



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY
OF CULTURE AND CHURCH AFFAIRS

Action plan

Action plan to prevent problem gaming and problem gambling

(2009 - 2011)





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Preface

The range and the accessibility of games and gambling have changed. Previous mechanical and electronic gaming and gambling devices have now been superseded by a range of new online games, which are increasingly available on portable and handheld gaming devices. This provides more opportunities for offering entertainment and stimulus through games and gambling. However, experience indicates that increased gaming and gambling propositions and accessibility can also lead to greater problems both for the player and for society. The Action plan to prevent problem gaming and problem gambling is a continuation of the action plan set out in 2005 and aims to reduce current problems and prevent future problems for the individual and for society.

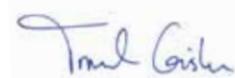


The dependency problems we know about are particularly related to gambling. In the last decade, problem gambling in Norway has been on the increase. From the late 1990s, an entirely new national health problem arose linked to gambling on slot machines. Multiple studies indicate that, in the period 2003-2007, there were between 50,000 and 70,000 gamblers in Norway who had dependency problems related to slot machines. After the Government prohibited such devices as of 1 July 2007, dependency problems related to gambling machines declined considerably. However, studies carried out since the slot machine ban indicate that many people currently have problems involving other gambling activities, especially in relation to gambling over the Internet offered by providers from outside Norway.

The provision and consumption of electronic computer games that do not involve gambling is on the increase. There is every indication that such gaming may also be addictive. This is particularly true of role-play games on the Internet. Through the action plan, the Government aims to establish better knowledge of problems related to computer gaming, in order to counter such problems in the future.

Experience shows that regulatory measures are the most important instrument for combating gambling problems. The Government's aims therefore include reducing access to harmful gambling on the Internet. The Government's action plan to prevent problem gaming and problem gambling also aims to give players and society better protection through targeted research, information and other targeted measures. The action plan will be financed by an annual appropriation of up to 0.5% of Norsk Tipping's profit for the measures that are established.

Oslo, May 2009


Trond Giske

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Primary goal 1:

Reducing the occurrence of problem gaming and problem gambling

One of the primary goals of the action plan is for fewer people in Norway to develop gaming and gambling problems. Experience shows that the most effective measure in combating problem gambling is to regulate the availability of gambling by law.

The trend in recent years indicates that new types games and gambling opportunities are becoming increasingly available over the Internet. This puts vulnerable groups in particular at risk of developing dependency tendencies. This steadily increasing availability of new types of games, via electronic and other channels, means that the authorities must constantly assess the need to implement preventive measures of both a regulatory and an informational nature.

Sub-goal 1.1:

To maintain and strengthen the Norwegian gambling model

Norwegian gambling policy is based on reliable supervision and a responsible development based on a public health perspective. The gambling market is in constant development, leading to more competition between the different gambling propositions and an increased supply of gambling over the Internet. The governmental and political supervision of this area has therefore been weakened, and it is a major political challenge to ensure responsible development of the gambling market in Norway. The first action plan set out a precautionary principle for the regulation of gambling. This is based on the high risk related to gambling and the uncertainty of the impact of individual measures. Relatively low costs are involved in implementing regulatory measures. Effective enforcement of the regulations is, however, crucial to ensure that such measures work as intended.

Since its establishment in 2001, the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority has had a constant remit to monitor market trends and propose suitable regulatory instruments in order to prevent problem gambling. This is to be continued and the Authority will continue to be in a position to base its proposals and advice on knowledge of the market and of which regulatory instruments have a preventive effect in relation to different games and gambling propositions.

This is summed up in the following measure:

Measure 1.1:

The gambling market will at all times be regulated to ensure a low prevalence in problem gambling:

Regulatory measures are to be based on the following factors:

- the availability of gambling is to be regulated to reduce the availability to unlicensed gambling and high-risk gambling
- the availability of gambling is to be restricted through a continuation and strengthening of the Norwegian gambling system
- the regulation aims to protect vulnerable groups, such as children and young people, for example through the introduction of an 18-year age limit for all gambling
- there will be an aim to remove bingo slot machines from 1.1.2010
- marketing of gambling is to be regulated in order to reduce exposure of high-risk gambling and the introduction of sanctions will be assessed
- risk elements in licensed gambling are to be regulated in accordance with research and new means of monitoring
- further measures should be assessed in order to limit advertising of unlicensed gambling in television, broadcasted from other EEA countries

Sub-goal 1.2:

Targeted information for at-risk groups

As part of the implementation of the first action plan, the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority developed and implemented a targeted information programme of which the primary target group was children and young people, but also adult males up to 40 years of age. The campaign lasted approximately 3 years, and the objective was to trigger measurable changes in attitudes and behaviours. Different approaches, channels and messages were chosen to communicate with the various target groups.

