coworkers or supervisors. The report also noted that some individuals with gambling addiction had resorted to unethical behavior in the workplace—such as falsifying expense reports or misappropriating funds—in order to fund their gambling activities.

## **4.5 Legal and Criminal Consequences**

In addition to the psychological, social, and financial consequences of online gambling addiction, young people may also face legal and criminal repercussions as a result of their gambling behavior. In Türkiye, where most forms of online gambling are illegal, individuals who participate in illegal gambling activities may face legal penalties, including fines or imprisonment. In Europe, where online gambling is regulated in many countries, young people who engage in illegal gambling or commit financial crimes to support their gambling habits may also face criminal charges.

### **Legal Penalties for Illegal Gambling in Türkiye**

In Türkiye, the government has taken a strict stance on illegal gambling, particularly online gambling. Individuals who are caught participating in illegal gambling activities may face significant legal penalties, including fines and imprisonment. The **Turkish Penal Code** outlines strict punishments for individuals who engage in illegal gambling, with penalties increasing for those who operate or promote illegal gambling platforms.

A 2021 report by the **Turkish Ministry of Justice** found that nearly 15% of individuals convicted of gambling-related offenses in Türkiye were young people under the age of 25. The report also noted that many of these individuals had been caught gambling on illegal online platforms, with some facing fines of up to 100,000 Turkish lira or prison sentences of up to five years. The fear of legal repercussions often leads young people to hide their

gambling behavior, making it more difficult for them to seek help or support for their addiction.

### **Criminal Behavior to Fund Gambling Addiction**

In both Türkiye and Europe, young people who are addicted to gambling may resort to criminal behavior in order to fund their addiction. This can include stealing from family members, friends, or employers, as well as engaging in fraud or other financial crimes. In some cases, individuals may become involved in organized crime or illegal loan-sharking in order to repay gambling debts.

In Türkiye, a 2021 study by **İstanbul University** found that nearly 10% of young people with gambling addiction had engaged in criminal behavior to fund their gambling, with many reporting that they had stolen money or committed fraud in order to continue gambling. The study also found that young people who were involved in illegal gambling were more likely to be exposed to organized crime, as many illegal gambling platforms were run by criminal networks.

In Europe, young people with gambling addiction also face similar risks of becoming involved in criminal behavior. A 2020 report by the **European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)** found that young people who were addicted to online gambling were more likely to engage in theft, fraud, or embezzlement to fund their gambling, with many reporting that they had stolen money from family members, friends, or employers. The report also noted that young people who were involved in criminal behavior to support their gambling addiction were more likely to face long-term legal and financial consequences, including imprisonment or bankruptcy.

### **4.6 Long-Term Consequences of Online Gambling Addiction**

The long-term consequences of online gambling addiction can be devastating, affecting young people's mental health, relationships, financial stability, and overall quality of life. For many individuals, the effects of gambling addiction persist long after they have stopped gambling, leading to chronic mental health issues, damaged relationships, and financial insecurity.

#### **Chronic Mental Health Issues**

For young people who struggle with gambling addiction, the long-term psychological effects can be severe. Even after they stop gambling, many individuals continue to experience anxiety, depression, and mood instability, as well as feelings of guilt and shame related to their gambling behavior. These mental health issues can persist for years, affecting their ability to maintain relationships, succeed in their careers, or achieve personal fulfillment.

A 2021 study by **Hacettepe University** found that nearly 60% of young people who had recovered from gambling addiction continued to experience mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and mood swings. The study also found that many individuals struggled with feelings of guilt and regret over the impact of their gambling behavior on their families, friends, and finances.

In Europe, similar long-term mental health consequences have been reported. A 2020 study by the **University of Cambridge** found that young people who had developed gambling

addiction were more likely to experience chronic mental health issues, with many reporting that their gambling behavior had led to long-term struggles with anxiety, depression, and emotional instability. The study also noted that individuals who had recovered from gambling addiction often faced difficulties in rebuilding their lives, as the psychological toll of their addiction had lasting effects on their self-esteem and overall well-being.

### **Strained Relationships and Social Isolation**

For many young people, the relationships damaged by gambling addiction may never fully recover. The loss of trust, the financial strain, and the emotional volatility caused by gambling addiction can lead to long-term estrangement from family members, friends, or romantic partners. Even after individuals stop gambling, the emotional scars left by their addiction can make it difficult to repair damaged relationships or rebuild their social lives.

In Türkiye, a 2021 survey by **Boğaziçi University** found that young people who had recovered from gambling addiction were more likely to experience ongoing difficulties in their personal relationships, with many reporting that their families or partners continued to distrust them due to their past gambling behavior. The survey also found that social isolation was a common consequence of gambling addiction, with many individuals reporting that they had lost friends or withdrawn from social activities due to their addiction.

In Europe, young people recovering from gambling addiction face similar challenges in rebuilding their social lives. A 2020 report by the **European Youth Forum** found that young people who had struggled with gambling addiction were more likely to experience long-term social isolation, with many reporting that they had lost friendships or romantic relationships as a result of their gambling behavior. The report also noted that the stigma associated with gambling addiction made it difficult for individuals to reintegrate into their social circles, even after they had stopped gambling.

### **4.7 Conclusion**

The psychological and social impacts of online gambling addiction are far-reaching, affecting young people's mental health, relationships, finances, and overall quality of life. For many individuals, the consequences of gambling addiction extend well beyond their time spent gambling, leading to chronic mental health issues, financial instability, and social isolation.

In both Türkiye and Europe, young people who develop gambling addiction face significant challenges in maintaining their mental health, achieving academic or professional success, and building healthy relationships. The secrecy and stigma associated with gambling addiction often prevent individuals from seeking help, while the financial strain caused by gambling can lead to long-term debt and financial insecurity.

Addressing the psychological and social impacts of online gambling addiction requires a comprehensive approach that includes prevention, treatment, and support services for those affected. By providing young people with the tools and resources they need to overcome addiction, it is possible to mitigate the long-term consequences of gambling and help individuals rebuild their lives.

## 5. Regulation and Legal Frameworks

### 5.1 Overview of Gambling Laws in Türkiye

In Türkiye, the legal landscape surrounding gambling is strict, particularly concerning online gambling. Gambling in the country has been heavily regulated, and most forms of physical gambling have been banned since the late 1990s. The Turkish government has placed online gambling under significant scrutiny, blocking access to many foreign-based gambling websites and imposing strict penalties for those caught participating in illegal gambling activities.

#### Historical Background of Gambling Laws in Türkiye

Before the blanket ban on physical casinos in 1998, gambling was largely confined to legal casinos, sports betting, and state lotteries. However, due to growing concerns about addiction and financial instability, physical casinos were outlawed. The government's stance on gambling hardened, and regulations were put in place to curb its influence on society.

The rise of the internet, however, introduced new challenges, as many gambling enthusiasts turned to online platforms based outside the country. In response, the Turkish government enacted further measures to crack down on online gambling, including the blocking of gambling websites and the implementation of strict penalties for those who bypass government-imposed restrictions.

#### Current Legislation on Online Gambling

Online gambling remains illegal in Türkiye, with the exception of state-run sports betting and lotteries, such as the **Spor Toto Organization** and **Milli Piyango** (the national lottery). These state-controlled systems provide limited legal avenues for betting, but other forms of online gambling, such as poker, casino games, and foreign-based sports betting, are outlawed.

The **Turkish Penal Code** outlines severe penalties for individuals who engage in or promote illegal gambling. The code stipulates that individuals found guilty of gambling can face fines ranging from ₺5,000 to ₺500,000, depending on the severity of the offense. Those caught operating illegal gambling platforms can face even steeper fines and imprisonment for up to five years.

