

## **Mid-term review of the Italian Pompidou Group Presidency (January 2023 - June 2024)**

### **Introduction:**

Back in 1971, Italy has been one of the 7 founding members of the Pompidou Group, the first ever European cooperation platform set up - at the initiative of the then French President - to counter drug abuse and the illicit trafficking in drugs. Five decades after, Italy is (for the first time) chairing the Group, which now comprises 41 member States and has extended its mandate to cover also licit drugs (such as alcohol or tobacco) and new forms of addictions, in particular online addictions.

The road map for the Pompidou Group's action is contained in the [Lisbon Declaration](#) and the related [work programme for 2023-2025](#), which were both adopted at the Ministerial Conference hosted by the outgoing Portuguese Presidency on 13-14 December 2022. On this occasion, Italy has been elected as the new Presidency, and Switzerland as the Vice-Presidency.

Together with all member States and with the active participation of the Secretariat, the Italian Presidency has worked intensively to implement the adopted work programme, keeping in mind the following priorities:

- deepen the already existing relationship with each of the member states, observers and countries that otherwise participate in the Group's activities, to get to know the reality of each State well, to increase the exchange and sharing of experiences, models and good practices, and to involve other international organizations, in a spirit of collaboration.
- make prevention a priority, to which increasingly adequate information, first and foremost among the very young, accompanied by attention to the treatment and recovery of addicts, is essential.
- reduce both the demand, through prevention campaigns, first and foremost in schools, and the supply, by fighting drug trafficking and organised crime.
- promote a human rights-based approach that is non-stigmatising and non-discriminatory: if we want to build welcoming and safe communities, access to care and treatment services must not be denied to anyone. The right to health must be guaranteed to all. Any policy in this area must be based on scientific evidence accredited by institutional sources, as only this can guarantee its effectiveness.
- find a proper balance between freedom and responsibility, at both individual and State level.

The present document summarises the activities – and results achieved - in the implementation of the 2023-2025 work programme, at mid-term.

## **I. Human rights at the heart of drug and addiction policies:**

### **Policy paper on human rights and drug and addiction policies**

The Expert Group on Human Rights and Drug Policy, building on its renewed mandate, finalized the draft policy paper document on “Guidance for aligning drug policy with human rights”. In early 2024, the draft policy paper received reviews from both secretariats of the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH); and the European Committee of Social Rights (Social Charter). Furthermore, the document was sent for review and comments under written procedure and was submitted for consideration and adoption at the 94th Pompidou Group ‘s Permanent Correspondent (PC) meeting on 30 May 2024.

Prior and during the 94<sup>th</sup> PC meeting, the draft policy document was reviewed in view of the latest received comments; and a revised document was presented as a compromise proposal for continued discussion and building consensus. Due to not always concurring national point of views, only parts I and II of the document were agreed upon, leaving the rest of the document to be discussed at the forthcoming 95th PC meeting in November 2024.

The planned way ahead on this process is that once adopted at Permanent Correspondents’ level, the policy paper would be transmitted to the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) with a view to jointly prepare a draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers. The modalities of this joint initiative will be further discussed and elaborated among the respective secretariats and presented to the GR-SOC in late 2024 or early 2025.

### **Self-assessment tool on human rights and drug policies**

Since autumn 2023, the same Expert Group on Human Rights and Drug Policy conducted review of the use of self-assessment tool for drug policy compliance with human rights. This review was based on the feedback by the users and assessment by the Secretariat itself. The review showed that 18 assessments have been conducted and only four feedbacks were received, therefore, as feedback being the main source for tools evaluation. The expert group has been exploring options on how to make the use of feedback attractive for some of the users and has identified areas for improvement of the tool itself and its functionality. Moreover, considerations are being given now on ways how to promote further the tool.

### **HELP course project**

Between December 2023 and June 2024, the working group for the development of the HELP course on human rights, drugs and addictions held three meetings and worked intensively on the course modules. The online course will be available in autumn 2024.

## **II. Online addictions:**

### **Policy paper on new forms of addictions**

The Lisbon Declaration adopted at the 18<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference of the Pompidou Group in 2022 reaffirms the focus of the Pompidou Group’s work on exploring strategies to address addictions related to the use of communication and information technologies and applications. In this context, one of the core priorities of the 2023 – 25 Pompidou Group Work Programme is to address new form of addictions by (i) understanding addictions facilitated by technologies and online practices, (ii) exploring available online interventions and tools in self-help and treatment and (iii) presenting and promoting new prevention practices for a digital world.

In order to fulfill this mandate, an Expert Group on online addictions was set up in 2023. The Expert Group is comprised by experts from 14 member States, with the participation of the WHO. The Expert Group is chaired by Switzerland.

In implementing the Terms of Reference adopted by Permanent Correspondents for activities in this area, in 2023 the Expert Group drafted the 'Report on Risks and Harms associated with Online Gaming and Gambling'. Based on the report the Group was tasked in 2024 to prepare the guidance document for consideration by Permanent Correspondents as a Pompidou Group policy paper. The policy paper on 'Strategies and regulatory options aimed at reducing risks and harms related to online gaming and online gambling' was adopted by member states at the 94<sup>th</sup> Permanent Correspondents meeting (see Appendix). It is now proposed that the policy paper be transmitted to the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI) with a view to jointly prepare a draft Recommendation to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2025.

### **Joint Council of Europe / European Union project:**

With the leadership of the Italian Presidency, 9 member States of the European Union - Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia - requested support from the European Commission (DG Reform) under Regulation 2021/240 "TSI Regulation" to design/strengthen regulations, policies and targeted measures to tackle the associated risks which particularly affect younger generations.

The project focusing on '*Promoting the mental health of children and youth by addressing the risks of online gambling and gaming*' has been approved for financing and the agreement between CoE/EU under a framework agreement with DG REFORM is being concluded. Implementation is planned to start as of 1 September 2024.

### **International Forum on addictive behaviours and crimes associated with internet use**

The Forum, co-organised by the Pompidou Group, the Mexican Ministries for Foreign Affairs and for Security and Citizen Protection as well as the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) of the Organization of American States (OAS), brought together over 200 representatives from 20 countries in Mexico City on 19-20 December.

