

DCMS Call for Evidence – Key Points

Introduction

The Centre for Sport and Human Rights (CSHR) is a new organization that was borne out of collaboration between sports bodies, governments (including the UK government), intergovernmental organisations, sponsors, broadcasters, NGOs and trade unions to create a world of sport that fully respects human rights following the strong first steps made on integrating sustainability standards as part of the London 2012 Olympic Games. CSHR also serves as secretariat, along with the UN Global Compact UK Network, for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Sport, Modern Slavery and Human Rights.

The impacts of the COVID-19 crisis have been vast and evident. No sector has been untouched by the crisis, but certain sectors including tourism, hospitality and sport have felt the effects more acutely than others. Before the pandemic, the sport industry was [estimated to be worth](#) just shy of USD 500 billion annually, and while experts say it is still too early to grasp the full impact, KPMG [estimates](#) that the financial hit to the “Big Five” football leagues in Europe (the UK, Spain, Germany, Italy and France) stands at €4 billion in lost broadcasting, sponsorship and match day revenue if the remainder of the season is not completed. Early [projections](#) suggest that projected revenue of global sports for 2020 is only likely to reach 54% of what was estimated pre-pandemic. Impacts have not only been financial – they have included the cancellation and postponement of major sporting events, the loss of jobs, and increased uncertainty among athletes, many of whom were in their final stages of preparation for what should have been the peak of their careers – the 2020 Summer Olympics, now postponed until 2021.

This submission will focus on the impact from COVID-19 on people in the sports industry, and how, by putting people first, DCMS and the UK Government can ensure that the sport sector and the country builds back better. The focus will be on the impact to people to:

1. Ensure that government spending during the recovery goes to those who have experienced the most severe impacts from the crisis
2. Ensure that issues beyond just the financial impact are taken into consideration
3. Ensure that public funding on sport is better aligned with sporting values such as non-discrimination and fair play

1. What has been the immediate impact of COVID-19 on athletes and what are the likely long-term consequences?

There are several issues affecting athletes with regard to the impacts of COVID-19 and return to play scenarios including:

- Issues on safe return to play – This includes ensuring that the return of sport does not compromise the broader public health situation, that athletes are not held legally or economically responsible for additional risks associated with COVID-19 and that player health and safety is not compromised for the sake of an accelerated return to play

- Unknown long-term health impacts of coronavirus – Some preliminary studies suggest that the virus could leave scarring in the lungs or cause inflammation of the heart which, while possibly not significant or very noticeable for the average person, can have considerable and detrimental impacts for an athletes’ career
- Support for under-funded sports – As return to play plans are put in place for some of the UK’s larger sports, it is important to remember that many smaller sports and their athletes will feel the impacts much more acutely

2. What has been the immediate impact of COVID-19 on women’s sport and what are the likely long-term consequences?

The impact of COVID-19 is already being felt harder by women and girls in many areas of life due to gender inequalities, and this is mirrored in sport. Most of the discussion on return to play and the economic impacts to the sport sector has focused on the impact on elite, and mostly male, sport. Sports leagues like the Premier League will undoubtedly face significant economic challenges, but nevertheless, are in a much stronger financial position than most. Other, typically under-funded areas, such as women’s sport, do not. Issues facing women’s sport include:

- Appearance of prioritisation of men’s leagues – In part because of different ownership structures, men’s leagues are placing significant time and resources into returning to play while women’s leagues have simply been cancelled. This creates the impression that men’s sports must continue while women’s sports don’t have to.
- Women’s sport in jeopardy – 2019 was a great year for women’s sport and generated significant momentum, which it was hoped would translate into greater sponsorship revenue in 2020, but Covid-19 has threatened that and the future of many leagues, thus reinforcing the gender norm that men’s sport matters more than women’s sport.
- Significant financial burden – While all sport faces significant economic challenges, women’s sport is particularly fragile due to the financial models in place, and the economic insecurity is more significant for both leagues and individuals as leagues are cancelled and pay for female athletes becomes even more uncertain.
- Additional barriers for women – Women face gender-specific barriers to grassroots participation in exercise and sport and have consistently been less active than men in Sport England Active Lives (and previously, Active People) data. Covid-19 has exacerbated existing barriers to women’s participation in sport and exercise and introduced new ones.
- Opportunities to motivate women to participate in exercise and sport – For some inactive women, the lockdown has provided time and motivation to take up exercise or increase the amount they are doing. Furthermore, the experience of lockdown has encouraged societal shifts, such as increased working from home. As the lockdown is lifted, we should capitalise on the opportunities provided by the “new normal” to help women get and stay active.

3. What has been the immediate impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) athletes and communities and what are the likely long-term consequences?