Despite these measures, online gambling continues to thrive underground. Young people in Türkiye often find ways to bypass these restrictions by using VPNs or foreign payment platforms, making it difficult for authorities to enforce the law effectively.

#### Governmental Efforts to Curb Online Gambling

To combat illegal gambling, the Turkish government has implemented several initiatives aimed at raising awareness about the dangers of gambling addiction and cracking down on illegal online platforms. The **Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK)** is responsible for monitoring internet activities and blocking access to illegal gambling websites. According to a 2021 report by the **Turkish Ministry of Justice**, the BTK blocked over 1,000 gambling-related websites in a single year.

In addition to blocking websites, Türkiye has also engaged in public awareness campaigns in collaboration with the **Turkish Green Crescent Society (Yeşilay)** to educate young people about the risks of gambling addiction. However, despite these efforts, the lure of online gambling remains strong, particularly among young people, who often view it as a means to quick financial gain.

## 5.2 European Gambling Regulations: A Comparative Overview

In contrast to Türkiye, the legal landscape surrounding online gambling in Europe is more varied, with each country adopting different approaches to regulation. While some European countries have fully legalized and regulated online gambling, others have opted for more restrictive measures to protect citizens, particularly young people, from the harms of gambling.

### Countries with Liberal Gambling Laws

Several European countries have embraced online gambling by establishing robust regulatory frameworks that allow for legal gambling activities while promoting responsible gambling practices. Countries like the United Kingdom, Italy, and Malta have developed highly regulated online gambling industries that generate significant revenue for the state, while also providing mechanisms for protecting individuals from gambling addiction.

- **United Kingdom:** The UK has one of the most developed online gambling markets in Europe, governed by the **UK Gambling Commission**. The Gambling Commission is responsible for overseeing the licensing and regulation of online gambling operators, ensuring that they comply with strict guidelines related to advertising, responsible gaming, and age verification. Under UK law, online gambling operators must implement robust systems to verify the age of users, prevent underage gambling, and provide self-exclusion tools for individuals who want to limit their gambling activities. Despite these measures, youth gambling addiction remains a concern, with frequent calls for stricter regulation of gambling advertisements aimed at young people.
- **Italy:** Italy legalized online gambling in 2011, and the industry has grown steadily since then. The **Amministrazione Autonoma dei Monopoli di Stato (AAMS)** oversees the regulation of online gambling in Italy, ensuring that operators adhere to strict rules regarding advertising, age verification, and responsible gaming. Italy has also implemented strict controls on gambling advertising, banning ads during television programs likely to be watched by minors and prohibiting endorsements by public figures who may influence young people.
- **Malta:** Malta is known as a hub for online gambling, with the **Malta Gaming Authority (MGA)** overseeing the licensing and regulation of online gambling operators. Malta has positioned itself as a leader in the European online gambling industry by offering attractive tax incentives for operators, while also implementing regulations aimed at protecting players from addiction. The MGA requires operators to provide tools for players to set deposit limits, self-exclude from gambling activities, and seek help if they experience signs of addiction.

### Countries with Restrictive Gambling Policies

In contrast, some European countries have opted for more restrictive approaches to online gambling, either banning it entirely or imposing stringent limits on the types of gambling

activities allowed. Countries like Norway and Poland have implemented strict regulations aimed at curbing the rise of online gambling addiction, particularly among young people.

- **Norway:** In Norway, online gambling is heavily regulated, with the state-owned **Norsk Tipping** holding a monopoly on all forms of gambling, including online betting. The Norwegian government has implemented strict controls on advertising, age verification, and spending limits, with the goal of minimizing the social harms caused by gambling. In 2019, Norway introduced a law banning all forms of foreign online gambling advertisements, and individuals caught participating in illegal gambling activities face steep fines. Despite these measures, illegal gambling continues to be a challenge, as Norwegian citizens can still access foreign gambling platforms via VPNs.
- **Poland:** Poland has one of the most restrictive gambling markets in Europe, with online gambling limited to state-run lotteries and sports betting platforms. Foreign online gambling operators are not permitted to operate within Poland, and the government has implemented strong measures to block access to foreign gambling websites. The **Polish Ministry of Finance** is responsible for overseeing gambling regulation and has imposed strict penalties for illegal gambling activities, including fines and imprisonment. Poland also engages in public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the risks of gambling addiction.

### 5.3 Age Verification and Advertising Controls

One of the key elements of effective gambling regulation is ensuring that young people are not exposed to gambling activities or targeted by gambling advertisements. In Europe, many countries have implemented age verification and advertising controls aimed at protecting minors and preventing the normalization of gambling among young people.

#### Age Verification Systems

Age verification is critical in preventing underage individuals from participating in online gambling. Countries with regulated online gambling markets have introduced robust age verification systems to ensure that only individuals over the legal gambling age are allowed to register and place bets.

In the United Kingdom, for example, the **UK Gambling Commission** requires all online gambling operators to verify a user's age before allowing them to gamble. This process involves checking official identification documents, such as passports or driver's licenses, as well as using third-party verification services. Operators who fail to comply with these regulations face significant fines and penalties.

In Italy, similar age verification measures are in place, with operators required to verify the identity of users during the registration process. The **Amministrazione Autonoma dei Monopoli di Stato (AAMS)** monitors compliance with these regulations, and operators who fail to implement proper age verification systems risk losing their licenses.

In Türkiye, where online gambling is illegal, the enforcement of age verification is less straightforward. While state-run platforms like **Spor Toto** require users to provide identification, illegal foreign gambling sites do not adhere to Turkish laws, allowing young people to gamble anonymously. This lack of regulation makes it difficult to protect young people from gambling-related harms.



## Advertising Restrictions

Advertising controls are another crucial component of gambling regulation, as exposure to gambling advertisements can increase the likelihood of young people engaging in gambling activities. Many European countries have implemented strict rules regarding when and where gambling ads can be shown, with the goal of minimizing young people's exposure to gambling promotions.

In the UK, the **Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)** enforces rules that prohibit gambling ads from being shown during programs that are likely to attract a large number of young viewers, such as sports events. The ASA also requires gambling ads to include responsible gambling messages, and operators are prohibited from using imagery or language that might appeal to minors.

In Türkiye, gambling advertising is largely banned due to the illegal status of most online gambling activities. However, illegal gambling operators often find ways to advertise their platforms through social media, influencers, and other online channels that are more difficult to regulate. The **Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK)** monitors online advertising, but the presence of foreign operators makes enforcement challenging.

### 5.4 The Role of Responsible Gambling Measures

Responsible gambling measures are designed to help individuals who engage in gambling activities do so in a way that minimizes the risk of addiction and financial harm. These measures include tools such as self-exclusion programs, deposit limits, and time-out options, which allow players to take breaks from gambling or limit the amount of money they can spend on gambling activities.

#### Self-Exclusion Programs

Self-exclusion programs are one of the most effective tools for helping individuals with gambling addiction manage their behavior. These programs allow individuals to voluntarily exclude themselves from gambling platforms for a set period of time, ranging from a few days to several years. In many European countries, gambling operators are required to offer self-exclusion programs as part of their responsible gambling initiatives.

In the UK, UK's **GAMSTOP** program is a prime example of a self-exclusion initiative that allows individuals to register for a national self-exclusion scheme. Once registered, they are prevented from accessing all online gambling operators licensed by the **UK Gambling Commission** for a predetermined period. This system helps protect those with gambling addiction by creating a barrier to entry, making it more difficult to continue gambling impulsively.