A key topic was the increasing use of online gaming platforms by drug traffickers to recruit young people into illicit drug trading. As the darknet is losing popularity among drug cartels – because the authorities have become more effective in monitoring it – online video games and social networks are now being used to lure youth into illicit drug trading, because such gaming platforms are not well monitored.

### **III. Law enforcement:**

#### **Annual conference on drug control networks**

170 experts from 40 countries, 5 international organisations, academia and the private sector attended from 6 to 8 December 2023 the first Annual Conference of Drug Control Networks hosted by the Pompidou Group. It was the first edition of a new conference format launched by the Pompidou Group, bringing together participants from different drug control and law enforcements sectors: trafficking through airports, general aviation, precursors control, and drugs related cybercrime.

This integrated conference format allows for more synergies between different law enforcement services, in particular border control, criminal investigation and customs services. Plenary sessions addressed topics of overarching interest such as (1) developments in drug supply and trafficking, (2) online challenges and opportunities, and (3) operations and international cooperation. Specific specialised sessions included (1) precursors awareness, (2) airport inside threat, (3) synthetic drug threats, (4) drugs online, (5) general aviation, (6) internet, AI and other internet-related threats, (7) gaming and recruitment, (8) money laundering and fraud, and (9) managing trauma, stress and mental health.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Law Enforcement Conference is scheduled to take place from 18 to 22 November 2024. This year's Conference's Programme's is built up over three main sector pillars which will be overviewed through plenary sessions: i) Drug production and supply; ii) Drugs online - challenges and opportunities; and iii) Drug Trafficking and International Cooperation. Transversal themes such as country trends on drug production, open-source intelligence, and legal frameworks in combatting drug production and trafficking will take other modalities of discussions through workshops, panels and situation briefs. Theme oriented discussions will take place in six breakout groups including: precursors and synthetic drugs, drugs online and fraud, artificial intelligence, airport, general aviation and maritime trafficking as well as international cooperation.

The online tool on Controlled Deliveries (CD), has already had its 2024 update. All data has been updated and all accesses have been granted. It is important to note that about 52 countries are benefiting from and exchanging through this tool.

More information about the online tool can be found at:  
<https://rm.coe.int/2021-flyer-controlleddeliveries-resourcebank/1680a5633f>  
and here: <https://vimeo.com/537702415>

### **The role of police in prevention:**

Following up on previous related work between 2019 and 2023, the first advisory group meeting on redefining the role of police in drug prevention took place on 29-30 April 2024. The group, composed of police officers and prevention specialists nominated by member states, has been established to guide international consultants in developing a core competency framework for police officers involved in drug prevention programs, and the elaboration of a toolkit on assessment and impact analysis of the police' contribution in drug prevention.

### **IV. International Drug Policy Academy:**

The overall aim of the International Drug Policy Academy is to facilitate know-how and build capacities for more effective policy elaboration, implementation, management and evaluation of drug policies and related programmes. The Academy's courses link policy, research and practice in a unique way.

The International drug policy academy provides two course offers: Drug Policy Executive Course and Annual Thematic Training on Drug Policy.

In 2023-2024 the courses were successfully organized as following:

1. 2023: The second edition of the **Drug Policy Executive Course** consisting of three modules was delivered between March and October 2023. Upon the completion of the course 22 participants received the Certificate in Advanced Drug Policy Management by the International Drug Policy Academy.
2. 2024: The **Annual thematic training on Drug Policy** focused on 'Improving Access and Quality of Treatment Services'. 33 participants from 19 Pompidou Group members states attended this 2 Module course organized in Bologna, Italy, in March 2024 and Rabat, Morocco, in May 2024.

### **V. "Criminal Justice and Health in Prisons" Programme:**

Thanks to the financial contribution of Luxembourg, the Programme promoted exchanges among the participating 14 countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Türkiye and Ukraine), with the aim of improving quality of and access to drug treatment programmes in custodial settings.

Regarding the co-operation group of South-East European professionals (PRISEE), the Programme consolidated a regional network of professionals, creating connections among policymakers and practitioners involved in developing and implementing comprehensive drug treatment systems in prisons.

Regarding the Republic of Moldova, the Programme continued to support the prison-based therapeutic community "Catharsis" for treating addictions by informing prison directors of its benefits and explaining their role in referring beneficiaries to the programme. It also contributed to improving service provision for people who use drugs or cope with addictions through a better understanding of non-opioid use in a qualitative study covering all 17 Moldovan prisons.

Following the success of and interest in the e-learning course on medication-assisted treatment developed in 2022 for Moldovan prison staff, a general English version of the course was created and made available online for the use of medical and non-medical staff involved in treatment, equally of interest for representatives of national penitentiary administrations.

One extra-budgetary project under the Programme was completed, contributing to the Action Plan (AP) for Ukraine and focusing on improving treatment and rehabilitation of people with substance use disorder in prisons, and one was launched on 23 April 2024 under the larger Council of Europe project "Towards More Humane Detention Conditions and Reduced Reoffending in Ukraine" (2024-2026); the operational phase starts on 1 July 2024.

Two extra-budgetary projects under the Programme, contributing to the APs for Georgia 2020-2023 and 2024-2027 and focusing on supporting Georgia in the implementation of its Drug Prevention Strategy, have been implemented, one of them under the larger Council of Europe project “Support to Penitentiary Systems Reforms in Georgia”. The new cycle of the Pompidou Group project will start on 1 July 2024.

## **VI. Regional networks:**

### **MedNET / MedSPAD:**

Thanks to financial contributions from Italy and France, under the respective chairmanships of Cyprus and Morocco, MedNET has continued to provide active support for 7 countries in the South-Mediterranean area (Algeria, Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine<sup>1</sup>, Tunisia), in their efforts to further develop drug policy, strategies, action plans and awareness on drug-related issues.

2023 saw the almost full implementation of the projects submitted and adopted within the framework of the work programme. Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine have increased their capacity of training human resources in the care and treatment of persons who use drugs, have developed indicators to help them monitoring the situation in terms of drug use by young people with MedSPAD, but also by setting up treatment demand indicators.

The implementation of the 2024 work programme is ongoing with activities being launched and conducted in Egypt on development of a model for management and care for individuals with drug use disorders who come into contact with the criminal justice system; Lebanon on the treatment of opioid dependence; Morocco on implementing addictology courses; Palestine\* on tackling gender-based violence and a prevention programme for youth in the juvenile justice system; Tunisia on medication assisted treatment for people with opioid use disorder.

