

Soft Forms of Gambling: Popularity, Availability, and their Risk Level

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Introduction

This project focuses on soft forms of gambling and their availability at different scales, using the Czech Republic as an example. It aims to the establishment of a baseline on this issue, which could then serve as a platform for the submission of an international project in which the conditions for accessibility and attitudes towards soft gambling should be compared. It is divided into three phases.

Despite the fact that terms referring to soft and hard forms of gambling appear in professional studies and official documents, their precise and uniform definition does not yet exist. Traditional divisions of gambling into 'hard' and 'soft' are associated with financially higher stakes and, at the same time, higher rates of gambling, where rapid and high losses can be expected. According to this criterion, Griffiths (1999) classified lotteries and football betting as soft forms of gambling and casino games and horse racing betting as hard forms of gambling. Carran (2013), however, points out that the distinction between soft and hard forms of gambling may also be due to state legislation itself, which, by its very nature, may only make particular types of gambling available from a certain age onwards, essentially giving an indirect indication of which games legislators believe are more harmful and risky to society than others. Using the example of the UK Gambling Act, it thus defines soft forms, medium forms and hard forms.

Griffiths and Wood (2001) point out that the distinction between these forms of gambling can also be made according to public attitudes, with some types of games being more heavily stigmatized by society than others. In this context, based on a questionnaire survey of Czech citizens' attitudes towards different forms of gambling, Fiedor et al. (2019) confirm that some forms of gambling (raffle, scratchcards, national lottery) are not actually considered gambling, i.e. they are socially acceptable and at the same time not perceived as potentially harmful. In recent decades, technological advances have enabled gambling to move online, which is another challenge for the study of gambling (Fiedor, 2020; Gainsbury et al., 2015).

Methods

National approaches to the legislative definition of gambling often differ and reflect cultural specificities. These are very often reflected in the division of gambling into different types. In order to make international comparisons at least partially possible, the analysis distinguishes between the following four groups of gambling: casino games, lotteries, slot machines, and sports betting (including horse race betting). The popularity of games is usually related to the most widespread gambling game in the population, in which the largest proportion of the population participates. However, this can usually only be determined by sample surveys. Given the inconsistency and time inconsistency of such surveys across European countries, it is problematic to use them. Thus, it would be possible to look at the popularity of individual games of chance partly through the amount of money invested in them. The most frequently used indicators are Gross Gaming Revenue (GGR) and Gross Gambling Yield (GGY). Although these indicators are not based on sample surveys and states should have these data available on an annual basis, the problem is their (un)availability. For this reason, artificial intelligence (ChatGPT) was used and asked "What is the most popular gambling game in all European Union countries?". One of the sub-objectives for us was to assess the applicability of this tool for international comparative analyses and we critically evaluated the results obtained using this tool. In analyzing the accessibility of different types of gambling, we focused on accessibility as defined by the legal limitation of the minimum age required to legally participate in a given game. This simple indicator also reflects a certain level of risk of a given type of gambling for the development of problem gambling. It is the legislative setting of the age of accessibility that allows international comparison of perceived dangerousness.

Results

Casino games represent the most popular form of gambling in a total of 18 countries. Sports betting attracts the most gamblers in 12 countries, followed by slot machines (11). Lotteries were the most popular in 6 countries.