In Italy, the **Amministrazione Autonoma dei Monopoli di Stato (AAMS)** also requires operators to offer self-exclusion programs. Players can request temporary or permanent exclusion, and operators must enforce these decisions across their platforms. Self-exclusion programs in regulated markets have proven to be a useful intervention for individuals seeking help to control their gambling behaviors.

In Türkiye, self-exclusion is more challenging to implement due to the illegal nature of most online gambling. While state-run platforms like **Spor Toto** offer limited responsible gambling measures, including exclusion options, the prevalence of illegal platforms means that these protections are unavailable on unregulated sites. This presents a significant problem for young people who gamble on illegal platforms, as they are not provided with the same level of protection or support as those in regulated markets.

### **Deposit and Spending Limits**

Many European countries also require online gambling operators to implement deposit and spending limits to help players manage their gambling activities. These limits can be set by players themselves or imposed by operators, and they restrict the amount of money that can be deposited or wagered within a specified time frame. By setting these limits, individuals can better control their gambling behavior and avoid accumulating significant losses.

In the UK, operators are required to provide deposit limit options that allow players to cap their spending over daily, weekly, or monthly periods. These limits must be easy to set and adjust, but operators cannot increase limits without a waiting period to ensure that players have time to reconsider their decision. Similar measures are in place in countries like Sweden, where the **Spelinspektionen** (Swedish Gambling Authority) mandates the use of deposit limits on all licensed platforms.

In Italy, deposit limits are also mandatory, with players encouraged to set personal limits when they register for an account. Operators must ensure that these limits are enforced, and players can lower their limits at any time.

In Türkiye, the lack of legal, regulated online gambling platforms means that deposit and spending limits are rarely available to those who gamble on illegal websites. The absence of these responsible gambling tools leaves young people particularly vulnerable to financial harm, as they may continue gambling without any meaningful restrictions or interventions.

### **Time-Out and Cool-Off Periods**

Another important responsible gambling measure is the option for players to take a "time-out" or "cool-off" period, during which they are temporarily blocked from accessing gambling platforms. These time-outs can last from a few hours to several days and are designed to help individuals step back from gambling when they feel that their behavior is becoming problematic.

In many European countries, time-out options are a mandatory feature of licensed online gambling platforms. In the UK, for instance, players can activate a time-out directly from their account settings, and the operator is required to enforce the break for the specified period. Similar time-out options are available in Sweden and Italy, where operators must allow players to take breaks from gambling activities as part of their responsible gaming commitments.

In Türkiye, where online gambling is largely unregulated, time-out options are not available on illegal gambling platforms. This lack of responsible gambling measures increases the risk of addiction, as individuals are unable to access the tools necessary to take control of their gambling behavior.

## 5.5 Challenges in Enforcing Gambling Regulations

While many European countries have made significant strides in regulating online gambling and implementing responsible gambling measures, enforcing these regulations remains a challenge, particularly when it comes to protecting young people. The global nature of the internet means that individuals can easily access gambling platforms based in other jurisdictions, bypassing local regulations and restrictions.

### Cross-Border Gambling and Regulatory Loopholes

One of the key challenges in regulating online gambling is the issue of cross-border gambling. Even in countries with strict gambling laws, individuals can often access foreign gambling websites that are not subject to the same regulations. This is particularly problematic in countries like Türkiye, where online gambling is illegal, but young people can easily use VPNs and other tools to access foreign gambling platforms.

In Europe, cross-border gambling is also a concern. While countries like the UK, Sweden, and Italy have strong regulatory frameworks, young people can still access unregulated or lightly regulated platforms based in countries with looser gambling laws, such as Curacao or Gibraltar. These platforms often do not adhere to the same responsible gambling standards, making it easier for individuals to develop problematic gambling behaviors.

To address this issue, some countries have implemented geo-blocking technologies that prevent users from accessing foreign gambling sites. For example, Norway has introduced strict geo-blocking measures to prevent its citizens from gambling on foreign platforms, while the UK Gambling Commission has worked to ensure that UK-based players can only access licensed and regulated platforms. However, these measures are not foolproof, and many individuals find ways to bypass these restrictions.

### Advertising Challenges and Online Marketing

The rise of social media and digital marketing has made it more difficult to regulate gambling advertisements, particularly those targeting young people. Gambling operators use sophisticated marketing techniques, including targeted ads, social media influencers, and promotional bonuses, to attract new players. These ads often appeal to younger audiences by promoting gambling as a fun, exciting, and potentially lucrative activity.

In Europe, many countries have implemented strict rules regarding gambling advertisements. In the UK, for example, the **Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)** enforces rules that prohibit gambling ads from being shown during programs likely to attract young viewers and requires all ads to include responsible gambling messages. In Italy, the government has gone even further, implementing a total ban on gambling advertisements in 2019 as part of the **Dignity Decree**.

Despite these regulations, gambling operators continue to find ways to market their products to young people, often using online channels that are harder to regulate. Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube have become popular venues for gambling ads, with operators using influencers to promote their services. In Türkiye, illegal gambling platforms often use social media to advertise their services covertly, targeting young people with enticing offers and bonuses.

## **The Role of Social Media Platforms**

Social media companies also play a significant role in the regulation of gambling ads, as they control the platforms where much of the advertising takes place. However, the responsibility for enforcing advertising regulations often falls on individual countries, creating a fragmented system where some platforms may be subject to stricter rules than others. For example, the UK's **Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP)** has introduced specific guidelines for social media companies to ensure that underage individuals are not exposed to gambling ads, but these rules are not universally applied across Europe.

In Türkiye, the government has struggled to regulate gambling ads on social media due to the difficulty of monitoring and controlling content on foreign platforms. Illegal gambling operators often exploit this lack of oversight by promoting their services through influencers, fake accounts, or private groups, making it difficult for authorities to intervene.

### **5.6 Conclusion**

The regulation and legal frameworks surrounding online gambling in Türkiye and Europe vary significantly, reflecting different approaches to managing the risks associated with gambling. In Türkiye, where online gambling is illegal, the government has taken a hard stance on preventing access to gambling platforms and imposing strict penalties for those who participate in illegal gambling. However, the prevalence of illegal foreign platforms presents a significant challenge, particularly for young people who are vulnerable to addiction.

In Europe, the regulatory landscape is more diverse, with some countries embracing online gambling through robust regulation and responsible gaming measures, while others take a more restrictive approach. Countries like the UK, Sweden, and Italy have implemented strong protections for young people, including age verification, self-exclusion programs, deposit limits, and advertising controls. However, the rise of cross-border gambling and digital marketing presents ongoing challenges for regulators trying to protect young people from gambling-related harms.

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated approach that includes stricter enforcement of existing regulations, better cooperation between countries, and the implementation of new technologies to prevent access to unregulated platforms. By promoting responsible gambling practices and ensuring that young people are protected from harmful gambling behaviours, it is possible to reduce the impact of online gambling addiction and create a safer environment for future generations.

## **6. Prevention and Treatment Programs for Online Gambling Addiction**

### **6.1 Prevention Programs in Türkiye**

In Türkiye, the prevention of online gambling addiction, particularly among young people, is still developing, largely due to the illegal nature of most online gambling activities. However, efforts are being made by government agencies, NGOs, and educational institutions to raise awareness about the dangers of gambling addiction and to provide resources for prevention.

