13th June 2021

Economic and Social Research Council

Polaris House

North Star Avenue

Swindon

SN21UJ

Dear ESRC,

The *Limiting Virus Transmission during Sporting Mega Event* project aims to analyse, inform, and evaluate the COVID-19 mitigation measures at EURO 2020. We have an update on the project progress from fans who attended matches as observers (11 fans, 31 observations) at Hampden Park in Scotland and Wembley Stadium in England. These broadly align to concerns with the following themes:

**Entry to/Exit from stadium**

While there was a staggered entry protocol into both stadiums, many observers indicated that there was no procedure in place for exiting the stadium. Observer 3 (ENGCRO) said, ‘***the exit from the stadium was the standard procedure prior to any covid regulations. There were no staged exits, and all exits led to the stadium perimeter where fans were free to go wherever they wanted***.’

Another observer (5: SCOCZE) said, ‘***not crush, but certainly usual busy squeezing into gaps that happens at the end of a normal match at Hampden***.’ A third observer (21: ENGSCO) said, '***I had confidence in the process from a general safety perspective, but from a covid control perspective it begs the question as to the point of a staggered entry over the course of 2.5-3 hrs to help with distancing, to then just let 25,000 people out at the same time. We were shoulder to shoulder with other fans as we left***’.

**Face coverings**

Many spectators ignored requests to wear masks, coupled with a failure of stewards to enforce it in seating areas. There was also confusion in the guidance provided to spectators in relation to face coverings, where observer 5 (SCOCZE) mentioned that they had received a notification by UEFA lifting the enforcement of mask wearing when seated, but this was later re-enforced at the match. Fewer than half of all spectators were wearing a mask on the concourse even though it was required. And, as recalled by observer 14 (ENGSCO), even less so were in the stands, '***I would guess at around 90% of those in the section did not have a mask on and did not pay attention to the multiple reminders on the screen***.’

**Social distancing**

The emotion of football had an impact on social distancing measures, which had been put in place inside the stadium to comply with public health guidance, of at least 1.5 metres between every spectator. However, some observers noticed that people often greeted one another through social contact (i.e., hugging, fist pumping, jumping, and cuddling), and this was heightened due to alcoholism and goal celebrations. Notably, observer 21 (ENGSCO) experienced a ‘***party***’ like ‘***carnival friendly atmosphere***’ of singing and chanting loudly, holding beer cups with shirts off. Observer 24 (ENGGER) was ‘***mobbed by other fans as England scored … No one cared about any regulations or people’s personal space***.’ Another observer (29: ENGDEN) also intimated that the occasion outweighed COVID-19 guidance, as ‘***there was clearly no fear from the majority about COVID, the moment of watching England win a semi-final of a major competition for the first time in 55 years meant way more***.’ Finally, Observer 21 (ENGSCO) said that a fan, who was intoxicated, was ‘***embracing people who he clearly didn’t know … grabbing people, putting his arm around them, talking right into their ear ... I would have been really unhappy if he had been close enough to touch me***.’

**Seating arrangement**

Seating had been allocated within the stadium, with at least one space per seat for every spectator. But many were not seated and stood next to others they knew. Whilst this might help to create ‘***greater distance between bubbles***’ (Obs.4: ENGCRO), it resulted in there being fewer spectators in some stands compared with others. Indeed, observer 4 (ENGCRO) moved ‘***freely***' near to the television studio and ‘***at no point were [they] challenged***.’ This same observer and another (1: ENGCROA) noticed 3-4000 England fans had relocated in the stand next to the Croatian fans but were separated by a ‘***wall***’ of stewards between the two sections. Spectators were not keeping to 1.5m distance between their seats and ‘***stewards were unable to communicate this with fans due to the size of the section***.’

With increased stadia capacity at the semi-final matches, one of the observers (22: ENGGER) said, ‘***It was impossible to keep 1.5m away from other people in the seating area, as even with one seat kept free in between fans, that is less than 1 meter***.’ Another observer (28: ENGDEN) could not even sit in his allocated seat because he ‘***couldn’t reach*** [his] ***seat due to the row being completely full***.’

**COVID-19 tests/proof of vaccination**

Whilst COVID-19 testing was mandatory for matches at Wembley Stadium, this was not the case at Hampden Park. At Wembley, spectators were required to show proof by email or text of a negative Lateral Flow Test or full vaccination. However, one observer (4: ENGCRO), who attended multiple matches, noticed ‘***the person [Wembley/UEFA staff member] didn’t confirm the name on the text with my ID***.’ On a second occasion, this same observer (17: ENGCZE) said, ‘***as you entered the queuing system a member of staff wanted visual evidence of a negative lateral flow test. As far as I could tell they were simply checking date and result (negative/positive). Nothing was scanned, and no ID was checked***.’ And on a third occasion, the same observer (Obs.23: ENGGER) found ‘***as per all the previous games the details I showed by text were not cross referenced to my ID***.’

Another observer (29: ENGDEN) gave the impression that the absence of cross-checking had come to the attention of UEFA, yet still slipped through the net, ‘***UEFA did announce to us via a security meeting beforehand that spot checks would be done to check the vaccination/negative result status. I didn’t see this happen, but it was interesting that they felt the need to do this. They didn’t explain their reasons, but it was clear they were serious about ensuring the safety of supporters***.’

**Changes to stadium guidance**

The protocol inside each stadium varied but was specific to each of the host nation’s public health guidance. Whilst group stage matches at Wembley and Hampden were limited to 25% stadia capacity, there ‘***was an attempt to return to normal as a fully operating test event***’ for matches beyond the group-stages (Obs.26: ITAESP). Indeed, stadia capacities increased for the quarter-final (45,000), semi-final and final (60,000) matches. Face coverings also only became mandatory in the concourse areas, and not in the stadium bowl. But as the guidance eased, so did compliance, as an observer (23: ENGGER) recalled, ‘***the whole end section was jumping around in one massive huddle or hundreds/ thousands of fans ... There was no adherence or consideration to covid guidelines at all***.’ Another observer (24: ENGGER) noticed that ‘***the hand sanitiser station was being used as a bin effectively for beer cups to be placed on***!’

**Ticketing**

Some fans, who had invalid tickets, gained illegitimate access to matches at Wembley Stadium. This was reiterated by Observer 29 (ENGDEN) who said, ‘***it was clear that some fans were exploiting the access points to the stadium, with some having screenshots on their phone of other people’s tickets … There were some stewards on hand to guide the fans to an exit point in the barriers, but some young fans decided to escape from the stewards and run up the stairs to the stadium. Some were successful in getting away, others weren’t***.’

We believe these preliminary insights will be of importance to the UK Government, Scottish Government, UEFA, and governing bodies of sport for the planning of future Sporting Mega Events, especially given the ongoing threat of COVID-19 to public health.

Yours Sincerely,

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