

Casinos and lotteries grew in popularity in 2006

The Swiss spent more on lotteries and gambling in 2006 than ever before, parting with USD 2.31 billion, according to a report released by the Federal Justice Office.

But Swiss lotteries suffered from the popularity of the massive European lottery, Euro Millions, which last year became the most popular game among Swiss punters.

The Swiss staked an average of USD 307 in 2006, up from USD 302 in 2005. This growth is part of a trend that has continued unabated since the turn of the century, according to the Federal Justice Office, which published the figures this week.

The Euro Millions game and its huge jackpots took first place in the popularity stakes, with sales increasing by 75 per cent to reach USD 447.9 million. Swiss Lotto suffered from the competition, losing more than a third of its turnover, which dropped to USD 339.4 million. Sports bets with Sporttip also fell slightly and were worth USD 32 million last year.

Under Swiss law, all profits made from gambling and lotteries are turned over for social or public utility causes. No less than USD 481.6 million was transferred to cantonal lottery and sports funds, as well as sporting associations. This amount was up from USD 403 million in 2005.

Switzerland's 19 casinos paid a total of USD 406 million in taxes last year, funds that were used to prop up the national pension system or that went directly to the cantons with smaller gaming facilities.

The casinos' profits USD 784 million were also higher than the lotteries in 2006 for the first time, thanks mostly to the popularity of slot machines. Despite revenue from gaming table

stagnating, growth was more than nine per cent, outstripping that of the lotteries.

The lotteries and casinos are engaged in a fierce battle for the content of customers' wallets. The lotteries have been betting part of their future revenue on electronic versions of their products, but the use of this type of machine has been banned outside casinos.

Switzerland's lotteries reckon that the electronic market could represent up to 80 per cent of their revenue in the future, as sales of more traditional products decline. Earlier this year they appealed the ban with the backing of the cantons.