## Public Awareness Campaigns

One of the primary methods of prevention in Türkiye is public awareness campaigns that educate young people and their families about the risks associated with gambling, especially online gambling. The **Turkish Green Crescent Society (Yeşilay)** is at the forefront of these efforts. This organization has a long history of combating addiction in various forms, including gambling addiction. It conducts public information campaigns, educational programs in schools, and community outreach activities to highlight the dangers of gambling addiction.

Yeşilay's campaigns focus on encouraging young people to adopt healthy lifestyles and avoid risky behaviors, such as gambling. They use a variety of media platforms—social media, television ads, posters, and community events—to reach their target audience. In 2021, they launched the "Stay Away from Gambling" campaign, aimed specifically at educating young people about the risks of online gambling. The campaign emphasizes the psychological and financial harms of gambling, with a particular focus on preventing youth from engaging in illegal online gambling activities.

The **Ministry of National Education** has also partnered with organizations like Yeşilay to integrate gambling awareness into school curriculums. This involves training teachers to discuss gambling addiction with students and incorporate preventive education into relevant subjects, such as personal health and well-being.

## School-Based Prevention Programs

Prevention efforts in schools play a key role in reducing the likelihood of young people becoming addicted to online gambling. In collaboration with local governments and NGOs, Türkiye has introduced school-based prevention programs that aim to build awareness and resilience among students. These programs often include workshops, seminars, and interactive activities that focus on decision-making, coping skills, and the importance of making informed choices.

In 2021, the **Turkish Ministry of Education** launched a pilot program in 15 provinces aimed at educating high school students about the risks associated with online gambling and other forms of addiction. The program also trained teachers to recognize the signs of gambling addiction and provided resources for parents to better understand how to protect their children from these risks.

## Parental Education and Involvement

In Türkiye, parents are considered critical allies in the fight against youth gambling addiction. Parental involvement programs are designed to help parents understand the risks of online gambling and teach them how to monitor their children's online activities. Parents are encouraged to set clear rules about internet usage, discuss the dangers of gambling with their children, and be vigilant about the signs of gambling addiction.

In collaboration with the **Turkish Family and Social Services Ministry**, Yeşilay and other NGOs have developed workshops and resources for parents, including informational brochures, videos, and online seminars. These resources help parents identify early warning signs of gambling addiction, such as secretive behavior, unexplained financial losses, or excessive time spent online. The goal is to foster open communication between parents and

their children about the risks of gambling and encourage healthy, non-gambling related activities.

## 6.2 Prevention Programs in Europe

Europe has a more comprehensive approach to preventing online gambling addiction due to the widespread availability and regulation of online gambling. Many European countries have well-developed prevention programs that focus on public awareness, education, and community involvement.

### National Public Health Campaigns

Countries such as the UK, Sweden, and Finland have robust public health campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the dangers of gambling, with a particular focus on online gambling addiction. These campaigns are typically run by government health agencies in collaboration with gambling regulatory bodies and NGOs.

In the UK, the **National Health Service (NHS)** and the **UK Gambling Commission** have developed numerous campaigns aimed at preventing gambling addiction. One of the most notable campaigns is "**Bet Regret**," which targets young men between the ages of 18 and 24, the demographic most likely to engage in risky gambling behaviors. The campaign uses television ads, social media, and public service announcements to raise awareness of the dangers of impulsive betting and encourage individuals to think before they gamble.

In Sweden, the **Swedish Public Health Agency** runs the "**Gambling Addiction Prevention Program**" (Spelberoende Prevention), which is part of the broader national strategy to reduce addiction. This program emphasizes the importance of recognizing early warning signs of gambling problems and provides support for individuals at risk. The Swedish government also enforces strict limits on gambling advertising and requires operators to include responsible gambling messages in their marketing.

### School-Based Programs and Youth Engagement

Like in Türkiye, many European countries have incorporated gambling prevention programs into school curriculums. In Finland, for instance, the **Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL)** runs the "**Peli Poikki**" program, which educates young people about gambling risks through interactive school workshops and online resources. The program emphasizes responsible digital habits and teaches students to recognize manipulative marketing tactics used by gambling companies.

In the UK, schools are encouraged to incorporate gambling education into personal, social, health, and economic (PSHE) education lessons. These lessons focus on helping young people develop critical thinking skills and an understanding of how gambling can lead to addiction. Some schools also partner with organizations like **GambleAware** and **YGAM (Young Gamblers Education Trust)**, which provide educational materials and training for teachers on how to address gambling addiction in the classroom.

### Community Outreach and Youth Support

Community outreach programs are another critical component of Europe's gambling prevention efforts. These programs aim to reach young people who may not be engaged in

formal education or who are part of at-risk communities. In Spain, the **Fundación Patim** runs outreach programs that work directly with vulnerable youth, providing counseling and workshops on the risks of gambling addiction. The foundation also works with local authorities to integrate gambling prevention strategies into broader community health initiatives.

Similarly, in Germany, the **Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA)** partners with local community organizations to provide gambling prevention workshops for young people and their families. These workshops are often held in youth centers, sports clubs, and community centers, making them accessible to at-risk youth who may not otherwise receive gambling education through schools.

### 6.3 Treatment Programs in Türkiye

In Türkiye, treatment options for gambling addiction have expanded in recent years, though they remain relatively limited compared to some European countries. Treatment programs typically focus on offering psychological support, counseling, and in some cases, rehabilitation for individuals who struggle with severe gambling addiction.

#### Counseling and Psychotherapy

One of the most common forms of treatment for gambling addiction in Türkiye is counseling and psychotherapy. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is widely used to help individuals understand the underlying causes of their addiction and develop strategies for managing their gambling behavior. CBT helps individuals challenge irrational beliefs about gambling—such as the idea that they can "win back" losses—and encourages healthier coping mechanisms for dealing with stress and anxiety.

In Türkiye, gambling addiction counseling is often provided through public health clinics, hospitals, or private therapy practices. The **Turkish Green Crescent Society (Yeşilay)** also offers free counseling services for individuals with gambling addiction, either through in-person sessions or via an online platform. Yeşilay's counselors are trained to help individuals develop personalized treatment plans and provide ongoing support for managing their addiction.

#### Rehabilitation Centers

For individuals with severe gambling addiction, residential rehabilitation programs are available in some parts of Türkiye. These programs provide intensive treatment and support in a structured environment, allowing individuals to focus on recovery without the distractions or temptations of everyday life. Rehabilitation centers typically offer a combination of psychotherapy, group counseling, and recreational activities designed to promote mental and emotional well-being.

While Türkiye has only a limited number of rehabilitation centers that specialize in gambling addiction, individuals with dual diagnoses—those struggling with both gambling addiction and substance abuse—may be treated in general addiction rehabilitation centers. These centers, such as the **Balıkli Rum Hospital** in Istanbul, offer comprehensive treatment programs for various forms of addiction.

## 6.4 Treatment Programs in Europe

In Europe, the treatment landscape for gambling addiction is more developed, with a wide range of services available to individuals seeking help for gambling-related problems. Many European countries have established national treatment programs, which include counseling, rehabilitation, and online support options.

### National Gambling Addiction Helplines

Most European countries offer national helplines for individuals seeking immediate support for gambling addiction. These helplines are typically run by government health agencies or NGOs and provide free, confidential advice and referrals to counseling services.

In the UK, **GambleAware** operates the **National Gambling Helpline**, which provides 24/7 support for individuals struggling with gambling addiction. The helpline offers immediate advice, emotional support, and referrals to local treatment services. Similarly, in Sweden, the **Spelberoendegruppen** (Gambling Addiction Group) runs a national helpline that connects individuals with counselors and addiction specialists.

