

FIFA World Cup 2026: The Largest Tournament in History, but Will the Economic Legacy Last?**Key Takeaways:**

- FIFA World Cup 2026 will be the largest tournament in history, featuring 48 teams, 104 matches, and 16 host cities across the United States, Canada, and Mexico, with more than 6.5 million expected attendees.
- OpenEconomics estimates the tournament could generate US\$40.9 billion in global GDP and support 824,000 jobs, including US\$17.2 billion in GDP gains and 185,000 jobs in the United States.
- Tourism and service sectors are expected to capture most of the benefits, with tourism spending projected at US\$7.5 billion (54% of total event-related expenditure), while airlines and broadcasters could earn up to US\$1 billion and over US\$500 million in additional revenue, respectively.
- Host cities face significant costs associated with security, transportation, and infrastructure, while historical evidence suggests that mega sporting events often experience substantial cost overruns and deliver lower-than-expected economic returns.
- Despite boosting spending and business activity during the tournament, long-term economic gains are expected to remain limited, with Goldman Sachs estimating that World Cup 2026 will raise U.S. GDP by only around 0.05%.

A Short-Term Economic Boost Rather Than a Structural Growth Driver

2026, the tournament will become larger than ever before, expanding from 32 to 48 teams and from 64 to 104 matches across 16 host cities in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. With more than 6.5 million expected attendees, the event is expected to boost spending across tourism, hospitality, transportation, entertainment, and related services.

According to OpenEconomics, the event could generate approximately US\$40.9 billion in global economic output and support around 824,000 jobs worldwide. The United States is expected to receive the largest share of benefits, with GDP increasing by roughly US\$17.2 billion and employment rising by around 185,000 jobs.

Beyond direct visitor spending, the tournament is also expected to generate multiplier effects as hotels, restaurants, transportation providers, retailers, and local suppliers increase hiring and purchase additional goods and services to accommodate higher demand.

However, compared with the size of the U.S. economy, which exceeds US\$30 trillion, the overall macroeconomic impact remains modest. Goldman Sachs estimates that the tournament will raise U.S. GDP by only around 0.05%, suggesting that World Cup 2026 is better viewed as a temporary demand boost rather than a structural driver of long-term growth.

Tourism and Services Will Benefit the Most

Tourism spending is expected to be the main economic beneficiary, accounting for approximately US\$7.5 billion, or 54% of total event-related expenditure. Host cities across North America are projected to receive

around US\$6.4 billion in visitor spending through hotels, restaurants, transportation, retail, and entertainment activities.

Accommodation and food services are expected to generate the largest gains in the United States, contributing approximately US\$2.4 billion in value added, followed by real estate and wholesale-retail sectors. More broadly, the benefits are likely to be concentrated in visitor-facing service industries, while manufacturing and export-oriented sectors will see limited direct impact.

The tournament is also expected to increase demand for air travel and cross-border transportation. Allianz Research estimates that airlines could generate up to US\$1 billion in additional revenue, while Morgan Stanley projects that media rights holders could earn more than US\$500 million in advertising revenue from record global viewership. Consumer spending is also expected to rise, particularly on food and beverages (32%) and streaming services (28%).

Not all spending, however, remains within host economies. A portion of the revenue generated during the tournament flows to FIFA, multinational sponsors, global hotel chains, airlines, media companies, and other international firms, reducing the net economic gains retained by local communities.

Rising Costs and Operational Challenges

While FIFA captures most revenues from ticket sales, sponsorships, and broadcasting rights, host cities bear substantial costs related to security, transportation, public services, and stadium upgrades.

Toronto's estimated hosting cost has risen to approximately US\$380 million, while the U.S. federal government has allocated more than US\$625 million for security support across the 11 U.S. host cities.

Research by Oxford University's Bent Flyvbjerg shows that major sporting events historically experience average cost overruns of around 172%, highlighting the risk that actual expenditures could significantly exceed initial budgets.