At the 2023 and 2024 meetings of the regional committee of the Mediterranean School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (MedSPAD), the participating experts exchanged experience on conducting country surveys on drug use and addictive behaviours and initiated the analysis of the impact of MedSPAD on policy and legislation. The 2023 regional report was published and the 2024 report is under preparation.

### **South East Europe co-operation:**

#### **Co-operation Group of South-East European professionals on Developing comprehensive drug treatment systems in prison (PRISEE)**

Supporting and strengthening thematic cooperation within the South-East Europe group of prison professionals (PRISEE), the knowledge and skills of practitioners and policy makers working on drug treatment and rehabilitation in prison from 14 member States were enhanced.

The mapping report presenting an overview of training needs in eleven South-East European countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Türkiye) and available open-source material (trainings and research) related to drug treatment and rehabilitation in prisons was published. The report can thus be used by penitentiary administrations identifying their needs and learning from practices and approaches of other countries in the region.

In October 2023, the third study visit of the SEE Co-operation Group took place in Chisinau where prison professionals from 14 Pompidou Group Member States learned about the in-prison Therapeutic Community treatment concept and the Moldovan criminal justice system; the thematic priorities for future activities within the framework of this Co-operation Group were discussed.

A training of trainer's module on drugs and addictions was developed for interdisciplinary prison staff for the use of SEE countries, and subsequently adapted and tested in Montenegro.

Using the guidance paper on raising standards on drug treatment in prisons developed by the PRISEE network and the checklist it contains, the first assessment visit was conducted in Montenegro in 2023, focusing on training needs of prison staff and an assessment report with recommendations was written by an independent expert; further two on-site country assessment visits conducted upon request of national authorities provided expert support to Cyprus and Slovenia for improving the implementation of standards on treatment and rehabilitation of detained people with substance use disorders.

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<sup>1</sup> This name should not be interpreted as recognition of a State of Palestine, without prejudice to the position of each Council of Europe member state on this issue.

## Co-operation Group of South-East European Airports (AIRSEE)

During the 2023 yearly meetings of the AIRSEE in Croatia, permanent members of the group, police and customs officers working at airports of the region on drug-related investigations, from 11 countries and Kosovo\* exchanged information on recent trends, *modus operandi* and case studies on drug trafficking. Synergies and co-operation paths are being explored with UNODC and EMCDDA regarding their ongoing projects in the Western Balkans in order to use full potential of the AIRSEE. A joint operation with participation of 10 countries and Kosovo\* was conducted again in 2023.

## VII. Project “Children whose parents use drugs”:

One of the four priorities for the Pompidou Group set by the Committee of Ministers in the Council of Europe Strategic Priorities 2022 – 2025 has been ‘Protecting the rights of persons belonging to vulnerable and risk groups’. Considering this priority and based on the qualitative research on children, women and practices of care for children whose parents use drugs conducted in the previous work cycle, the Advisory Group comprised of 6 experts from member States under the leadership of Czechia has developed a guidance document on integrating human rights, children’s rights and a gender perspective in services and care for children and families affected by drug use. This work delivered in 2024 compiles the human rights’ legal framework that guarantees children’s rights as well as those of parents who use substances. It promotes the consolidation of collaborative, multi-disciplinary work among different stakeholders (schools, social, child protection, health, drug treatment and harm reduction services as well as services for women who are victims and survivors of violence) in order to provide integrated services to children whose parents use drugs.

## VIII. Prevention, recovery and harm reduction:

**Prevention** has been the subject of a major international seminar, organized in Venice on 22 June 2023, with a particular focus on young people. More than 80 participants from 28 countries along with the EMCDDA, the UNODC and the INGO Conference of the Council of Europe, attended the event, hosted in the historical venue of Palazzo Franchetti. The participation of 2 Ministers, 1 Deputy Minister and 2 State Secretaries from Italy showed that early prevention of drug use among young people is a key priority for the Italian government.

The seminar confirmed the need of a multidisciplinary and multistakeholder approach based on inter-ministerial cooperation with involvement of all relevant authorities at local, regional, national and international level to develop effective prevention strategies. To avoid the use of drugs and develop life skill competences to be able to say no to drugs at an early age should be the prerequisite of any prevention intervention. Tools which have demonstrated their efficiency exist and standards developed by EMCDDA and UNODC are successfully adapted and implemented by many countries. They rely on skills to be promoted by parents in the first place, by schools, and by all structures which are interacting with young people.

Organized in the continuation of the 94<sup>th</sup> meeting of the PG Permanent Correspondents, on 31 May 2024, [the seminar on Recovery and Education](#) brought together about 80 professionals that were welcomed and addressed by high level government representatives, the Mayor of Naples, social volunteering and religious associations (involved in drug recovery, prevention as well as faith-based education and territorial development work).

The first part of the Seminar focused on sharing practices through case studies, highlighting identified challenges. It emphasized the roles of various stakeholders in Italy, including local communities, government, and national authorities. Documentary modelled videos showcased responses to drug use and recovery, emphasizing steps taken to address and mitigate drug-related issues in three heavily affected regions: Scampia, Caivano, and Tor Bella Monaca.

The second part was dedicated to an overview of international initiatives and national practices allowing for insights on recent developments related to recovery and education from other Pompidou Group member states and international partners. Participants included: [UNODC](#), [CICAD/OAS](#), Belgium ([Ministry of Justice and Public Health](#)), Ireland ([Trinity College of Dublin](#)), Italy ([San Patrignano Community](#)), Moldova ([National Penitentiary Administration](#)) and the [Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America](#) (CADCA).

**Harm reduction** : From 4-5 May 2023, the Pompidou Group, in partnership with the City of Strasbourg, the Ithaque Association and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), organized the [3<sup>rd</sup> International Symposium of Drug Consumption Rooms](#), at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

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\* All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

Following the awareness raising initiative launched in April 2019 with the symposium held in the European Parliament in Strasbourg (and the success of the 2nd symposium at the Council of Europe in July 2021, which contributed to the discussion of European experiences, providing support for existing low-risk drug consumption rooms in Europe), this event extended the geographical scope to experiences from other continents and explored new issues such as gender diversity and housing and neighborhoods, giving a voice to people who may have mixed feelings about living near DCRs.

