



Responsible gambling

Portugal considers online casino ban amid coronavirus state of emergency

Government introduces public health legislation which could prohibit online casino during Covid-19 lockdown

Robert Simmons | 16 April 2020



The Portuguese government has instituted legislation that imposes a partial or total ban on online gambling for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic.

Amendments to law 10-I /2020, have inserted language which allows for “partial or total limitations on access to online gambling are established until the end of the period relating to the state of emergency, with a view to protecting consumers”.

The amendment does not state the specifics on the limitations which may be introduced or indeed if the ban will be a total or partial one, limited to specific verticals, but it is understood this will apply to online casino only.

Initial proposals published earlier this month in government bill 326/XIV/1 included both fixed odds sports betting and online gambling in the scope of any potential ban.

However, *EGR* understands that fixed-odds sports betting restrictions were dropped from the final bill due to the absence of these events from the calendar.

It is also understood that the Portuguese government is currently working on specific regulations to govern the market during this period, but no other details have been confirmed.

Initially, the bill was aimed at addressing “unlimited and uncontrolled” access to online gambling sites by Portuguese players affected by the country’s lockdown measures.

It claimed players will exhibit less impulse control as a result of the measures and may be drawn into at-risk gambling habits as a result of both this and the financial consequences of the lockdown.

Government data claims online gambling and average daily revenue has increased 18% year-on-year as a result of the closure of Portugal’s land-based casinos, with online casino average daily revenue up 24%.

Tiago Bessa, managing associate at Portuguese law firm Vieira De Almeida, said the law provided few details of potential consequences for operators, adding that it was “not well-worded and raised a lot of legal concerns”.

Speculating on what regulations the Portuguese government may look to introduce, Bessa asserted that a total ban would not be enforceable, instead claiming the government would look to introduce a similar ban on advertising to the one currently in force in Spain.

“In my opinion, it would be excessive to implement a ban and for sure that this could not be done by a simple regulation from the government,” said Bessa.

“I can understand the concern from the public authorities on this matter, but most of the topics that the law/regulation intend to cover could already be addressed under existing legal mechanisms. It does not seem like a necessary measure at this stage,” Bessa added.

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