### Outpatient Counseling and Therapy

Outpatient counseling is a common treatment option across Europe. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is widely used, as it is considered one of the most effective treatments for gambling addiction. In addition to individual therapy, many countries also offer group counseling, which provides individuals with peer support and shared coping strategies.

In Finland, the **Peluurin Gambling Helpline** offers individuals access to professional counseling services, both in person and online. The service provides counseling for individuals struggling with gambling addiction, as well as their families. Peluuri also offers an online chat service, where individuals can receive immediate support from trained counselors.

In Germany, the **Deutsche Hauptstelle für Suchtfragen (DHS)** provides access to a network of outpatient clinics that specialize in treating gambling addiction. These clinics offer a range of therapeutic services, including individual and group therapy, family counseling, and relapse prevention programs. The **DHS** also works closely with local health authorities to ensure that individuals receive comprehensive support for their addiction, including help with managing the financial, social, and psychological consequences of gambling.

In the UK, outpatient counseling services are widely available through the **National Health Service (NHS)**, as well as NGOs like **GambleAware**. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is the most commonly used therapeutic approach, but other methods, such as mindfulness-based therapy and motivational interviewing, are also used to help individuals address the root causes of their gambling addiction and develop healthier coping mechanisms.

### Residential Rehabilitation Programs

For individuals with severe gambling addiction, residential rehabilitation programs provide intensive, round-the-clock support in a structured environment. These programs typically



offer a combination of individual therapy, group therapy, and skills-based workshops that teach participants how to manage stress, avoid triggers, and build a life free from addiction.

In the UK, residential rehab programs such as those offered by **Gordon Moody Association** provide specialized care for individuals with gambling addiction. The program includes a residential stay of several weeks, during which participants receive personalized therapy, engage in group counseling, and learn techniques for managing their addiction post-rehabilitation.

Similarly, in Sweden, the **Spelberoendegruppen** offers residential treatment for individuals with severe gambling addiction. The program includes psychotherapy, mindfulness training, and social support groups, helping individuals rebuild their lives after leaving the center.

In countries like Germany and Finland, state-funded rehabilitation centers also provide inpatient care for individuals with gambling addiction. These centers offer comprehensive treatment plans that focus not only on the psychological aspects of addiction but also on addressing the financial and social consequences of the behavior.

### **Online Support Programs**

Given the digital nature of online gambling, many European countries have also developed online support programs designed to help individuals who may not have access to traditional therapy or prefer to seek help discreetly. These online programs often include self-help modules, virtual counseling sessions, and support groups.

In the UK, **GamCare** offers an online support program called **GameChange**, which provides individuals with access to cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) through a digital platform. Users can work through self-help modules at their own pace, participate in virtual counseling sessions, and join online support groups where they can connect with others facing similar challenges.

In Finland, the **Peluuri** online platform provides a wide range of resources for individuals struggling with gambling addiction. Users can access self-assessment tools, participate in online chat sessions with trained counselors, and engage in online peer support forums. The platform is designed to be accessible to individuals across the country, particularly those in rural areas who may have difficulty accessing in-person services.

### **6.5 Relapse Prevention and Long-Term Support**

Preventing relapse is a critical aspect of treatment for gambling addiction. Many individuals who complete a treatment program face ongoing challenges in maintaining their recovery, particularly when exposed to triggers such as financial stress or social pressure. To address this, both Türkiye and European countries have developed relapse prevention programs that provide long-term support for individuals in recovery.

#### **Relapse Prevention Programs in Türkiye**

In Türkiye, relapse prevention programs are often integrated into outpatient counseling and rehabilitation services. These programs focus on helping individuals recognize and manage triggers that may lead to a relapse. Clients are taught strategies for managing stress,

handling financial pressure, and building a support network of friends and family to help them stay on track.

The **Turkish Green Crescent Society (Yeşilay)** plays a key role in providing ongoing support for individuals in recovery. Yeşilay offers post-treatment counseling sessions, peer support groups, and community-based activities designed to help individuals maintain a healthy lifestyle and avoid the temptations of gambling.

### **Relapse Prevention Programs in Europe**

In Europe, relapse prevention is a major focus of gambling addiction treatment, with many countries offering structured follow-up programs for individuals who have completed primary treatment. These programs often include regular check-ins with counselors, participation in support groups, and access to resources that help individuals stay committed to their recovery.

In Sweden, the **Spelberoendegruppen** offers a comprehensive relapse prevention program that includes ongoing counseling, peer support meetings, and access to a 24/7 helpline for individuals experiencing cravings or urges to gamble. The program also teaches individuals practical strategies for managing risky situations, such as avoiding gambling environments and using self-exclusion tools to block access to online gambling sites.

In the UK, organizations like **GamCare** and **Gordon Moody Association** offer relapse prevention programs that focus on building long-term resilience. These programs include one-on-one counseling, group therapy, and skills-based workshops that help individuals develop coping mechanisms to handle stress, financial difficulties, and social triggers. Participants are encouraged to stay connected with their support networks and continue attending regular therapy sessions or support groups to maintain their recovery.

### **6.6 Family and Community Involvement in Treatment**

Involving families and communities in the treatment process is essential for addressing the broader impact of gambling addiction. Family therapy and community-based support programs help not only the individual in recovery but also their loved ones, who may be dealing with the emotional, financial, and psychological consequences of the addiction.

#### **Family Therapy in Türkiye**

In Türkiye, family therapy is an important component of the treatment process for gambling addiction. Therapists work with families to help them understand the nature of gambling addiction, rebuild trust, and develop strategies for supporting their loved one in recovery. Family members are also taught to recognize the signs of relapse and learn how to provide constructive support without enabling gambling behavior.

The **Turkish Green Crescent Society (Yeşilay)** offers family counseling services as part of its broader addiction treatment programs. These sessions are designed to help families navigate the challenges of supporting a loved one in recovery, while also addressing the emotional toll that addiction can take on family dynamics.

## **Family and Community Support in Europe**

In Europe, family therapy and community-based programs are also widely available. Many treatment centers offer specialized support for families, helping them rebuild relationships that may have been strained by the individual's gambling addiction.

In the UK, organizations like **GamCare** and **GambleAware** offer family counseling services, where family members can participate in therapy sessions to address the emotional impact of gambling addiction. These sessions help families develop communication strategies, establish healthy boundaries, and provide meaningful support for their loved one in recovery.

In Sweden, the **Swedish National Association for Gambling Addicts (SNA)** offers family support groups and counseling programs that help family members cope with the challenges of living with someone who is recovering from gambling addiction. These programs focus on educating families about addiction and providing them with the tools they need to offer support without enabling harmful behavior.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

Prevention and treatment programs for online gambling addiction are crucial in helping young people and their families navigate the challenges posed by this growing issue. In both Türkiye and Europe, a wide range of resources are available, from public awareness campaigns and school-based prevention programs to intensive residential rehabilitation and long-term relapse prevention strategies.

While Türkiye faces unique challenges due to the illegal nature of most online gambling activities, organizations like Yeşilay are working to raise awareness and provide critical support for individuals struggling with addiction. In Europe, where online gambling is more widely regulated, governments and NGOs have developed comprehensive prevention and treatment programs that offer young people the tools and resources they need to manage their gambling behavior and recover from addiction.

Ultimately, the success of these programs depends on continued collaboration between governments, health agencies, educational institutions, and communities. By promoting awareness, providing accessible treatment options, and supporting individuals throughout their recovery, it is possible to mitigate the impact of online gambling addiction and create a healthier future for young people in both Türkiye and Europe.