Ticket Prices, Visa Restrictions, and Geopolitical Risks

The high cost of attending the tournament may also limit visitor demand. According to World Cup Guide, the average ticket price for World Cup 2026 is estimated at around US\$1,300, roughly ten times higher than the inflation-adjusted average ticket price of the 1994 tournament.

At the same time, stricter visa and immigration policies could constrain international arrivals. Allianz Research notes that visa rejection rates exceed 40% for some countries, while the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA) reports that around 80% of hotels across the 11 U.S. host cities are experiencing booking levels below expectations. Higher travel costs, visa restrictions, and geopolitical uncertainty could therefore reduce some of the tournament's anticipated economic benefits.

Can the World Cup Deliver a Lasting Economic Legacy?

Historical evidence suggests that the long-term economic benefits of hosting the World Cup are often smaller than pre-tournament projections.

Economists Robert Baade and Victor Matheson estimated that the economic impact of the 1994 FIFA World Cup in the United States fell US\$5.5–9.3 billion short of original forecasts. Brazil spent more than

US\$11 billion hosting the 2014 tournament, yet post-event economic returns were relatively limited, while the IMF estimated that World Cup 2022 boosted Qatar's economy by only 0.7–1.0% of GDP.

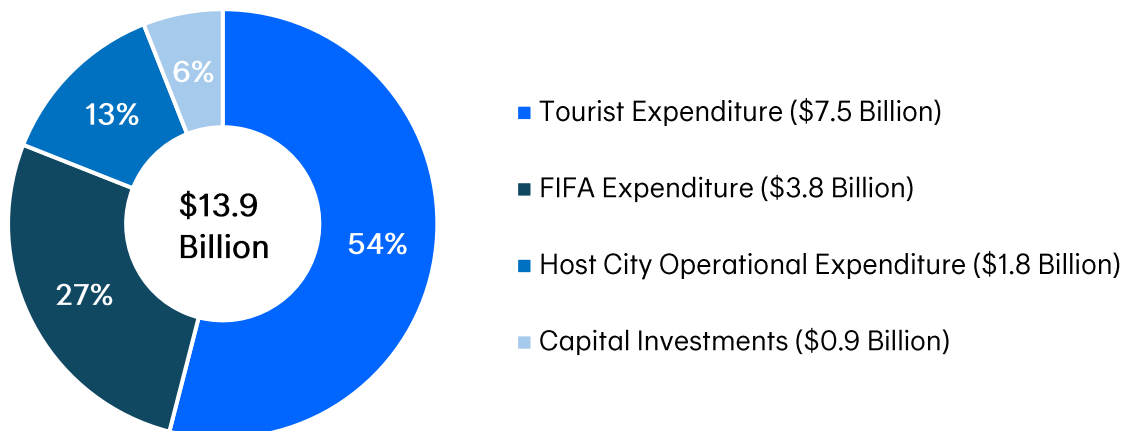
Although some host cities benefit from improved international visibility, tourism branding, and infrastructure upgrades, such gains are difficult to quantify and vary significantly across locations.

Ultimately, the success of World Cup 2026 will not be determined solely by attendance, revenues, or spending during the tournament. Its long-term economic legacy will depend on whether host countries can convert a temporary surge in activity into lasting improvements in infrastructure, tourism competitiveness, investment attractiveness, and productivity.

Chart1: FIFA World Cup 2026 Impact Propagation

	Global	USA	Rest of The World
Gross Output (Economic Impact)	\$80.1 Billion	\$30.5 Billion	\$49.6 Billion
GDP (Gross Domestic Product)	\$40.9 Billion	\$17.2 Billion	\$23.7 Billion
Labor Income (Gross Salaries)	\$20.8 Billion	\$10.2 Billion	\$10.6 Billion
Employment (Full Time Equivalent Jobs)	824 Jobs	185 Jobs	692 Jobs

Chart2: Expenditure Estimate by Source



Source: OPENECONOMICS.

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