The 4<sup>th</sup> international seminar is planned to take place in Strasbourg in Spring 2025.

#### **IX. Pompidou Group contribution to major international events:**

In 2023 and 2024, the Pompidou Group continued its standard practice of actively participating in the annual sessions of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs and in the biennial “Lisbon addictions” gatherings: These events offer a major opportunity for promoting the work of the Pompidou Group, reinforcing or renewing its partnership with major international players and enhancing its visibility as the Council of Europe cooperation platform for drugs and addictions.

## APPENDIX

**Council of Europe International Co-operation Group  
on Drugs and Addictions**



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## **Policy paper on strategies and regulatory options aimed at reducing risks and harms related to online gaming and online gambling**

***Adopted at the 94th meeting of the Permanent Correspondents of the Pompidou Group***

### **Table of contents**

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Understanding risks and harms
  - 2.1. Concepts of risks and harms
  - 2.2. Risks and harms of online gambling
  - 2.3. Risks and harms of online gaming
- 3. Developing a strategy
  - 3.1. Aims and expected impact
  - 3.2. Objectives
- 4. Regulatory options
  - 4.1. Online gambling
  - 4.2. Online gaming
  - 4.3. Applying consumer protection and product safety regulations
  - 4.4. Major obstacles and challenges in the implementation of regulations
- 5. Evaluation and adjustments
  - 5.1. Key indicators and verification sources
  - 5.2. Monitoring
- Appendix I – Overview of options for regulatory approaches
- Appendix II – Making multistakeholder cooperation work
- Appendix III – Definition of terms

### **1. Introduction**

Addressing the potential risks and harms resulting from online gaming and online gambling involves considering prevention, risk and harm reduction, and treatment options. Effective policies and responses require a comprehensive framework for an integrated and coherent approach. Prevention in this field is crucial, from a general approach on the use of screens by children and adolescents, to clear guidelines for parents and teachers. Ensuring commitment and collaboration among stakeholders are crucial for attaining impact and expected results. The rapidly evolving digital landscape requires ongoing trendspotting, foresight management, and preparedness, which require innovative monitoring and the ability to make flexible adjustments or responses.

This document provides conceptual guidance to political decision-makers and policy developers who are seeking to develop strategies, action plans, and regulatory frameworks to minimise the risks and harms associated with online gaming and gambling. It complements the 2024 Pompidou Group report *Risks and harms associated with online gaming and gambling*.



## **2. Understanding risks and harms**

### **2.1. Concepts of risk and harm reduction**

Risk and harm reduction is an umbrella term for interventions, programmes, and policies that seek to prevent, reduce, minimise, and relieve the health, social, and economic harms to individuals, their families, communities, and societies resulting from problematic and disordered online gambling and online gaming.

### **2.2. Risks and harms of online gambling**

Even though gambling, including its online forms, is a common and unproblematic leisure time activity for the majority, a significant minority develops problems related to this behaviour and becomes addicted (i.e., gaming disorder, gambling disorder as included in ICD 11 of WHO). In these cases, the individual loses control over gambling and severe adverse consequences that affect family, friends, and the community can be identified. For example, problem gamblers may experience consequences such as loss of employment, financial strain, or even bankruptcy, accompanied by strong psychological distress and different co-occurring mental health conditions. The risk of suicide is high. Furthermore, research shows that gambling on the internet (remote gambling and mixed-mode gambling) is associated with higher problem gambling severity than land-based-only gambling. The risk of developing addiction to online gambling is higher due to significantly increased accessibility, making it easier for individuals to engage in gambling activities online compared to land based. Moreover, the control over one's own behaviour is reduced due to increased accessibility. Simultaneously, enforcement of legal regulations is also more challenging.

Online gamblers are more likely to be male and younger than land-based-only gamblers. They are also more likely to never marry or live with a partner and have higher education levels compared to land-based-only gamblers. Additionally, there are also other risk factors in or related to the games, such as characteristics of the games, distribution and availability. Furthermore, despite its illegality in the underage population, online gambling is a common practice among adolescents, putting their mental health and well-being at serious risk.

### **2.3. Risks and harms of online gaming**

Video gaming is one of the most popular hobbies nowadays across all genders and ages. Video games can be played both offline and online. Nevertheless, the most popular games, which have the largest player bases are played in online environments, usually by a large number of players interacting with each other in different ways. Pursued only recreationally, as a main passion or competitively, the majority plays in a harmless manner. A minority, however, experiences addiction-like symptoms leading to serious negative consequences affecting personal, educational/work-related, familial, social, and other areas of life. Similarly, to gambling disorder, gaming disorder is also recognised by the WHO as a mental and behavioural disorder.

Gaming disorder and hazardous gaming affects especially adolescents and young adults, males are more represented than females. Adolescents are particularly at risk due to age-related underdevelopment of cognitive control. Given the increasing amount of gambling elements in online games, players are not only at risk of developing gaming-related problems or disorder but also gambling disorder.

## **3. Developing a strategy**

Developing a strategy to prevent and reduce the risks and harms related to online gaming and online gambling requires (i) formulation of a clear aim, (ii) setting strategic objectives in pursuit of the aim, (iii) specifying the actions needed to achieve the strategic objectives, and (iv) evaluating actions and interventions of the processes and outcome through a range of indicators.

### **3.1. Aims and expected impact**

Reducing potential risks and harms associated with online gaming and online gambling.

### **3.2. Strategic objectives**

The following strategic objectives, necessary actions and potential indicators should be considered.

### **3.2.1. Raising public awareness**

*Objective:* To achieve a balanced view of the complexity of online gaming and gambling, including their understanding as non-problematic recreational activities, the potential benefits of gaming, and the risks and harms associated with them. Increasing awareness of the differences between legal and illegal operators can decrease the social acceptance of illegal gambling websites.

*Actions:* Provide financial resources to create awareness campaigns for this purpose, based on international scientific literature.

*Indicators:* The level of public awareness among the population groups most affected by potential harms, according to longitudinal studies with representative national samples.

### **3.2.2. Empowering families and educators**

*Objectives:* Increase parents', other family members' (especially spouses and children), and educators' understanding of the potential risks and harms associated with online gaming and gambling. Increase their ability to address these risks effectively.

