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THE 2026 WORLD CUP REWROTE HISTORY OF BETTING. TOTAL BETTING VOLUME REACHED NEARLY $600 BILIION



The 2026 FIFA World Cup has become the biggest betting event in history. According to the analytical company GCI (Gaming Compliance International), the total volume of bets placed during the tournament reached approximately **$593 billion** (roughly CZK 12.5 trillion). The record interest of fans was supported not only by the expansion of the championship to 48 teams and 104 matches, but also by the significantly wider availability of legal online betting than at the previous World Cup in Qatar.

Nevertheless, it turns out that the illegal market has benefited mainly from the record volume of bets. GCI estimates state that around **69% of all bets**, or more than **$409 billion**, went through unregulated platforms.

The expanded championship brought more matches and more bets

This year's World Championship was the first in history in which 48 national teams participated. A longer tournament and a higher number of matches extended the period during which fans could bet, which translated into record volumes.

The International Football Federation FIFA also benefited from the record-breaking championship. Its revenue for the entire 2023-2026 commercial cycle is estimated to be around **$13 billion**, representing a year-on-year increase of more than 70% from the previous period. The championship itself was estimated to have raised around **$8.9 billion**, mainly due to higher revenues from television rights, sponsorship and ticket sales.

The regulated market has strengthened significantly

Since the 2022 World Cup, the regulatory environment has changed significantly. In the United States, legal mobile sports betting was already available in **39 states** during this year's tournament, up from around 30 four years ago.

Brazil has also undergone a significant change, entering the championship for the first time as a fully regulated market after the launch of the licensing system at the beginning of 2025. Analysts estimate that Brazil has accounted for about **10 percent of the global** World Cup betting volume.

At the same time, European markets remain heavily regulated, but different countries apply different rules, especially in the area of advertising, bonus offers or emerging prediction markets.

Records were also reported by the largest betting operators

Historically, the largest betting companies also recorded the highest interest in football during the tournament. U.S. companies FanDuel and DraftKings reported that the opening matches between the U.S. and Brazil produced the highest number of active bettors and the largest volume of bets staked on football in the history of both platforms.

The world's most visited betting brands by internet traffic during the last month included Stake, Betano, SportyBet, bet365 and Superbet tournaments. At the same time, the data confirms that the global market remains highly fragmented and no single operator clearly dominates it.

Prediction markets are gaining importance

Prediction markets were also an important phenomenon of this year's championship. Kalshi and Polymarket recorded a combined monthly trading volume of nearly **$45 billion during June**, with the greatest interest going towards contracts related to the overall winner of the World Championship.

It is the status of these platforms that remains the subject of regulatory disputes. While some states consider them financial products, others classify them as gambling requiring a license. For example, Spain has blocked access to Kalshi and Polymarket, Brazil has banned prediction markets altogether.

The black market remains the biggest winner

According to H2 Gambling Capital, the volume of bets placed with licensed operators around the world was approximately **$60 billion**. This means that the regulated sector represented only a smaller portion of all funds wagered during the tournament.

According to estimates, illegal operators accounted for more than two-thirds of all bets. According to analysts, this difference is one of the biggest challenges of the current regulation of gambling. Although legal markets continue to grow and new jurisdictions are added, record-breaking sporting events are still widely used by unlicensed platforms that are not subject to regulatory oversight or standard player protection rules.

In addition to sporting records, the 2026 World Cup also showed the ongoing transformation of the global betting market. In addition to traditional licensed bookmakers, prediction platforms are playing an increasingly important role, and at the same time, the extremely strong position of the illegal market persists, which remains one of the main problems for regulators around the world.