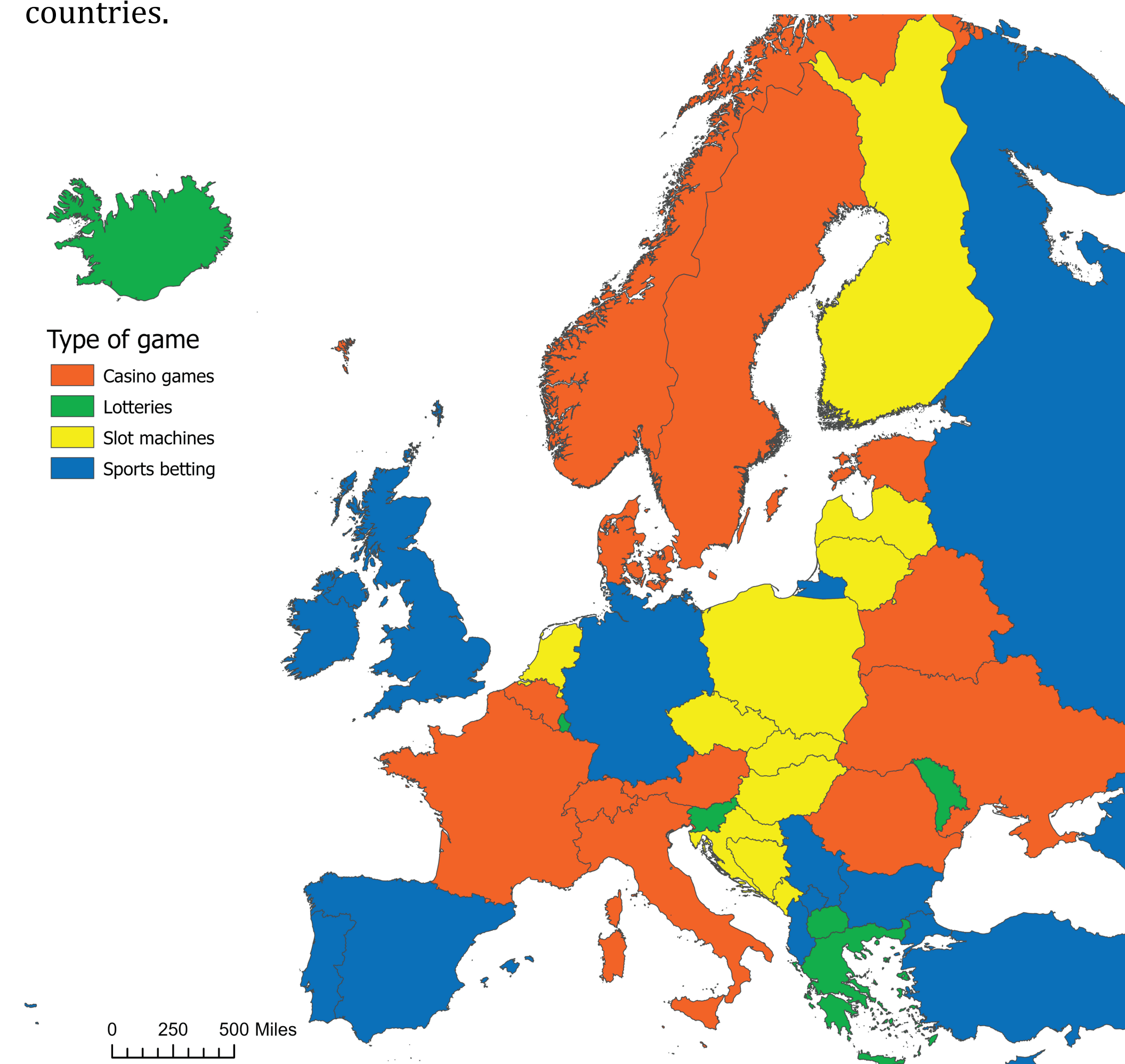


Fig. Most popular games of chance in European countries

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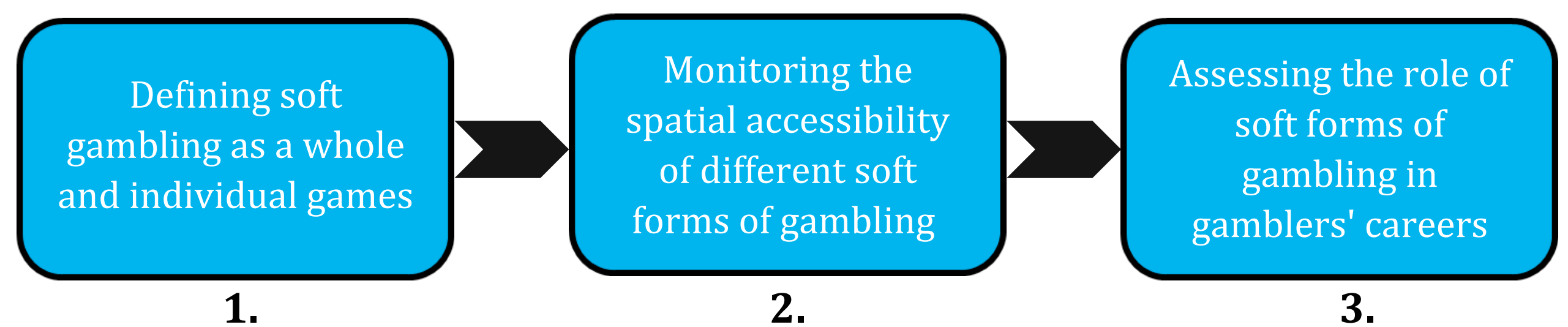


Table: Age restrictions for playing selected games in EU countries

Country	Casino games	Lotteries	Sports betting	Slot machines
Belgium	21	18	18	21
Cyprus	21	18	18	18
Estonia	21	16	18	18
Finland	18	15	18	18
Greece	21	18	21	21
Lithuania	21	18	18	18
Sweden	20	18	18	18
United Kingdom	18	16	18	18
The rest of EU (20)	18	18	18	18

In most countries in the European Union (and the UK) there is a minimum age of 18 to participate in gambling. In a total of 20 European Union countries, a player must be 18 years of age to be able to play casino games, participate in lotteries, bet on sports and play slot machines. But there are also cases where lower or higher limits are set for different types of gambling, which also vary from country to country. Especially for casino games we can observe a higher age limit at which players can participate in gambling. For this reason alone, casino gambling can be considered as more risky and therefore classified as a hard form of gambling.

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