*Actions:* Provide resources and tools for families and educators for effective monitoring and guidance. Create high-quality prevention materials, handbooks and tools for this purpose, based on international scientific literature.

*Indicators:* The amount and availability of high-quality resources and tools. Monitor metrics of usage and engagement levels with the provided resources. Evaluate the impact of resources on the proficiency of parents and educators.

### **3.2.3. High-quality scientific research**

*Objectives:* Increase the amount and quality of scientific research conducted by independent bodies.

*Actions:* Provide financial support for independent scientific research institutions assessing the aetiology of gaming disorder and gambling disorder, the effectiveness of prevention and treatment interventions, changes in policies and regulations, and monitoring the ever-changing trends in the field of online gambling and online gaming, as well as assessing other types of problems related to these activities.

*Indicators:* The amount and availability of financial resources for independent research bodies on both national and international levels; the amount and quality of research outputs (e.g., scientific papers, research reports, etc.).

### **3.2.4. Prevention**

*Objectives:* Increase the amount and availability of effective prevention programmes.

*Actions:* Develop and provide evidence-based, effective prevention programmes for the general population (universal prevention), for individuals at risk (selected prevention), and for those experiencing problems (indicated prevention). Providing the necessary resources for developing and evaluating such programmes is essential. Online gaming and gambling prevention should be included in general health promotion programs. The WHO provides detailed guidance documents.

*Indicators:* The number of evidence-based prevention programmes, their availability for different groups in need, data on the size and characteristics of the populations involved, and process and outcome evaluation.

### **3.2.5. Treatment**

*Objectives:* Increase the availability of high-quality treatment.

*Actions:* Provide accessible and effective evidence-based treatment options for individuals with gambling and gaming problems. Support and resources are needed to develop treatment centres, train mental health professionals, provide them with the necessary tools and resources for efficient treatment and identify and develop new treatment methodologies if necessary. Establish cooperation protocols for treatment. Ensure the competence of professionals in healthcare, educational, and developmental sectors for early identification of individuals with issues related to online gambling and gaming, as well as the implementation of various interventions and treatments for the disorders.

*Indicators:* The number and quality of tools/resources/materials available for experts; the number and accessibility of evidence-based treatment programmes, their availability for different groups in need; process and outcome evaluation.

### **3.2.6. Harm reduction**

*Objectives:* Increase the availability of harm reduction programs and measures.

*Actions:* Promote harm reduction measures for all online gambling/gaming products on all levels of involvement – not solely among problem and disordered gamblers/gamers.

*Indicators:* The availability of harm reduction measures and responsible gambling/gaming tools across all online gambling/gaming products.

### **3.2.7. The industry's contribution to risk and harm reduction**

*Objectives:* The video game industry has not recognised its responsibility for the potential harm caused by its products. Corporate social responsibility should be promoted where the industry stands to its responsibility and actively contributes to reduce risks and harms associated with their products.

*Actions:* Identify and regulate the industry's minimum requirements to ensure safer products. Develop and implement effective regulatory measures to control dark pattern elements and require them to introduce responsible design features in their products.

*Indicators:* The proportion of gambling and gaming products that ensure consumer protection by providing safer gambling and gaming practices instead of dark patterns/persuasive design elements.

### **3.2.8. International governmental cooperation**

*Objectives:* Enhance international governmental cooperation.

*Actions:* Mobilise international governmental organisations that provide platforms for collaboration and facilitate networks for exchanging experiences and data sharing, for example GREF (Gambling Regulators European Forum). Cooperation formats already exist, most notably those at the Council of Europe for online addictions, data protection, cybercrime, and money laundering should be considered. Facilitate capacity building and mutual assistance among regulatory bodies in different countries.

*Indicators:* The adoption of multi-lateral political and legal instruments, aligned and harmonised national regulations, joint law enforcement operations, and campaigns.

## **4. Regulatory options**

Different levels of regulation are possible, such as regional, national, and international levels; for example, the Digital Markets (DMA) and Services Acts (DSA) in the European Union. Given that both online gambling and gaming are accessible through the internet and thus available across borders, international harmonisation of national regulations would be beneficial. This could be achieved through enhancing international governmental cooperation (see point 3.2.8). Possible regulatory options are listed below. In cases where information is available regarding their efficacy, we discuss those below the list

### **4.1. Online gambling**

- Age limits to participate in online gambling including demos without money.
- Consider blocking illegal operators by web-blocking or payment blocking.
- Consider if jurisdictions should be restricted from issuing licenses to operators with a main purpose to offer games in other European jurisdictions than where the license is given.

- Altering the structural characteristics of online gambling products (e.g., providing the odds of winning the major prize; reducing the maximum bet limit) to reduce their harmful potential.
- Requiring the obligatory use of pre-commitment systems (e.g., fixing a maximum limit on losses before the beginning of the play or for a certain time frame; fixing the time periods within a day/week when one is allowed to play) as harm prevention measures.
- Mandatory pre-commitment systems could be required below a certain ceiling, e.g., maximum loss limit. The set loss limit should apply to all regulated operators. The concept can be based on the same principles as a centralised self-exclusion system.
- Introducing effective and binding self-exclusion regimes by having centralised and unified systems of self-exclusion (i.e., volunteering to ban oneself from online gambling).
- Using targeted messages that convey meaningful information in a simple and clear way allows users to know how much time and money they spend during a gambling session and the relative risks of specific gambling products. These messages must be provided via unavoidable information screens at the beginning of every session of use.
- Limiting the non-stop availability of online wagering systems by introducing “opening hours”.
- Restricting, banning or reducing the visibility of online gambling advertisements (e.g., on TV, in social media platforms, on streaming platforms, and on video gaming-related platforms) and a prohibition of direct marketing addressing self-excluded people because the principal use of gambling advertising is not only recruiting new consumers but also ‘normalising’ the product and associating it with enjoyable and desirable activities, especially among children and young people.
- Consider providing effective campaigns and messages to counter the stigma associated with gambling and problem gambling because stigmatisation is one of the important obstacles to treatment seeking.
- Consider a progressive tax system for online gambling based also on the potential harm and addiction. Additional revenues resulting from these progressive or expanded tax regimes could be allocated to the provision of:
  - effective social marketing around gambling harm and stigma reduction,
  - well-resourced counselling,
  - support and recovery programs,
  - research funding.
- Funding gambling research from general revenue and utilising taxation from gambling operations. Gambling researchers must be independent from the gambling industry, and this should be supervised very strongly.
- Online gambling operators should provide access to de-identified data and information about their operations and products to researchers as a condition of their licensing.