THE STATE IS HEADING TO PREDICTION MARKETS FOR THE FIRST TIME. POLYMARKET HAS BEEN BLACKLISTED AND MAY CHANGE THE FIGHT AGAINST ILLEGAL ONLINE GAMBLING



The Czech Republic has taken a significant step in regulating prediction markets. The Ministry of Finance included the Polymarket platform on the List of Prohibited Internet Games and access to the platform was subsequently blocked in the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic has thus joined the growing number of European countries that are intervening against prediction markets. Access to the Polymarket has been limited or blocked in recent months, for example, in Germany, Bel-

gium, Romania, Switzerland, Poland, Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Spain or, more recently, Norway and France.

This is not just another item on the list of prohibited websites. The case of Polymarket represents an important regulatory step towards prediction markets, whose legal status has become the subject of intense debates in recent years not only in the Czech Republic, but also in other European countries.

From the Black Book to the regulatory step

We have already opened the topic of prediction markets in the Czech Republic in the second edition of the Black Book of Illegal Gambling. This topic was subsequently followed by the systematic work of the IPRH within the National Platform for Combating Illegal Gambling. Its important output was a legal and comparative analysis that we presented, in which we mapped how regulators in other European countries and outside Europe approach prediction markets, including specific measures taken against Polymarket.

It was therefore not just a professional discussion about a new phenomenon. The IPRH has been working on the topic for a long time, gathering foreign experience and bringing it to the debate within the National Platform. It was this work that helped to place prediction markets in the broader context of the fight against illegal gambling and to create a basis for assessing how to approach them from the perspective of Czech regulation.

The inclusion of Polymarket on the List of Prohibited Internet Games did not come in isolation. It was preceded by systematic professional work, which began with the opening of the topic in the Black Book and continued with its systematic processing by the IPRH within the National Platform. The decision of the Ministry of Finance now shifts this work from the professional and legal level to a specific regulatory intervention.

A bet that is called differently

Prediction markets present themselves as a modern financial or information tool. However, for the average user, they work very similarly to a bet: a person puts money on an uncertain future outcome and waits to see if his guess comes true. The difference is often only in terminology. Instead of "bet", there is talk of a "contract", instead of "odds" of "probability", and instead of "winning", of "return".

Users can trade the results of real events – for example, who will win the election, how a sports match will turn out, whether a specific political decision will be made, or what temperature will be measured by a selected weather station.

European regulators have already named this problem directly. Dutch regulator KSA ordered Polymarket to cease operations in the country, stating that similar bets are not allowed even to licensees. The French regulator ANJ drew attention to addictive characteristics, lack of protection of players and the risk of manipulation of events. The British Gambling Commission, in turn, pointed out that prediction platforms cannot avoid gambling regulation just by labeling their products with different terminology.

From a marginal phenomenon to a billion-dollar business

Moreover, the importance of prediction markets cannot be judged solely by their technological novelty. Originally a marginal phenomenon, it has become a global business with volumes in the hundreds of billions of dollars. Approximately $238 billion was traded on the Kalshi platform in 2025, while Polymarket was trading about $220 billion. The monthly volumes of both platforms are in the tens of billions of dollars.

The more money is tied to the outcome of specific events, the greater the potential motivation to influence their outcome or use non-public information.

When you can bet on everything, the motivation to influence the result grows

Prediction markets don't just create the risk that people will lose money outside of the regulated gambling market. They also create a motivation to influence the events themselves or to abuse non-public information.

We know these risks in legal gambling, which is why there are rules, supervision, monitoring of suspicious bets, cooperation with sports organizations, anti-match-fixing tools, AML checks and the obligation to identify players. In prediction markets, the same risks occur in a much wider range of events, but without comparable protection.

This is shown, for example, by a case from France, where the authorities dealt with suspicious temperature fluctuations at Charles de Gaulle Airport, which coincided with profitable bets at the Polymarket. According to investigators, it was enough to physically heat the temperature sensor to influence the result of the measure-

ment, and some bets brought a profit in the order of tens of thousands of dollars. Another example is the case of an American soldier who was accused of using non-public government information about an operation against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and allegedly earned more than $400,000 on these bets.