Even though, in general, the impact of the awareness-raising and attitude-changing activities is uncertain, surveys of attitudes to gambling during this period show a marked increase in recognition of the fact that gambling may lead to problems. Information and education raise awareness and are important preventive measures in this area. A conscious attitude to these problems is also important to allow people to make informed choices and for problem gambling tendencies to be revealed as early as possible.

Awareness-raising and educational activities must be continued. All the groups at risk of problem gambling are to be target groups for these activities. Annual allocations from the action plan funds must be made for the preparation of pamphlets, website creation and maintenance, etc. The Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority should coordinate the information activities, but other bodies may also be responsible for certain campaigns and for disseminating targeted messages.

This is consolidated in the following measure:

Measure 1.2:

A targeted information programme is to be initiated and implemented

An information programme aimed at specific at-risk groups is to be developed and implemented. This applies to vulnerable groups, such as children and young people, the elderly, minorities and particularly at-risk professions. The information programmes are to employ new channels and instruments and be tailored to new groups, depending on trends in the gaming market.

Primary goal 2:

Knowledge of gaming and gambling is to be improved

New types of gambling are constantly being developed, offered on new platforms and through new distribution channels. Vulnerable groups are at risk and online gambling, in particular, is an increasing problem for many. Accordingly, there remains a great need for knowledge and expertise in order to prevent problem gambling.

A knowledge summary for the period 2004 to 2008 shows that research on gambling problems and gambling habits has been boosted by the work achieved and that research and competence groups have now taken a stronger interest in this field. This needs to be carried forward through continued planned targeting of prioritised projects.

Another important strategy for reaching this primary goal will be continued development of systems which regularly procure fundamental data about the gambling market and gambling behaviour in the population, in order to maintain on-going monitoring of the market and its development and to acquire data as a basis for further analysis and research.

This is summarised in two sub-goals and associated measures.

Sub-goal 2.1:

To stimulate competence networks and research environments

During the period of the first action plan, the Research Council of Norway was tasked with implementing a research programme based on a description prepared by the three ministries concerned and relevant professional specialists in the field. The period of activity was set at 5 years, and research on gambling problems was incorporated into both the Research Council's Programme for Mental Health and the National Health Programme. A total of three different research projects were started up in this period and, together with an R&D project initiated in the treatment sector, they have provided positive stimulus for the research environment and will yield useful knowledge and competence in the field. These programmes should be continued and potential expansion should be assessed.

The following measure caters for this:

Measure 2.1:

Research on gambling problems under the Research Council of Norway is to be developed and continued

In consultation with relevant specialists, the Research Council of Norway is to develop and continue investigation of gambling problems. The period of activity is being extended by 2 years, to expire in 2011. Problem gambling in at-risk groups is to be evaluated with respect to special target areas. At-risk groups in this context means, for example, children and young people, minorities, specific professions and parts of the elderly population. An increase over previous allocations to the research programme is to be assessed.

Sub-goal 2.2:

Surveys of problem gambling in the population are to be carried out regularly

The Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority tracks trends in the gambling market and regularly reports on them. The systematic collection of various types of fundamental data has been established. This activity is supplementary to the Authority's ordinary operational remit and will be developed and extended in accordance with needs defined by the Authority or its partners.

The collection of data from treatment environments and various support groups for people with problem gambling tendencies is something that the Authority will prioritise, with the aim of enhancing routines and forms of cooperation.

During the first plan period, two comprehensive population surveys were undertaken concerning the extent of gambling addiction and problem gambling. A new survey of this kind should be organised at the end of the second plan period.