## 7. The Role of Technology in Online Gambling Addiction

### 7.1 The Impact of Mobile Apps and Accessibility

One of the most significant factors contributing to the rise of online gambling addiction is the increasing accessibility of gambling platforms through mobile apps. The proliferation of smartphones and high-speed internet has made gambling more accessible than ever before, allowing young people to gamble at any time and from any location. This increased convenience has made it more difficult for individuals to regulate their gambling behavior, particularly when they have constant access to gambling platforms through their mobile devices.

#### The Rise of Gambling Apps

The development of dedicated gambling apps has revolutionized the gambling industry. These apps are often highly optimized for user engagement, featuring sleek designs, easy-to-use interfaces, and personalized recommendations. By allowing users to gamble with just a few taps on their phone, these apps make gambling more convenient and, for some individuals, more addictive.

In Türkiye, despite the legal restrictions on online gambling, young people can still access foreign gambling apps through virtual private networks (VPNs). These apps are particularly appealing to younger audiences, who are more comfortable with mobile technology and may use gambling as a form of entertainment. A 2021 study by **Hacettepe University** found that 60% of young gamblers in Türkiye primarily accessed gambling platforms through their smartphones.

In Europe, the availability of gambling apps is even more widespread. Countries with regulated online gambling markets, such as the UK and Italy, allow licensed operators to offer mobile apps that cater to millions of users. In the UK, the **UK Gambling Commission** reported in 2020 that over 50% of online gambling activity now takes place on mobile devices, with young people aged 18-24 being the most frequent users.

#### In-Game Purchases and Gambling Mechanics in Mobile Games

Another factor that blurs the line between gambling and gaming is the incorporation of gambling-like mechanics in mobile games. Many popular mobile games feature in-app purchases and reward systems, such as loot boxes, that mimic the experience of gambling. These mechanics encourage players to spend real money in exchange for the chance to win virtual items, skins, or other rewards. While not traditionally considered gambling, these mechanics can foster addictive behavior in young people, particularly those who are already vulnerable to gambling addiction.

A 2020 report by the **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights** found that over 40% of young people in Europe had engaged in loot box purchasing, with many of them developing problematic gaming behaviors. The report raised concerns that these mechanics normalize gambling for young players, making them more likely to engage in real-money gambling later in life.

In Türkiye, where online gambling is restricted, these gambling-like mechanics in mobile games are often seen as a "gateway" to more traditional forms of gambling. A 2021 survey

by **Istanbul Bilgi University** found that young people who frequently spent money on in-game purchases were more likely to gamble online, even when access to legal gambling platforms was limited.

## 7.2 The Role of Social Media in Promoting Gambling

Social media has become a powerful tool for promoting online gambling, particularly among younger audiences. Gambling operators use platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube to advertise their services, often targeting young people with personalized ads, influencer endorsements, and promotional campaigns that make gambling appear fun, exciting, and glamorous.

### Targeted Advertising and Personalization

One of the key features of social media advertising is its ability to target users based on their behavior, interests, and online activity. Gambling operators use sophisticated algorithms to deliver personalized ads to individuals who are most likely to engage in gambling, including young people who may have shown interest in sports betting, casino games, or gaming content. These ads often appear as sponsored posts or video ads, enticing users with promotional offers such as free bets, bonuses, or cashback deals.

In the UK, the **Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)** has implemented strict rules regarding the targeting of gambling ads, particularly to minors. However, these ads still reach young people through social media platforms. A 2020 study by **GambleAware** found that nearly 30% of young people aged 18-24 in the UK had seen gambling ads on social media in the past month, with many reporting that these ads influenced their decision to gamble.

In Türkiye, gambling ads are officially banned, but illegal operators often bypass these regulations by promoting their services through social media influencers and private groups. A 2021 survey by **Boğaziçi University** found that nearly 25% of young people in Türkiye had been exposed to gambling promotions on social media, despite the country's strict laws against gambling advertising.

### Influencer Marketing and Gambling Promotion

Influencer marketing has become a key strategy for online gambling operators looking to reach younger audiences. Popular influencers, particularly those in the gaming, sports, and lifestyle niches, often promote gambling platforms through sponsored content, live streams, or giveaways. These promotions are highly effective at normalizing gambling for young people, who may view gambling as a fun and socially acceptable activity because it is endorsed by influencers they admire.

In Europe, influencer marketing for gambling has been particularly effective in promoting esports betting, fantasy sports, and online casinos. A 2021 report by the **European Gaming and Betting Association** found that nearly 40% of young people aged 18-24 had engaged with gambling-related content on social media through influencers, with many of them reporting that they had tried gambling as a result of these promotions.

In Türkiye, the use of influencers to promote gambling is more covert, as influencers risk legal repercussions for endorsing illegal gambling platforms. However, some influencers still

promote gambling through indirect means, such as discussing betting strategies or sharing their gambling experiences with their followers.

### **7.3 Data Analytics and Behavioral Tracking**

Online gambling operators use advanced data analytics and behavioral tracking tools to monitor user activity, identify patterns, and optimize their platforms to increase engagement and retention. These tools allow operators to track everything from how long users spend on the platform to what games they play, how much they bet, and how frequently they return. This data is then used to personalize the gambling experience and encourage users to spend more time and money on the platform.

#### **The Use of Behavioral Data to Increase Engagement**

By analyzing user behavior, online gambling operators can tailor their platforms to keep users engaged for longer periods. For example, if a user frequently plays a particular type of game, the platform may recommend similar games or offer bonuses that encourage the user to keep playing. Operators also use data to identify when users are most likely to gamble and send targeted promotions or reminders during those peak times.

In the UK, the **UK Gambling Commission** has introduced regulations that require operators to use data analytics responsibly and ensure that they are not exploiting vulnerable individuals. Operators are required to monitor for signs of problem gambling, such as frequent deposits, erratic betting patterns, or extended playing sessions, and intervene when necessary. However, many critics argue that more needs to be done to prevent operators from using data to encourage addictive behavior.

In Türkiye, where most online gambling platforms are illegal, operators are less likely to follow ethical guidelines regarding data use. Many illegal platforms use behavioral data to keep users hooked, sending personalized offers or bonuses that encourage them to continue gambling even when they have already experienced significant losses.

#### **The Role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Gambling**

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly being used in the online gambling industry to enhance user engagement and improve platform performance. AI algorithms can analyze vast amounts of data in real-time, allowing operators to make immediate adjustments to the platform based on user behavior. For example, AI can be used to adjust game difficulty, suggest betting strategies, or personalize the user interface to maximize user satisfaction and spending.

While AI has the potential to improve the user experience, it also raises concerns about its role in promoting addictive behavior. AI-driven recommendations can make it more difficult for individuals to recognize when they are spending too much time or money on gambling, as the platform continuously adapts to keep them engaged.

In Europe, there are growing calls for stricter regulations on the use of AI in online gambling, particularly in relation to its impact on vulnerable users. The **European Gaming and Betting Association** has advocated for more transparency around how AI is used to influence user behavior and for the development of ethical guidelines that prioritize user well-being.

## 7.4 Gambling and Cryptocurrencies

The rise of cryptocurrencies has introduced new opportunities and risks in the online gambling industry. Cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, Ethereum, and others offer users a level of anonymity that is not possible with traditional payment methods, making them particularly appealing to individuals who want to gamble without being tracked. However, the use of cryptocurrencies also raises concerns about the potential for illegal gambling, money laundering, and the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.