The decision of the Ministry of Finance sets an important precedent

The inclusion of Polymarket on the List of Prohibited Internet Games sets an important precedent for the Czech market. It confirms that even new digital products cannot circumvent rules that protect players, prevent money laundering, ensure supervision of operators and create a fair playing field between legal and illegal markets.

At the same time, it is important for IPRH that this is not an isolated case of one platform, but the first concrete test of the Czech regulation's approach to an entire category of prediction markets. There are other similar platforms operating on the international market and it will therefore be important to continuously evaluate whether their offer does not meet the characteristics of prohibited gambling under Czech law.

From a regulatory step to media coverage

However, the work on the topic for IPRH did not end with the decision of the Ministry of Finance. We immediately responded to the inclusion of Polymarket on the List of Prohibited Internet Games with our own press release and actively communicated the topic with the media in the Czech Republic and abroad. In addition to the regulatory step itself, we also offered the media a broader context of prediction markets, their rapid growth and the risks they bring.

The topic aroused a significant media response in the Czech Republic and abroad. In the Czech Republic, for example, Seznam Zprávy, Deník.cz, Hrot24 and Ekonomický deník reported on it, while abroad SBC, iGB, crypto.news and European Gaming reported on it. The IPRH press release thus helped to bring the Czech view of the regulation of prediction markets into the international expert debate.

This shows the whole chain of work of the IPRH. From identifying a new risk, through expert analysis and work with regulators, to actively communicating the topic to the public and the media.

THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE HAS SETTLED THE COMMENTS. FOR AML, MOST OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE GAMBLING SECTOR REMAIN UNCHANGED



The Ministry of Finance has completed the settlement of comments on the draft Act on Economic Protection of the State (ZEOS) and on the amendment to the Gambling Act. Although it took into account some of the comments by modifying the draft or supplementing the explanatory report, its position remains unchanged on most of the fundamental requirements. It will therefore be crucial for gambling operators to prepare for extensive changes in the area of AML.

In its comments on the ZEOS, the Ministry of Finance repeatedly argues that a substantial part of the new regulation is based directly on the European AML package. According to the ministry,

the space for a different Czech regulation is therefore limited.

For example, the Ministry of Finance rejected the requirement that sanctions for gambling operators be based on GGR instead of accounting turnover. At the same time, however, it stated that the turnover represents only the maximum statutory ceiling and that the real economic situation of the operator, i.e. practically also its GGR, must be taken into account when determining a specific fine. According to the Ministry of Finance, significantly higher sanctions should be reserved especially for serious, repeated or systematic breaches of AML obligations.

The maximum number of five contact persons for communication with the Financial Analytical Office also remains unchanged. The ministry argues with the FAU's experience, according to which a larger number of contact persons can complicate communication in urgent cases. For operators who do not designate contact persons, communication will be ensured by a compliance officer.

A significant change will also be the transition of AML supervision from the FAU to the Customs Administration. The Ministry of Finance rejected the request for a more precise legal definition of the Customs Administration's direct access to operators' AML/CFT systems. According to him, it is not appropriate to set specific technical limits directly in the law. Similarly, the Ministry did not comply with the requirement for legal limits for the scope and frequency of AML reporting. However, it will add an emphasis on proportionality and minimization of administrative burdens to the explanatory report.

The interpretation of the due diligence obligation for transactions from EUR 2 000 or more remains an open question. The IPRH drew attention to the uncertainty as to whether this obligation applies only to occasional transactions or also to transactions within an existing business relationship. The Ministry of Finance did not provide a substantive interpretation of the question with reference to the direct applicability of the European AML Regulation.

On the other hand, in the case of the amendment to the Gambling Act, the Ministry of Finance has moved some practical issues. With regard to the new regulation of the prohibition of coercive practices in encouraging participation in gambling, the Ministry has admitted the possibility of a methodological opinion that should help clarify the meaning of this new term. At the same time, it explicitly stated that the passive availability of games in a user account should not be prohibited.