Children and young people are in particular focus as a vulnerable group. New distribution channels and types of games will be particularly targeted at this group. Children and young people's gambling habits should therefore be especially investigated, and preferably monitored over a longer period. Similar investigations should also be evaluated for other at-risk groups.

This is consolidated in the following two measures:

Measure 2.2.a:

Continuous data collection from the gambling market, gambling operators, relevant public registers and voluntary support groups

High-quality registration of activity in the gambling area is important, both in terms of tracking trends in the market and for fundamental data for further research and analysis. Statistics as a basis for further analyses are crucial in order to be able to monitor trends over time in the prevalence of problem gambling. In addition to market data, this measure aims for continuous, systematic fundamental data collection on gambling addiction and trends in gambling habits.

Measure 2.2.b:

Surveys of the trend in the population's gambling habits over time

A new prevalence survey, equivalent to those previously performed, is to be conducted at the end of the plan period. The trend in children's and young people's gambling habits is to be especially investigated over a longer time period, using the same methodology as in previous studies. It is recommended that similar surveys of minorities and at-risk professions are carried out.

Sub-goal 2.3:

Raising awareness of problems related to computer games

Games of different types are under constant development, and since the previous action plan, online role and strategy games have become popular, especially among young people. There are a large number of foreign games available on the Internet to Norwegian users and here, as for other online gaming, the options for national regulation are limited.

In this context, children and young people constitute an especially at-risk group, and the support apparatus which deals with addiction problems is increasingly coming into contact with parents and teachers who express concern about young people's use of these games. There may be a number of fundamental reasons why some individuals have problems limiting their use of this type of gaming.

Before adequate measures are established, there will be a need to update knowledge as a basis for preventive measures and treatment. There is little experience of this field in Norway, but some studies have been made, international articles published and treatment programmes are in place in other countries. A systematic review of available knowledge of the field will prove highly beneficial as a basis for implementing any measures.

The following measure is proposed:

Measure 2.3:

To establish an inter-disciplinary and inter-authority working group for the Internet gaming/online computer game field

The working group's remit will be to acquire and systematise available knowledge about Internet gaming/online role and strategy games and problems associated with these games, and to make proposals for national measures to prevent problem gaming. The working group is to be composed from across various services, with representatives from, for example, the treatment apparatus, the Norwegian Media Authority, the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority, the Norwegian Directorate of Health, the consumer authorities and other relevant specialist authorities. The working group is jointly appointed by the ministries concerned (the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs, the Ministry of Health and Care Services and the Ministry of Children and Equality), who will also establish the working group's mandate.

Primary goal 3: Quick and effective help and treatment for problem gaming and problem gambling

Having increased consistently since the year 2000, requests to the treatment apparatus for help to combat gambling addiction have now been reduced. The primary reason is that the main source for problem gambling, slot machines, were removed from the market in the summer of 2007. The trend now is that requests are increasing with respect to other types of games and gambling, first and foremost on the Internet.

The treatment offered to people with problem gambling tendencies has to be developed and provided within the existing health and social services, and the individual region health authorities are responsible for adapting the service to the needs in their region. The measures in the first action plan emphasised the development of competence and knowledge within the schools, employment, social services and health sectors in order to detect any problems at an early stage, to ensure that more people would receive treatment. The outcome is that professionals in these sectors have received a considerable boost in competence-building offers in this field. A national training programme and a remote treatment service have been developed, which, each in their own way, counteract the uneven geographical distribution of previous services. A treatment service and information material aimed at children and young people was also developed in this period.

Even though the number of people seeking treatment has recently fallen, there is reason to believe that the need for help and treatment will increase in line with the growth of online gambling propositions, and particularly so with respect to vulnerable groups such as children and young people. Competence building in the treatment sector must therefore be continued, especially with respect to problems concerning children and young people, and a number of measures that have already been initiated must be tested further. This will enable the treatment sector to offer quick and effective help and treatment to people who turn to it with such problems.

Help must be provided at several levels, not just in the specialised health services. There must be readily accessible services for people needing help in all parts of the country, and such services must be stimulated and enhanced.

