The 2026 men's FIFA World Cup is here and a 28-year wait is finally over: Norway plays tomorrow!

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Abstract

This work studies the travel distances of the teams in the group stage of the FIFA World Cup from efficiency and fairness perspectives. As efficiency measure, we focus on the total distance traveled by the teams. As fairness measure, we focus on the differences between the distances traveled by the teams. To assess these measures, the group stage scheduling problem is formulated as a multi-league scheduling problem with multiple shared venues and other practical features. This problem can be modelled by an integer linear programming model. The model is run using data for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, an event which has raised special concerns due to the relatively long distances between venues. Results of the model are compared with the schedule implemented in practice by FIFA. How fair and efficient is FIFA's solution?

In the preface of the Norway's first match in the group stage after 28 years, I will also dare to share with you a couple of recent works in the literature which attempt to predict, among others, the chances of Norway winning the tournament.

FOR Discussion series paper link: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=6747160.