

research snapshot

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Comparing policies to reduce the supply of electronic gambling machines in Italy and Finland

What this research is about

Electronic gambling machines (EGMs) are amongst the most harmful forms of gambling. Policies to remove or reduce the number of EGMs in non-casino locations may reduce their use. The impacts of such policies vary depending on the extent of the reduction. Both Finland and Italy had recently introduced policies to reduce the number of EGMs in non-casino locations. This study had two aims: (1) to compare the objectives of the EGM reduction in these countries and the reasons given to justify the policies; and (2) to examine the impacts on total consumption.

What the researchers did

For the first aim, the researchers examined news articles from one year prior to the announced EGM reduction until February 2020. The start period was September 2016 in Italy and September 2018 in Finland. Seventeen articles were collected from the best-selling newspaper in Italy, *Corriere della Sera*. In Finland, 45 articles were collected from the largest daily newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, and from another database for other publicly available newspapers and media sources. Most articles were news pieces. There were some opinion pieces and stakeholder interviews. The researchers coded the data into four categories: (1) objectives of the policy suggestions; (2) arguments against; (3) expected impacts; and (4) final decisions.

For the second aim, the researchers looked at the number of EGMs and gross gambling revenue (GGR) before and after the reduction. The Italian data were obtained from the ADM Libro Blu between 2016 and 2019. The data concerned 'amusement with prizes' (AWP) machines since the reduction did not affect

What you need to know

Both Finland and Italy had recently introduced policies to reduce the number of electronic gambling machines (EGMs) in non-casino locations. The researchers analysed news articles to explore the objectives of the policies and their justifications. They also examined the impacts on total consumption. The EGM reduction was justified in terms of public health concerns in both countries. But, the reduction was limited in extent compared to initial suggestions. The decline in total consumption was not proportional to the reduction in the number of EGMs. The researchers suggested that the EGM reduction in Italy and Finland had not been significant enough.

video lottery terminals (VLTs). The Finnish data were obtained from Veikkaus, the national monopoly operator. The data covered the period from January 2018 to February 2020.

What the researchers found

Policy objectives, justifications, and expected impacts

In Italy, local governments had already started to reduce the number of EGMs. The debate regarding EGM reduction reflected a conflict of interests between the central and local governments. The main stakeholders were political actors and journalists acting as watchdogs of political decision-making. The first news article reported the announcement to reduce 30% of AWP. The justifications were related to the social and health consequences of gambling and the requests of local governments. Most news articles in 2016 were in favour of further reduction. These news articles were critical of the lobbying

power of the industry. They justified the need for further reduction in terms of poverty and social consequences, as well as the risk of corruption. A policy agreement was reached in 2017 to reduce the number of AWP by 35%. The media appeared to have accepted the compromise solution. The EGM reduction was no longer discussed in 2018 and 2019.

In Finland, public discussion about EGMs increased during 2018 and 2019. As in Italy, the Finnish media was initially critical of EGMs. The advocates of removing EGMs were citizen activists, researchers, and a few politicians. Their argument was to reduce gambling harms, especially amongst lower income groups. The main stakeholders against removing EGMs were representatives of the resale networks (e.g., kiosks, supermarkets, restaurants). Their main argument focused on the impacts on revenues and employment. Veikkaus announced in September 2019 that it would reduce 18% of non-casino EGMs. The aim was later increased to 43%. Unlike Italy, the reduction did not target the number of resale points. The remaining news articles discussed the impacts on revenues and no longer focused on gambling harms.

Financial impacts on total consumption

In Italy, most of the reduction took place in 2017 and 2018. The number of AWP decreased by 35% and the number of venues decreased by 31%, as planned. However, there was an increase of 7% in the number of VLTs. The gross gambling revenue (GGR) from AWP decreased by 13% from 2016 to 2019, while the GGR from VLTs increased by 2%. Overall, the total consumption of EGM gambling declined by 6%. This was not proportional to the 35% reduction in number of AWP. Further, state revenue increased by 7% from AWP and by 44% from VLTs. These results suggested a substitution effect from AWP to newer VLTs. Another explanation was that the reduction had mostly targeted less profitable machines.

The Finnish data only covered the initial phase of EGM reduction since venues were closed during COVID-19. By February 2020, the number of non-casino EGMs had decreased by 5%. The GGR also decreased, but this might have been due to a long-term trend of declining EGM gambling in Finland.

How you can use this research

The researchers suggested that the EGM reduction in Italy and Finland had not been enough to reduce total consumption and the burden on public health. This study can inform research and policy decision making.

About the researchers

Virve Marionneau and **Janne Nikkinen** are affiliated with the Centre for Research on Addiction, Control, and Governance (CEACG) at the University of Helsinki in Helsinki, Finland. **Gabriele Mandolesi** is affiliated with the Università Lumsa in Rome, Italy. **Sara Rolando** is affiliated with the Research and Training Institute ECLLECTICA in Turin, Italy. For more information about this study, please contact Virve Marionneau at virve.marionneau@helsinki.fi.

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