This is summarised in two sub-goals, each with two associated measures:

Sub-goal 3.1: Offers of and competence in help and treatment is to be increased

A number of treatment and training schemes were developed and tested in the first plan period. Some of these have been implemented only relatively recently and will require further testing. Gaming and gambling activity on the Internet is increasing, and the trend is for increasingly more people to apply to the treatment apparatus for help with dependencies related to gaming and gambling on the Internet

In this action plan, concern for children and young people is to be given special emphasis. Development and testing of methods and systems treating these especially at-risk groups should therefore be prioritised. In order to detect problem gambling/gaming tendencies as early as possible, professionals in the health and social services sector might benefit from the Directorate of Health's guidelines on early intervention in the field of alcohol and substance abuse.

Two specific measures should ensue from this:

- a) It should be arranged for more health and social service workers to acquire better knowledge of problem gaming/gambling
- b) Treatment for problem gambling should be enhanced and tested.
- c) Treatment for young people should be given special emphasis.

Measure 3.1.a: It should be arranged for more health and social service workers to acquire better knowledge of problem gambling / gaming

It is important that professionals in the health and social service sectors are qualified to detect problem gambling/gaming tendencies as early as possible. This requires knowledge and competence. The measures implemented in the first plan period meant that more people received an offer of and completed treatment for gambling addiction. This was a result of an increase in competence concerning these problems in the treatment sector, due primarily to increased provision of training.

The national training programme on gambling dependency is to be enhanced and offered to relevant professionals. In addition, a follow-up survey of participants who receive training is to be conducted in order to measure the effect of the training.

Knowledge of recommended methods for detecting, treating and following up people with problem gambling/gaming tendencies must be made even more accessible. This is to be done via the Internet whereby experiences from the action plan to combat problem gambling and other relevant information are to be collected and presented.

Measure 3.1.b:

Treatment for problem gambling is to be enhanced and tested.

Treatment for young people is to be given special emphasis

A number of different treatment services were developed and tested in the first plan period, and the specialist environments concerned have acquired valuable knowledge and competence in the field. The specialist environments are to be stimulated to continue this work.

Children and young people constitute a large and vulnerable group. This is also reflected in the action plan's preventive measures under primary goal 2. When, however, the problems have become so great that they require treatment measures, it is important that this too can be achieved quickly and effectively and using the best methods and systems. The specialist environments concerned are therefore to be stimulated to develop and test treatments especially aimed at young people.

Sub-goal 3.2:

The scope and quality of readily available services is to be enhanced

It is not just the specialized health services that should offer help to groups with gambling problems; it is important that help is also readily available at lower levels.

Voluntary support groups for/of gambling addicts and similar groups for/of relatives of gambling addicts make a positive contribution to reducing damage and problems caused by gambling addiction. Many people have received help at an early stage through these groups and stimulation through financial support has increased both the scope and the quality of this type of service. This should be developed further, for example, through support for prioritised development and information projects.

The Helpline for gambling addicts opened on 28 April 2003 as a pilot project, and from 2005 became a permanent service. Core financing comes from the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority's budget.

The Helpline has proved to be an effective and easily accessible service for both people with problem gambling tendencies and their relatives. Statistics from the Helpline are often in demand and provides an important barometer of trends in the gambling market in general. The availability of this low-threshold service has remained unchanged since May 2004. The telephone is manned from 09:00 to 21:00, 7 days a week. With the anticipated future development of the gaming and gambling market, it remains important to keep the opening hours unchanged so that the availability of the service is not reduced and statistics from the calls are not affected by factors other than changes in the gambling market. The Helpline should therefore be further developed and its activity should be maintained at the 2008 level, including having the same opening hours as at present.

This is to be followed up by two specific measures:

- a) Operational and project subsidies to voluntary support groups are to be continued
- b) The Helpline is to be further developed

Measure 3.2.a:

Operational and project subsidies to voluntary support groups are to be continued

Organised support groups perform activities related to the treatment and prevention of problem gambling and possess knowledge and competence of many problems associated with this field. Such support groups are to be stimulated financially through continuation of the current straightforward system of operational and project subsidies.

Measure 3.3.b:

The Helpline is to be further developed

The Helpline is to be maintained and is to continue to be financed by the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority's budget, but is to receive extra funding from the action plan's funds for maintaining competence and availability, and for enhancing its informational and marketing activities.



Notes

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