Women's sport is one sub-sector that requires particular attention of DCMS, as is the impact of COVID-19 on BAME athletes and communities. The impact on these communities includes:

- Greater health threat – extensive research and evidence suggests that people from BAME backgrounds are more likely to die from COVID-19, although it is not well understood exactly why.
- Concerns from BAME athletes – given the greater health risk, many BAME athletes have spoken out about not feeling comfortable returning to play
- Higher risk areas – there is also evidence to suggest that certain occupations are experiencing higher death rates due to COVID-19 and that these sectors have a higher percentage of BAME workers which is important to consider in advising on return to play

4. What is the immediate impact of COVID-19 on trafficking and modern slavery in the sport sector and what are the likely long-term impacts?

While female workers and BAME workers bare more significant impacts due to existing inequalities, so too do migrant workers – this is no different in the sport sector. Workers who may have been trafficked or are victims of modern slavery are particularly vulnerable as they face social isolation and a lack of access to resources. Impacts on these communities related to sport include:

- Lack of reporting – Football migration and trafficking appears now to be of low priority, whereby its victims are at the bottom of the pyramid in terms of welfare and protection.
- Lack of access to support services – Migrant workers, be they migrant athletes or working on sport infrastructure, will already have limited access to resources and with existing resources being concentrated around response to the pandemic, their access is even more limited

5. How effectively has the support provided by DCMS and arms length bodies addressed the sector's needs?

In [publishing](#) its 'stage three guidance', DCMS mentioned that they consulted the "Deputy Chief Medical Officer of England, Public Health England, and medical representatives from across the Olympics, Paralympics and other sports governing bodies", however it does not mention any consultation with athletes themselves, nor which sports were represented in consultation with governing bodies. This is deeply concerning as athletes are the ones who are potentially putting themselves at higher risk of contracting the virus to accelerate return to play agendas, and many of the well-represented sports on national and international medical committees are not the sports who will need the most support in emerging from this crisis.

Sport England did however setup a [Community Emergency Fund](#) early in the crisis whose purpose is to provide community sport and physical activity organisations with support if they are experiencing short-term financial hardship or the threat of ceased operations due to COVID-19. In particular, the Fund prioritises organisations who:

- Deliver activities in deprived areas
- Work with the following groups in particular: women and girls, LGBTI+, persons with disabilities, Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups and older people
- Can demonstrate that they have been actively staying in touch with their participants during this period
- Can demonstrate that they are at risk of ceasing to operate should they not receive support

While the fund was setup with community and grassroots funds in mind, the criteria used can and should be applied by DCMS to the wider sport sector.

6. Conclusions and recommendations / lessons learned

The coronavirus crisis was unprecedented and many governments did what they could to react as quickly and as efficiently as possible. The situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic is evolving quickly and with global daily cases still on the rise, it is important to remember that the threat of a second wave remains a significant possibility. Nevertheless, sport will have an increasingly important role to play the weeks and months to come to ensure that the recovery that leaves no one behind. Sporting activities and events are the perfect opportunity to bring communities back together following months of physical distancing.

While the UK is currently at work on response, resilience and recovery plans, there are a few lessons that can be learned to ensure that in the event of a second wave or another crisis, the response is better, and a series of recommendations of how to build back a fairer and stronger sport sector for the UK.

Lessons learned

- ✓ When considering economic support packages, consider which sub-sectors (be it smaller sports, women's sport, grassroots programmes etc.) are likely to be more severely impacted and prioritise them
- ✓ Ensure that athletes are consulted on in return to play plans and work to keep them continuously informed as the situation develops
- ✓ Rather than prioritising guidance on return to play, focus on providing guidelines for sports bodies on how to manage postponement and furlough schemes, so that women's leagues are not dropped and athletes are not left in such precarious positions
- ✓ Capture as much data as possible as early as possible to better understand whether certain groups are more vulnerable, and factor this in to return to play plans, including for workers around the stadiums, not just for athletes

Recommendations to build back better

- ✓ Take immediate steps to ensure that no athletes are being forced to sign insurance liability waivers in any leagues operating in the UK
- ✓ Ensure that arms-length bodies of DCMS, particularly those that allocate funding such as UK Sport and Sport England, have procedures to effectively consult athletes on decisions affecting them, particularly female athletes and athletes of colour

- ✓ When using public funds, include criteria such as equal distribution of funds to men's and women's disciplines as a condition of funding to sports governing bodies
- ✓ With less sport content to broadcast, consider filling gaps in TV schedules with less well-followed sports, including smaller sports and women's sport
- ✓ Conduct a study to better understand why certain ethnicities seem to be more vulnerable to this pandemic, why there are higher death rates in certain sectors, and prioritise recovery plans in line with findings
- ✓ Conduct a comprehensive study on trafficking and modern slavery in sport to better understand the scale of the issue in sport, and how best to respond in future