The ministry will also add to the deadline for the publication of game plans and permits for land-based operators. In the case of the provision allowing for the revocation of authorisation in the event of a serious infringement, it insists on wording based on a significant deterioration in the protection of health, public order or other public interest.

The most important thing for operators now is to monitor the next legislative process and prepare for the changes that the AML package will bring. The AMLR regulation will come into force on 10 July 2027, and by then the Czech regulation in the form of ZEOS must also be adopted.

POLAND'S GAMBLE BETWEEN GROWTH AND THE TAX TRAP. STRICT RULES KEEP THE MARKET UNDER CONTROL, WHILE STRENGTHENING THE GREY AREA

The Polish gambling market is one of the fastest growing in Europe. At the same time, however, they are facing a problem that is increasingly being addressed by operators and experts: high taxation and state monopoly in some areas, according to them, complicate the development of the legal market and create space for illegal offers.

In recent years, Poland has become one of the most interesting gambling markets in Central Europe. The country of nearly 38 million people benefits from a growing economy, the digitalisation of services and the high public interest in sports betting. Although the market is growing, operators point out that its further potential is limited by one of the strictest tax systems in Europe.

The Polish case shows a broader European dilemma. How to set the rules so that the state obtains adequate tax revenues, but at the same time maintains an attractive legal offer and is able to effectively limit the illegal market.



A tax system that is one of the strictest in Europe

The current form of Polish regulation is based on the 2009 Gambling Act, which was created in the atmosphere of a political scandal known as the "Blackjack-gate". The affair led to the resignation of several senior government officials and significantly influenced the state's subsequent approach to gambling regulation.

The result was the introduction of one of the harshest tax regimes in Europe. Operators of sports bets pay a tax of 12 percent on the volume of amounts wagered, not on the actual profit. Casinos then pay a 50 percent gross income tax (GGR).

In addition, players pay tax on winnings, which is collected directly through the operators.

According to the operators, the so-called turnover tax is the main problem. Unlike gross income tax, it does not take into account the actual economic result of the business and puts pressure on higher margins.

"Turnover tax is inherently against customers. It limits the opportunities to offer players a more competitive product," said Myke Foster, Director of Gaming at Fortuna Entertainment Group.

According to the analytical company H2 Gambling Capital, the average margin of sports betting in Poland is approximately 32 percent. This is significantly higher than in many other European countries. The reason for this is the operators' effort to cover the tax on the volume of bets and at the same time to offset the uncertainty that this model brings.

A change in the tax model could support the legal market

The debate on changing the Polish tax system is not new. Economist and former Finance Minister Konrad Raczkowski has previously proposed replacing the 12 percent sales tax with a system based on taxation of gross income, for example in the amount of 20 to 25 percent.

According to estimates, such a change would mean a short-term decrease in state budget revenues. With the current volume of the market, the state would probably collect less than it does today.

However, experts point out that the aim of regulation cannot only be to maximize immediate tax revenue.

"Optimal tax settings can lead to a reduction in short-term collection, but the main goal of regulation should never be only the amount of taxes collected. The key is the balance between state revenues, market competitiveness and the degree of involvement of players in the legal environment," said Ed Birkin of H2 Gambling Capital.

According to the supporters of the reform, more attractive conditions for legal operators could help reduce the share of illegal offers.

The market is growing, but illegal offers have not disappeared

The paradox of the Polish market is that despite the high tax burden, it is still growing significantly. The total volume of the gambling market, including online and brick-and-mortar operations, is expected to reach nearly $5 billion in 2026.

However, market growth alone does not automatically mean that regulation is working optimally.

According to H2 Gambling Capital's estimates, the player engagement rate for legal online sports betting is approximately between 78 and 88 percent. The situation is significantly worse for online casinos – the legal market share is estimated to be only around 59 percent.

