

International sporting events during the COVID-19 pandemic

Presidency background paper

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a wide-ranging impact on various areas of sport in the European Union and worldwide. Not least affected are the changed framework conditions with regard to the planning, financing, organisation and implementation of national and international sporting events¹ – and thus also the professional or business activities of athletes, coaches, staff, sports organisations, leagues, etc. For example, major sporting events such as the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the 2020 UEFA European Football Championship, the 2020 European Aquatics Championships, the 2020 European Athletics Championships, the French Open (Roland Garros) and Wimbledon tennis tournaments, and various cycling events (e.g. the Tour de France, the Giro d'Italia, the Vuelta a España), as well as golf and equestrian tournaments, have had to be cancelled or

¹ The term 'international sporting events' in this paper includes European sporting events as well as league competitions and world cups.

postponed. Even some events that were only planned for 2021 have been postponed for precautionary reasons or due to scheduling conflicts (e.g. the UEFA Women's Euro 2021, FIBA Eurobasket 2021, the World Games 2021 and the World Athletics Championships 2021).

Sports competitions can only be held during the pandemic if specific hygiene plans are developed and implemented in coordination with the public authorities responsible for public health protection. One of the aims is to prevent sporting events from becoming drivers of the pandemic.

An essential element of these hygiene plans is that sporting events may take place either without spectators or only with a significantly reduced number of spectators. This not only has a negative impact on the atmosphere at the events, but often also results in considerable loss of income.

In addition, the conditions under which teams or individual athletes, their coaches, support staff and other officials may enter the country where the event is to take place and the conditions under which they may return to their country of origin after the event (possibly requiring

several days of quarantine and testing) depend on the rules of the relevant Member States and local authorities. This applies in particular if the countries concerned have been classified as 'risk areas'. In addition, the health conditions and requirements are constantly evolving. These circumstances sometimes create considerable uncertainty for all concerned, regarding both the organisation of and participation in international sporting events.

The rules in question therefore affect the right of these persons to move freely within the European Union. In this context, it should be kept in mind that, in principle, the adoption of measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic is the responsibility of each Member State. While until recently there was no common EU approach in this respect, on 13 October 2020 the Council Recommendation on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was adopted on the basis of a proposal from the European Commission (doc. 11689/1/20 REV 1).

For the policy debate at the informal video conference of EU Sports Ministers, the Presidency has decided to invite representatives of various sports organisations, who will be invited to report on the impact the pandemic has had on their sports or on specific sports events. Ministers will then have the opportunity to make comments and ask questions.

Without prejudice to the debate triggered by the external guests, and as a complement to it, the Presidency invites Ministers to focus their interventions² on the following key questions:

1. What experience have you had with international sporting events organised in your country since the outbreak of the pandemic, in particular in terms of challenges faced and cooperation mechanisms?
2. How do you assess the need for increased exchange at EU level in the context of international sports events?

² Maximum three minutes per Minister.