Allwyn and Austrian Lotteries with continued misconduct in youth protection failures

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The Austrian Spielerhilfe Association (Player-Aid) continues to identify major violations of youth protection at the Austrian Lotteries. Major shareholder of Austrian Lotteries is Allwyn, who is going to run "The National Lottery" starting with 1st of February 2024 in UK. Already in April there were 70 reports of youth protection violations in Salzburg and Upper Austria. The Austrian Lotteries raised the minimum age from 16 to 18 years after. In further mystery shopping checks conducted out by the Player Protection Association, in which 12 to 14-year-old children were used, gambling products were again able to be purchased in 60% of all cases. Spielerhilfe provided this evidence at a press conference on 13th October in Vienna, Austria.

“The protection of minors is still not ensured. In more than half of all test purchases, children were able to purchase Austrian Lottery products, even though they should only be available to those aged 18 and over. The company has big problems to control its retail partners,” says Christoph Holubar, chairman and spokesman for Spielerhilfe (Player-Aid).

Spielerhilfe (Player-Aid) has found that the recent age increase is a "greenwashing" and "cover-up" of the youth protection problem of the Austrian Lotteries and Allwyn. If in over 60% of all test cases children - who were clearly too young - were still able to purchase gambling products, it is far away to speak of functioning player and youth protection.

Youth protection scandal uncovered in Salzburg

During surveys in the federal state of Salzburg, Spielerhilfe found out that - contrary to the new version of the Salzburg Youth Act that has been in force there since March 2019 - the products were illegally offered for sale to those aged 16 and older, although according to the law this should only have been done from the age of 18 years and above.

For years, the Austrian Lotteries failed to inform the retail partners in Salzburg about the current youth protection regulations and therefore allowed the products to be sold to those aged starting with 16 years. The company ignored the law over an extended period of 4.5 years and offered its gambling products for purchase to those aged 16 years and above. The Lotteries knew, based on various studies, that children and young people in particular are susceptible to problematic gambling and gambling addiction.

“The Lotteries ignored the legal situation in Salzburg and illegally sold their products to a target group that was too young through the retail partners. In doing so, the company risked that its contractual partners would continually violate applicable laws and commit administrative offenses,” said Holubar.

The years of disregard for the law in Salzburg give great cause for concern and raise the question of whether the Austrian Lotteries and Allwyn are actually a reliable partner when it comes to compliance in the area of youth and player protection, according to the Spielerhilfe at the press conference.

Tough measures were taken against Austrian Lotteries

During the press conference, Spielerhilfe brought harsh consequences to the table as a means of dealing with the misconduct that had been highlighted. These include a further 24 reports of violations of youth protection when selling lottery products in Salzburg on the basis of the Youth Act. The association also suggested a reliability check with the gambling licensing body, the Federal Ministry of Finance. This is also due to the serious violations of youth protection in Salzburg since 2019. The report was also sent to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, which is responsible for consumer and youth protection, as well as the respective youth protection offices in the individual federal states.

According to the Salzburg Chamber of Commerce, violations of youth protection can have profound consequences: “Violations are punished with fines of EUR 250 up to a maximum fine of EUR 14,600 or with a prison sentence of up to 4 weeks. Repeated violations can also be punished with the revocation of the business license,” says the Chamber of Commerce in an information sheet.

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For this reason, Spielerhilfe reported the serious youth protection violations in Salzburg to the Chamber of Commerce and suggested to consider banning them from trading.

“As a basic requirement, the Austrian Lotteries must ensure proper player protection. The ongoing violations in Salzburg, but also in the other federal states, confirm that this is not guaranteed. The protection of young game participants is an absolute basic requirement that fails here. That is why the responsible authorities should now check whether the Austrian Lotteries actually have the necessary reliability to be able to continue to keep the gambling license,” says Christoph Holubar from Spielerhilfe.

Spielerhilfe calls for the youth protection problems to be addressed immediately

At the same time, a solution was also presented on how to get the youth and player protection problem at the Austrian Lotteries under control: In opinion of Spielerhilfe, it should be possible to resolve these problems through mandatory registration. Participation in lottery, scratch cards or other games of chance offered by the lottery group should no longer be possible anonymously, the association demands:

“Anonymous participation in the game actually makes player protection almost impossible. There is no possibility of self-blocking for gambling addicts, no control over gambling behavior and, as can be seen from our surveys, no functioning youth protection. A registration requirement would also remove the responsibility for age checks from the over 5,000 sales outlets, thus enabling perfect protection of young people and players,” concludes Holubar.

The association called on the Federal Ministry of Finance as the supervisory authority and other authorities to take action so that the current violations are remedied immediately.

Allwyn not responding to Spielerhilfe requests

Instead of addressing the problems, the management team of Austrian Lotteries and Allwyn is not responding to enquiries of Spielerhilfe. Allwyn hired the UK company Brunswick Group to contact journalists who reported about the youth protection issues. The plan was to motivate journalists to delete previousely published articles. Brunswick used dirty campaigning methods and tried to discredit the Association Spielerhilfe and its chairman.

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