The main problem is that illegal operators can offer products without the costs associated with regulation, taxes or player protection obligations.

"If the state restricts legal companies from offering services that customers obviously require, some players

will find these services elsewhere. And there, the state no longer has control over consumer protection or tax collection," Foster points out.

The state monopoly on online casinos remains a matter of debate

Another major issue for the Polish market is the future of the state monopoly in the field of online casinos.

Since the 2017 reform, the state-owned company Totalizator Sportowy has had the exclusive right to operate the online casino. At the same time, it also controls the market for technical games outside of land-based casinos.

Proponents of the current system argue that a state monopoly allows for better control of the market and a reduction in the negative effects of gambling.

Critics, on the other hand, argue that banning the legal offer of online casinos by private licensed companies only strengthens the illegal sector.

"Customers know that online casinos exist. They see them on social networks and the Internet. If legal brands cannot offer them a regulated alternative, the state paradoxically increases the space for illegal operators," said Foster.

However, according to a 2025 survey by Ariadna Research, part of the public supports the state monopoly. About half of the respondents supported the maintenance of the current system, while 16 percent were against.

Politics will be decisive

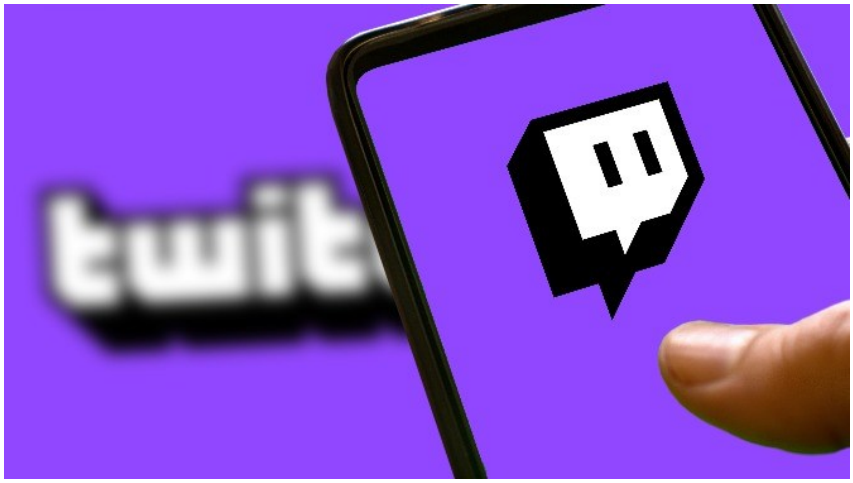
Eventual change in the Polish gambling system will ultimately be primarily a political issue. The upcoming parliamentary elections in 2027 may be the point at which the topic of reform will be reopened.

However, the current main political parties are not very inclined to significant liberalization. The historical experience of the Blackjack-gate affair still influences the political sensitivity of the topic.

Finland, which is preparing a transition from a state monopoly to a licensing model for online gambling, may be a certain inspiration. If Finland's reform proves successful, it may strengthen the arguments of supporters of change in other European countries as well.

Poland thus faces a similar question as many other regulated markets: whether it is better to maximize short-term tax collection or to create an environment in which the legal market is attractive enough to compete with illegal offers.

SWEDEN WARNS AGAINST ADVERTISING ILLEGAL WEBSITES. INFLUENCERS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS ARE BECOMING THE MAIN TOOL



The Swedish gambling regulator draws attention to the growing importance of influencers, affiliate networks and social media in promoting illegal online casinos. According to the authority, the channels, which have a significant reach especially among younger Internet users, are increasingly being used by unlicensed operators to reach Swedish players.

A new report by the Swedish gambling supervisory authority, Spelinspektionen, maps the ways in which illegal operators promote their services and circumvent established control mechanisms. The most important channels include affiliate marketing, streaming platforms, social networks or closed communication groups.