## 4.2. Online gaming

- Consider regulations to secure that the industry:
  - sets limits to participate in online gambling including demos.
  - discloses the probabilities of obtaining loot box/random rewards (to reduce overspending) – this must be monitored by independent bodies because the industry could manipulate drop rate information to exploit the players.
  - stops providing random drawing services / probability-based lucky draw features (e.g., loot boxes) to minors – requires an effective age verification system.
  - stops using manipulative psychological techniques (e.g., persuasive
  - stops designing elements (or so-called “dark patterns”) to increase spending (e.g., giving players rewards if they log in every day, if they spend on the game for the first time or if they spend several times on the game consecutively).
  - stops using/do not use artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to customise rewards, gaming experience, marketing and probability values, especially in targeting minors.
  - displays in a comprehensible manner the patented methods used in the game application. The principle of these cognitive-behavioural methods must be clearly explained in the app store. A sign saying “in-app purchases” is not sufficient.
  - displays the real-money value of virtual items that can be bought with in-game currencies.
  - provides effective self-limiting options – allowing players to set limits to the amount of time and money they want to spend in games, as well as to set the time periods for playing (e.g., not being allowed to play between midnight and 6AM).
  - provides effective parental control features - permitting parents to limit the amount of time and money their children are allowed to spend on games, as well as to set the time periods for playing (e.g., children not be allowed to play between midnight and 6AM).
  - provides effective self-exclusion options (including the possibility of self-banning) – e.g., for those who wish to abstain from specific games.
- Consider taxing the industry (e.g., a specific percentage of their profits) and using these taxes to finance:

- independent research with specific emphasis on (i) monitoring the development of trends (e.g., changes in the use of persuasive design elements and so-called “dark patterns” in video games), (ii) efficacy studies of prevention programmes and treatment methods.
- prevention programmes among vulnerable populations, including the education of parents and educators.
- a widely accessible, freely available treatment service network that supplies experts with the necessary tools, resources, and training to provide efficient treatment.

### **4.3. Applying consumer protection and product safety regulations**

Consumer protection and product safety regulatory concepts can be applied, depending on national regulations, by analogy to online gaming and gambling to ensure the well-being and safety of players and customers. This is particularly relevant concerning age restrictions, labelling and disclosure, recalls and safety alerts, dispute resolution including recourse for harm, product liability, product safety testing, and prohibited content.

However, online gambling and gaming often fall into regulatory gaps where existing laws may not specifically address the digital nature of these activities. This may require additional provisions with the flexibility to adapt to changing technology and evolving industry practices, together with provisions for a regular review process for regulations to ensure they remain up-to-date and effective in addressing emerging challenges. Instead of struggling to develop catch-all regulations, it should be considered to start with regulatory ‘sandboxes’ to test the functionality of one specific aspect of the issue over a limited period of time as a pilot before widening or extending the measure.

Exploring analogies to the measures used for prescribed drugs, alcohol, and tobacco products can also be a valuable approach to addressing protection and public health. However, it is essential to consider the differences in the nature of these products and activities when applying such measures.

### **4.4. Major obstacles and challenges in the implementation of regulations**

#### **4.4.1. Online gambling**

Similarly, to the tobacco and alcohol industries, the gambling industry is also opposed to the implementation of effective policy regulations because it believes that such measures would reduce their profits. Consequently, the industry is using its financial and lobbying force to impede the implementation of effective regulatory measures.

Another major obstacle is the difficulty of effectively monitoring and achieving regulatory compliance. Effective monitoring and obtaining regulatory compliance requires a large amount of resources of all types (e.g., human, financial, temporal). In addition, gambling products and industry innovations should be strictly and constantly monitored, and regulations must be frequently adjusted – another process requiring resources. Close monitoring scrutiny should be on illegal operators and unregulated platforms to limit these as far as possible.

#### **4.4.2. Online gaming**

Effective monitoring and achieving regulatory compliance in the case of video games may even be more difficult than in the case of gambling products due to the historical lack of regulation in this field and the huge number of small companies and game developers providing video games (it seems almost impossible to monitor every provider in this sector). Furthermore, video games and industry innovations (e.g., changes in the structural characteristics and game mechanics of video games, applying persuasive design elements or “dark patterns”) require constant monitoring, and regulations must be frequently adjusted, requiring yet even more resources.

The industry is opposed to the implementation of effective regulatory measures by national governments because they believe that such measures would reduce their profits. The reason for this is that a considerable part of their profits comes from vulnerable players such as video game players at risk of gaming disorder, video game players with gambling problems and children. Furthermore, the industry greatly fears stigmatisation. They believe that the acceptance of gaming disorder as a mental health condition and official diagnosis stigmatises video gaming as a recreational activity and may lead to a decrease in their profits.

### **5. Evaluation and adjustments**

- Continuous, high-quality research conducted by independent researchers to monitor and evaluate
  - current trends and innovations in online gaming and gambling-related issues
  - the effectiveness of current regulatory strategies

- Feedback from stakeholders, including parents, educators, healthcare providers, gaming and gambling communities, and industry representatives
- Regularity of strategy reviews and updates based on research findings and stakeholder feedback

### **5.1. Key indicators and verification sources**

Reduction in problematic online gaming/gambling behaviours

- Percentage decrease in reported cases of gaming/gambling disorder and related problems.

Increase in responsible gaming/gambling practices

- Percentage of gaming/gambling operators implementing responsible gaming/gambling features.
- User satisfaction with responsible gaming/gambling tools and resources.

Positive impact on mental health:

- Reduction in mental health issues related to excessive gaming/gambling.
- Improvement in the overall well-being of individuals engaging in online gaming/gambling.

Decrease in underage online gambling:

- Percentage decrease in reported cases of underage online gambling.
- Increased effectiveness of age verification measures.

Community and stakeholder support:

- Level of support from government authorities, industry stakeholders, and the general public.
- Positive media coverage and public perception of the initiative.

Financial situation of individuals:

- Reduction in financial harm associated with online gambling/gaming.
- Implementation and proven effectiveness of spending limits and notifications in both online gambling and gaming products.