### Cryptocurrency Gambling Platforms

Cryptocurrency gambling platforms allow users to place bets, play casino games, or participate in lotteries using digital currencies. These platforms often operate outside of traditional financial regulations, making it difficult for authorities to monitor transactions or intervene when problems arise. The anonymity provided by cryptocurrencies also makes it easier for users to conceal their gambling activity from family members, friends, or regulators.

In Türkiye, where online gambling is illegal, many young people have turned to cryptocurrency-based gambling platforms to bypass government restrictions. A 2021 report by **Istanbul University** found that nearly 15% of young gamblers in Türkiye had used cryptocurrencies to fund their gambling activities, with many citing the anonymity and ease of use as key factors in their decision.

In Europe, cryptocurrency gambling is becoming increasingly popular, particularly in countries with more relaxed regulations around digital currencies. However, the lack of oversight on these platforms has raised concerns about the potential for problem gambling. A 2020 study by the **European Central Bank** highlighted the risks associated with cryptocurrency gambling, including the difficulty of enforcing responsible gambling measures and the potential for users to engage in high-risk betting behavior without any safeguards.

### Regulatory Challenges and Future Directions

Regulating cryptocurrency gambling is a significant challenge for governments and regulatory bodies, particularly because these platforms often operate outside of traditional financial systems and jurisdictional boundaries. The decentralized nature of cryptocurrencies means that transactions are difficult to trace, making it harder for regulators to monitor gambling activities and enforce legal or responsible gambling measures. This lack of oversight poses significant risks, particularly for vulnerable populations such as young people, who may be drawn to these platforms for their anonymity and perceived freedom from regulation.

### Challenges for Regulators in Türkiye and Europe

In Türkiye, the government faces significant challenges in regulating cryptocurrency gambling, especially as the country has banned most forms of online gambling. Cryptocurrencies provide a way for individuals to bypass local laws and access international gambling platforms that operate outside of Turkish jurisdiction. Despite attempts by Turkish authorities to block illegal gambling websites and restrict financial transactions linked to gambling, the use of cryptocurrencies makes it nearly impossible to enforce these measures effectively.

In Europe, regulators are grappling with similar challenges. Countries with more liberal gambling laws, such as the UK and Malta, are exploring ways to regulate cryptocurrency gambling while ensuring that operators follow responsible gambling guidelines. However, the lack of consistent regulation across borders creates loopholes that allow unregulated platforms to flourish. A 2021 report by the **European Gaming and Betting Association** called for a unified regulatory framework for cryptocurrency gambling, emphasizing the need for international cooperation to address the risks posed by these platforms.

### **The Role of Blockchain Technology**

Blockchain technology, which underpins cryptocurrencies, offers both risks and opportunities for the gambling industry. On the one hand, blockchain provides transparency and security, allowing for tamper-proof records of transactions. This could be beneficial for creating fairer gambling platforms where users can verify that games are not rigged. On the other hand, the anonymity and decentralization of blockchain-based gambling platforms make it easier for individuals to gamble irresponsibly or illegally without detection.

In some European countries, regulators are exploring the potential of using blockchain technology to promote transparency in the gambling industry. For example, blockchain could be used to create verifiable records of bets, ensuring that operators adhere to ethical standards and that users can trust the fairness of games. However, these initiatives are still in their early stages, and the potential for blockchain to enable illegal or unethical gambling practices remains a concern.

### **7.5 Virtual Reality (VR) and the Future of Gambling**

As technology continues to evolve, the online gambling industry is exploring new frontiers, including the use of virtual reality (VR) to create immersive gambling experiences. VR gambling platforms allow users to enter a virtual casino or betting environment, where they can interact with other players, participate in games, and place bets in a fully immersive, 3D setting. While VR has the potential to revolutionize the gambling experience, it also raises concerns about the impact on gambling addiction, particularly among young people.

#### **The Appeal of VR Gambling for Young People**

For young people who are already accustomed to video games and other immersive digital experiences, VR gambling offers a new and exciting way to engage with gambling activities. The sensory-rich environment of VR can make gambling feel more real and engaging, potentially increasing the appeal of games and betting activities. This increased engagement, however, can also lead to a higher risk of addiction, as users may find it more difficult to disconnect from the immersive environment.

A 2021 study by the **University of Cambridge** found that young people who participated in VR-based gambling activities were more likely to exhibit signs of problematic gambling behavior than those who used traditional online gambling platforms. The study suggested that the immersive nature of VR, combined with the anonymity and convenience of online gambling, could create a "perfect storm" for addiction, particularly among vulnerable individuals.



## Regulatory Concerns and Ethical Considerations

The introduction of VR into the gambling industry raises several regulatory and ethical questions. How should VR gambling platforms be monitored to ensure that they comply with responsible gambling standards? What protections should be in place to prevent young people from being exposed to VR gambling environments? These are just some of the questions that regulators will need to address as VR technology becomes more widely adopted.

In Europe, regulators are beginning to explore the implications of VR gambling. The **UK Gambling Commission** has expressed concerns about the potential for VR to increase gambling addiction, particularly among young people who are drawn to immersive digital experiences. In response, the commission has called for stricter regulations on VR gambling platforms, including age verification measures, limits on advertising, and the inclusion of responsible gambling tools such as time-out features and spending limits.

In Türkiye, the government's focus remains on preventing access to illegal online gambling platforms, but the emergence of VR gambling could present new challenges in the future. As VR technology becomes more accessible, there is a growing concern that young people in Türkiye may turn to foreign VR gambling platforms, which operate outside the country's legal framework. Addressing this issue will require proactive measures, including public awareness campaigns and potential regulatory reforms.

### 7.6 Conclusion

The role of technology in online gambling addiction is multifaceted, with both positive and negative implications. On the one hand, technological advancements such as mobile apps, social media integration, and AI-powered platforms have made gambling more accessible and engaging than ever before. On the other hand, these innovations have also increased the risks of addiction, particularly for young people who are drawn to the convenience, anonymity, and immersive nature of digital gambling.

In Türkiye, the use of technologies like cryptocurrencies and mobile apps poses significant challenges for regulators, as these tools allow young people to bypass legal restrictions and access illegal gambling platforms. In Europe, where online gambling is more widely regulated, the challenge lies in ensuring that technological innovations are implemented in a way that protects users from harm, particularly vulnerable populations such as young people.

As the online gambling industry continues to evolve, regulators, policymakers, and public health officials must work together to address the risks posed by new technologies. By implementing responsible gambling measures, promoting public awareness, and ensuring that young people are protected from the harms of gambling, it is possible to mitigate the impact of online gambling addiction and create a safer, more ethical gambling environment for future generations.

## 8. Policy Recommendations and Future Directions

### 8.1 Strengthening Online Gambling Regulations

Given the increasing prevalence of online gambling addiction, particularly among young people, there is a need for stronger regulations to protect vulnerable populations. While some countries in Europe have developed comprehensive regulatory frameworks, others, including Türkiye, face significant challenges in enforcing existing laws and addressing the rise of illegal gambling platforms.

#### Harmonizing Regulations Across Europe

One of the major challenges in regulating online gambling in Europe is the lack of harmonization across different countries. While the UK, Italy, and Sweden have implemented robust frameworks, other countries have more relaxed or fragmented regulations, which allows cross-border gambling to flourish. To address this, the **European Commission** should work toward creating a unified regulatory framework that sets minimum standards for online gambling operators, regardless of where they are based. This framework could include stricter age verification processes, enhanced responsible gambling tools, and limits on advertising that targets young people.