"The illegal market is increasingly adapting to the digital

environment. Operators use tools that allow them to quickly change domains, hide the true origin of advertising campaigns and target specific groups of users," the regulator points out.

Affiliate networks as a gateway to illegal casinos

One of the main problems, according to the Swedish authority, is affiliate networks and so-called link farms – websites created to redirect users to illegal gambling services.

These domains often only work for a short time, yet they can reach thousands of users. After the intervention of regulators or blockages, they subsequently disappear and appear under new names.

The regulator's attention has also been drawn to websites using Swedish Internet domains (.se), which can act as local services. However, in reality, they redirect users to foreign gambling sites without a Swedish license.

Influencers open the way to younger players for the illegal market

According to the report, influencers who promote illegal operators through social networks and streaming platforms play a significant role.

The problem mainly affects services such as Twitch or Kick. Influencers use affiliate links, promo codes, contests, or various forms of user engagement.

While Twitch has already restricted the promotion of a number of illegal gambling brands in the past, according to the Swedish regulator, some activity has shifted to alternative platforms. At the same time, some influencers have begun to target foreign audiences or move their activities to other social networks.

The regulator also drew attention to the use of large social platforms such as Meta Platforms, TikTok, Snapchat or X. This is where hidden advertising campaigns, affiliate links or content that is not always obvious that it is paid promotion appear.

The use of foreign influencers who have started creating content in Swedish, or the use of deepfake technologies, where the faces of celebrities are falsely used for promotion, also raises concerns.

Artificial intelligence complicates the control of digital advertising

The Swedish regulator also draws attention to the use of more advanced digital advertising tools. According to him, illegal operators use programmatic advertising and tools based on artificial intelligence, which can help circumvent lists of blocked websites or hide the true purpose of advertising campaigns.

SMS campaigns are also a problem. The authority has registered repeated cases of messages promoting illegal gambling, which were also sent to people using Sweden's Spelpaus self-exclusion system.

From August this year, stricter technical requirements for the operation of the Spelpaus system are to come into force in Sweden. The changes are expected to include, for example, more thorough checks, stricter verification and new identifiers for licensees.

Illegal advertising is also moving to closed communities

The regulator also drew attention to the use of encrypted or semi-closed communication platforms, especially the Telegram service. These are used to distribute affiliate links, organize contests or distribute advertising codes.

Attention was also focused on the area of esports. According to the Swedish authority, so-called skin-betting platforms and cryptocurrency casinos are increasingly gaining ground here, reaching a younger audience through sponsorship of esports tournaments.

The Czech Republic is following the same trends

The findings of the Swedish regulator confirm a trend that is also appearing on the Czech market. Even in the Czech Republic, illegal operators are increasingly not focusing only on the classic form of internet advertising, but are using social networks, influencers, affiliate networks or other forms of digital promotion.

Europe tightens rules for influencer marketing

The Swedish report comes at a time when the European Union is preparing further rules for digital advertising. The draft European Digital Fairness Act (DFA) is expected to bring stricter rules for some forms of targeted advertising and greater responsibility for online platforms and influencers.

At the same time, the regulation of influencer marketing is becoming one of the main topics of the European debate on gambling advertising. Similar issues are also being addressed by other European countries that are trying to limit the promotion of illegal operators outside the controlled licensed market.

In Sweden, promoting gambling without a license is a criminal offense under the law. A notable case was March 2026, when the influencer received a 22-month prison sentence for economic crimes related to, among other things, the promotion of illegal gambling.

This was the first known case in Sweden where the promotion of illegal online gambling led to a conviction.

The experience of Sweden and other European countries shows that the fight against the illegal market is no longer just about blocking websites. Controlling digital advertising, cooperating with technology platforms and the ability to react quickly to new marketing strategies of illegal operators are playing an increasingly important role. The same challenges are also being addressed by the Czech market, where illegal offers are also increasingly moving to the online environment and using new communication channels.