Educational impact:

- Integration of responsible gaming/gambling education into school curricula.
- Improved knowledge among students and educators about the risks and benefits of online gaming/gambling.

Compliance with regulations:

- Percentage of gaming/gambling operators in compliance with regulatory measures.
- Number of enforcement actions taken against non-compliant entities.

Accessibility of treatment services:

- Availability and accessibility of treatment services for gambling/gaming-related problems in various regions.
- Percentage of individuals seeking and receiving treatment.

Long-term sustainability:

- Demonstrated positive trends in the reduction of gaming/gambling-related issues over several years.
- Continued commitment and engagement from stakeholders.
- Regularly monitoring and analysing these indicators will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the prevention strategy, allowing for adjustments and improvements over time.

### **5.2. Monitoring**

- Rapid assessments
- Trends spotting
- Foresight management

## Appendix I – Overview of regulatory options

### 1. General regulatory options

<b>Age Verification:</b> Age verification processes to prevent underage gambling, including the use of age verification tools and identity checks.
<b>Parental Controls:</b> Development of parental control features, allowing parents to monitor and restrict their children's online activities.
<b>Advertising and Marketing Restrictions:</b> Regulate the advertising and marketing of online gambling and gaming to prevent targeting vulnerable populations and excessive promotion of online gambling and gambling offers, as well as online gaming and related offers.
<b>Data Protection and Privacy:</b> Ensure that customer data is protected, and operators comply with data protection regulations.
<b>Problem Support:</b> Set up, fund and promote services for prevention and treatment, including helplines, counselling, and support groups.
<b>Whistle blower protection:</b> Encourage the reporting of unethical or unsafe practices while ensuring adequate legal protection for whistle blowers.

### 2. Specific regulatory options

Specific for Online Gambling	Specific for Online Gaming
<b>Licensing and regulation:</b>  Require online gambling operators to obtain licenses from regulatory authorities, which can ensure that operators meet specific criteria and adhere to responsible gambling practices.  Establish dedicated regulatory bodies to oversee and enforce gambling laws and regulations. For example, the United Kingdom has the UK Gambling Commission.	<b>Age Ratings and Content Regulation:</b>  Age Ratings: Implement age-appropriate content ratings to ensure that games are suitable for the intended audience.  Content Moderation: Enforce regulations that require developers to monitor and remove inappropriate or harmful content within games (e.g., racist, sexist content, but also persuasive design elements or so-called “dark patterns”).
<b>Responsible Gambling Measures:</b>  Self-Exclusion Programs: Operators should offer self-exclusion options, allowing players to voluntarily ban themselves from gambling platforms for a specified period.  Mandatory Limits: Set limits on deposits, losses, and betting amounts for players, to prevent excessive gambling.	<b>Loot Box / Random Reward Mechanisms Regulation:</b>  Regulate the use of loot boxes and other random reward mechanisms and microtransactions, requiring transparency about odds and costs, and potentially classifying them as a form of gambling.
<b>Anti-Money Laundering (AML) Regulations:</b>  Apply AML regulations to online gambling platforms, obligating operators to report	<b>Online Safety and Cyberbullying:</b>  Establish measures to combat cyberbullying, harassment, and toxic behaviour within online

suspicious transactions and perform due diligence on high-value customers.	gaming communities, including reporting mechanisms and consequences for offenders.
<b>Blockchain and Cryptocurrency Regulations:</b>  Adapt regulations to address the challenges posed by blockchain-based gambling platforms and cryptocurrency use in online gambling.	<b>Esports Player Welfare:</b>  Develop regulations to protect the welfare of esports athletes, including contractual fairness, working conditions, and mental health support.  Establish rules and regulations to ensure fair play and integrity within esports competitions, including measures to prevent cheating and match-fixing.

### 3. Challenges in introducing and implementing regulatory measures

Legal Challenges	Remedial Action
<b>Definition and Classification:</b>  Determining what constitutes gambling or harmful content in games can be subjective, and legal definitions may not keep pace with rapidly evolving technology.	Utilize best available evidence: review research on the most recent trends in online gaming and gambling to inform evidence-based regulations. It is of utmost importance to ensure financing scientific research monitoring the ever-changing trends and innovations in both fields.
<b>Jurisdictional Variability:</b>  Online gambling and gaming is often provided across national borders, making it difficult to establish consistent regulations, especially in cases where different countries have divergent laws.	International Agreements: multilateral and bilateral cooperation agreements, common standards.
<b>Enforcement:</b>  Enforcing regulations across the vast and decentralized landscape of online platforms is challenging, especially when entities operate from offshore locations.	Harmonization of Laws: Encourage international harmonization of laws and regulations, especially for cross-border issues.  Use of Technology: Employ advanced technology solutions, including AI and blockchain, to monitor and enforce regulations more effectively.  Impose where possible available sanctions such as fines.  Mutual Assistance: Promote mutual assistance among regulatory bodies in different countries to combat illegal operators and ensure compliance.
<b>Regulatory Gaps:</b> Online gambling and gaming often fall into regulatory gaps where existing laws may not specifically address the digital nature of these activities.	Regular Review: Implement a regular review process for regulations to ensure they remain up-to-date and effective in addressing emerging challenges. Sandbox Approach: Consider implementing regulatory sandboxes to allow for innovation while maintaining consumer protection. Adaptive Framework: Build regulations with the flexibility to adapt to changing technology and evolving industry practices.



## **Appendix II – Making multistakeholder cooperation work**

Any comprehensive strategy to meet and deal with the legal, political, and practical challenges of introducing and implementing policies, regulations, as well as awareness raising and educational programmes, addressing online gambling and gaming should involve various stakeholders to address these challenges from multiple angles. A Multi-Stakeholder Task Force which brings together representatives from government, civil society, concerned industries and research should be set up from the very beginning of the strategy development process to create the necessary commitment and sense of ownership needed for ongoing collaboration.

### **II. 1. Key Principles for engaging stakeholders**

Developing the strategy and/or policy taking into account the specific needs and interests of each stakeholder group will increase the likelihood of obtaining their buy-in and commitment. This requires bearing in mind the following basic principles:

- **Clear Communication:** Clearly articulate the goals, benefits, and expected outcomes of the initiative.
- **Inclusivity:** Ensure that the concerns and perspectives of stakeholders are considered and integrated.
- **Flexibility:** Be open to feedback and be willing to adapt the initiative based on stakeholder input.
- **Transparency:** Maintain transparency in all interactions, providing accurate information and addressing concerns openly.
- **Demonstrate Success:** Highlight successful implementations and positive outcomes to build confidence and trust.