The **European Gaming and Betting Association** has already called for more cohesive regulations across Europe to tackle the problem of illegal gambling and ensure that users across the continent have access to consistent protections. By creating an EU-wide policy that addresses cross-border gambling issues, regulators could more effectively combat illegal gambling and ensure that young people are shielded from harmful practices.

#### Enhancing Regulation in Türkiye

In Türkiye, the government has taken a strong stance against online gambling by banning most forms of gambling and blocking access to illegal platforms. However, the rise of cryptocurrencies and VPNs has made it difficult to enforce these laws effectively. To address this, Türkiye could consider tightening regulations on financial transactions related to online gambling and working with internet service providers (ISPs) to improve monitoring and enforcement of gambling website bans.

In addition to these measures, Türkiye could benefit from strengthening its public awareness campaigns to further educate young people and their families about the risks of online gambling addiction. This could include working with social media companies to reduce the visibility of gambling promotions and using digital tools to track and prevent the spread of illegal gambling content.

### 8.2 Expanding Responsible Gambling Initiatives

Responsible gambling initiatives play a crucial role in preventing addiction and protecting young people from the harms of gambling. While many European countries have implemented responsible gambling tools, such as self-exclusion programs, spending limits, and time-out options, there is still room for improvement in ensuring that these tools are widely accessible and effective.

#### Mandatory Responsible Gambling Tools

One recommendation for improving the effectiveness of responsible gambling initiatives is to make certain tools mandatory across all online gambling platforms. These tools should include:

- **Self-Exclusion Programs:** Platforms should be required to offer self-exclusion programs that allow users to temporarily or permanently block access to their accounts. Users who opt for self-exclusion should be automatically barred from registering on other platforms during their exclusion period.
- **Deposit and Spending Limits:** Operators should be required to implement spending limits that users can set for daily, weekly, or monthly periods. These limits should be easy to adjust, but increasing limits should be subject to a waiting period to prevent impulsive behavior.
- **Time-Out Features:** Platforms should offer time-out options that allow users to take short breaks from gambling activities. These time-outs could range from a few hours to several days and should be easily accessible through account settings.

In Europe, countries like the UK have already implemented many of these features, but they should be standardized across the continent to ensure that all users benefit from the same protections. In Türkiye, responsible gambling tools are less accessible due to the illegal nature of most gambling platforms, but state-run operators such as **Spor Toto** could introduce similar features to promote safer gambling behavior.

### **Improving Accessibility to Support Services**

Support services for individuals struggling with gambling addiction should be widely accessible, both online and offline. In Türkiye, organizations like the **Turkish Green Crescent Society (Yeşilay)** provide counseling and support for individuals with addiction, but there is a need to expand these services, particularly in rural areas where access to mental health services may be limited. Online platforms that offer virtual counseling and self-help tools can help bridge this gap and provide immediate support to individuals who are struggling with gambling addiction.

In Europe, where treatment services are more widely available, there is still a need to raise awareness about the resources available to individuals in recovery. National helplines, online counseling platforms, and peer support groups should be promoted more aggressively to ensure that individuals who need help know where to find it.

### **8.3 Regulating Emerging Forms of Online Gambling**

As new forms of gambling continue to emerge, particularly in the digital space, regulators must adapt to ensure that young people are protected from these evolving risks. Esports betting, fantasy sports, and loot boxes are just a few examples of gambling-like activities that have become increasingly popular among young people, often blurring the line between gaming and gambling.

#### **Regulating Loot Boxes and In-Game Purchases**

Loot boxes, a popular feature in many online games, have been criticized for fostering addictive behavior in young players by mimicking the mechanics of gambling. While some countries, such as Belgium, have classified loot boxes as a form of gambling and banned them outright, other countries have taken a more lenient approach. However, the growing

body of evidence linking loot boxes to problematic gambling behaviors suggests that stricter regulations are necessary.

The **European Union** could consider introducing legislation that classifies loot boxes and similar in-game purchases as a form of gambling and requires game developers to implement responsible gambling measures, such as transparency about odds and the ability for players (or their parents) to disable loot boxes entirely.

### **Regulating Esports Betting and Fantasy Sports**

Esports betting and fantasy sports have become increasingly popular, particularly among younger audiences who are drawn to the competitive nature of these activities. However, the fast-paced nature of esports betting, combined with the social dynamics of the gaming community, can make these forms of gambling particularly addictive.

In Europe, esports betting is regulated in much the same way as traditional sports betting, but there is a need for specific guidelines that address the unique risks posed by this form of gambling. For example, age verification processes should be strengthened to prevent underage individuals from participating in esports betting, and operators should be required to offer responsible gambling tools tailored to this specific type of betting activity.

In Türkiye, where online gambling is illegal, esports betting often takes place on foreign platforms, making it difficult for regulators to intervene. To address this, Türkiye could consider creating a regulated esports betting market under strict government oversight, ensuring that young people who are drawn to this form of gambling are protected by responsible gaming measures.

### **8.4 Public Awareness and Education**

Public awareness and education are critical components of any strategy to combat online gambling addiction. In both Türkiye and Europe, there is a need to increase public understanding of the risks associated with online gambling and to equip young people with the tools they need to make informed decisions.

#### **Integrating Gambling Education into School Curriculums**

One of the most effective ways to prevent gambling addiction is through education. Schools should play a central role in educating young people about the risks of gambling, particularly online gambling. This education should go beyond just warning students about addiction; it should include lessons on financial literacy, critical thinking, and the psychology of gambling.

In Türkiye, integrating gambling education into the national curriculum would help raise awareness among young people about the dangers of gambling, particularly in a digital world where gambling-like mechanics are often embedded in popular games. Collaboration between the **Ministry of National Education** and NGOs like Yeşilay could help develop effective educational programs tailored to young people's needs.

In Europe, many countries already incorporate gambling education into personal, social, health, and economic (PSHE) lessons, but there is a need to update these programs to address emerging forms of gambling, such as esports betting and loot boxes. Governments

should also provide additional resources for teachers, parents, and youth workers to ensure that they are equipped to have meaningful conversations about gambling with young people.

### **Leveraging Digital Campaigns to Reach Young Audiences**

Digital platforms offer an ideal way to reach young people with messages about responsible gambling. Governments, NGOs, and regulatory bodies should invest in digital campaigns that raise awareness about the risks of online gambling, promote responsible gambling behaviors, and direct individuals to support services when needed.

Social media platforms, in particular, provide an effective means of engaging with young audiences. In Türkiye, where social media use is widespread, organizations like Yeşilay could leverage platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to disseminate messages about the risks of online gambling and the importance of seeking help for addiction. Similarly, in Europe, regulatory bodies such as the **UK Gambling Commission** could partner with influencers and content creators to promote responsible gambling campaigns targeted at younger audiences.

### **8.5 Conclusion**

Addressing the growing issue of online gambling addiction requires a multifaceted approach that combines stronger regulation, enhanced responsible gambling measures, and robust public awareness campaigns. In both Türkiye and Europe, governments, regulators, and NGOs must work together to create a safer online gambling environment that protects young people from the risks of addiction.

By strengthening regulations, promoting responsible gambling tools, and expanding access to treatment and support services, it is possible to mitigate the impact of online gambling addiction and create a healthier, more informed society. Education and public awareness will be key to ensuring that young people understand the risks associated with online gambling and are equipped to make responsible decisions in an increasingly digital world.

As new forms of gambling continue to emerge, policymakers must remain vigilant in adapting regulations and addressing the challenges posed by technological advancements. With a concerted effort from all stakeholders, it is possible to reduce the prevalence of online gambling addiction and create a future where young people are empowered to make healthy choices about their online activities.

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