### **II. 2. Ensuring stakeholder commitment**

Obtaining buy-in and commitment from different stakeholders is crucial for the success of any initiative. Here are some strategies tailored to different stakeholders:

#### ***Government Authorities:***

- **Research and Data:** Present compelling data on the prevalence of issues and potential societal impacts.
- **Policy Alignment:** Show how your initiative aligns with existing policies or how new policies can be beneficial.
- **Economic Impact:** Emphasize the economic benefits of a healthier, more responsible gaming/gambling environment.

#### ***Game Developers and Operators:***

- **Profitability:** Demonstrate how responsible gaming/gambling practices can enhance a company's reputation, customer loyalty, and long-term profitability.
- **Industry Standards:** Emphasize the importance of industry-wide standards and highlight successful case studies of companies implementing responsible gaming/gambling features.
- **Collaboration:** Highlight the potential for collaboration and shared resources to address common challenges.

#### ***Parents and Educators:***

- **Child Development Research:** Share findings on the impact of excessive online gaming/gambling on cognitive development and behaviour in children.
- **Educational Benefits:** Emphasize the importance of a balanced approach, acknowledging educational benefits while mitigating potential risks.
- **Parental Empowerment:** Provide resources and tools for parents to monitor and control their children's online gaming/gambling activities.

#### ***Healthcare Professionals:***

- **Training Programs:** Offer training programs, tools and resources to help healthcare professionals recognize and address online gaming/gambling-related issues.
- **Research Collaboration:** Highlight opportunities for collaboration in research and data collection to better understand the health impacts.
- **Treatment Options:** Demonstrate how responsible gaming/gambling initiatives can complement existing mental health and addiction treatment services.

**Community and Non-profit Organizations:**

- Community Impact: Illustrate how the initiative can positively impact the community and contribute to social well-being.
- Partnership Opportunities: Explore collaborative projects and initiatives that align with the mission and goals of community organizations.
- Advocacy Support: Seek support for advocacy efforts from these organizations to create a broader impact.

**General Public:**

- Public Awareness Campaigns: Implement targeted public awareness campaigns to inform and educate the public about the potential risks and benefits of online gaming/gambling.
- User Testimonials: Share stories and testimonials from individuals who have experienced positive changes through responsible gaming/gambling practices.
- Inclusivity: Highlight that responsible gaming/gambling practices are designed to benefit everyone and foster a safer online environment.

**Media Outlets:**

- News Coverage: Engage with media outlets to cover success stories, industry trends, and the importance of responsible gaming/gambling.
- Expert Interviews: Offer experts for interviews or op-ed pieces to provide insights into the initiative and its impact.
- Partnerships: Explore partnerships with media organizations for joint awareness campaigns.

**Legislators and Policymakers:**

- Policy Briefs: Provide clear and concise policy briefs that outline the necessity and benefits of regulatory measures.
- Engagement and Consultation: Engage in open dialogue and consultation sessions to address concerns and receive input.
- Global Best Practices: Showcase international best practices in online gaming/gambling regulation and responsible gaming/gambling.

**Investors and Shareholders:**

- Risk Mitigation: Demonstrate how the initiative can mitigate legal, reputational, and financial risks associated with online gaming/gambling-related controversies.
- Long-Term Sustainability: Illustrate how responsible gaming/gambling practices contribute to the long-term sustainability and resilience of the gaming/gambling industry.

**Internal Team Members:**

- Training Programs: Conduct training sessions to educate internal teams about the initiative and its importance.
- Employee Well-being: Emphasize how the initiative aligns with the company's commitment to employee well-being.
- Incentives: Consider offering incentives or recognition programs for teams contributing to the success of the initiative.

**Appendix III – Definition of Terms***Online addiction/s*

The term is used to refer to both online gambling disorder and online gaming disorder (see below).

*Online gambling*

Gambling is the betting or staking of something of value, with consciousness of risk and hope of gain, on the outcome of a game, a contest, or an uncertain event whose result may be determined by chance or accident or have an unexpected result by reason of the bettor's miscalculation. Online gambling is any kind of gambling conducted on the internet. It is also often labelled as remote, internet or interactive gambling.

### *Online gambling disorder*

According to the World Health Organization, “gambling disorder, predominantly online is characterised by a pattern of persistent or recurrent gambling behaviour that is primarily conducted over the internet and is manifested by: 1. impaired control over gambling (e.g., onset, frequency, intensity, duration, termination, context); 2. increasing priority given to gambling to the extent that gambling takes precedence over other life interests and daily activities; and 3. continuation or escalation of gambling despite the occurrence of negative consequences. The behaviour pattern is of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in personal,

family, social, educational, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. The pattern of gambling behaviour may be continuous or episodic and recurrent. The gambling behaviour and other features are normally evident over a period of at least 12 months in order for a diagnosis to be assigned, although the required duration may be shortened if all diagnostic requirements are met and symptoms are severe.”

### *Online gaming*

Gaming refers to playing video games that are played on digital devices (e.g., personal computers, gaming consoles, smartphones, virtual reality devices). Online gaming refers to any kind of video gaming conducted on the internet.

### *Online gaming disorder*

According to the World Health Organization, the definition of gaming disorder predominantly online resembles completely the definition of gambling disorder predominantly online, only the term ‘gambling’ is exchanged with ‘gaming’ referring to digital gaming or video gaming.

### *Risk and harm reduction in the case of online gambling and gaming problems*

Risk and harm reduction is the umbrella term for interventions, programmes and policies that seek to prevent, reduce, minimise, and relieve the health, social and economic harms to individuals, communities and societies, resulting from problematic or disordered online gambling and online gaming.

### *Prevention in the case of online gambling and gaming problems*

All actions taken to decrease the chance of developing online gambling or online gaming disorder or problems related to online gambling and gaming.

### *Treatment in the case of online gambling and gaming problems*

Medical care given to individuals suffering from online gambling and gaming disorder or problems to decrease their symptoms and recover their health.