



Edge
Health

oxera

Impact of travel restrictions on Omicron in Italy and Finland

Oxera and Edge Health

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Summary: what has Omicron taught us about travel restrictions? (I)

Italy and Finland introduced pre-departure testing for air passengers in mid- and late-December respectively in response to the Omicron variant.

Italy's response was six to eight weeks after Omicron was first identified, meaning that the variant was likely being spread in these countries for a number of weeks before travel restrictions were imposed.

As a result, additional travel testing introduced in December was ineffective at preventing the spread of Omicron.

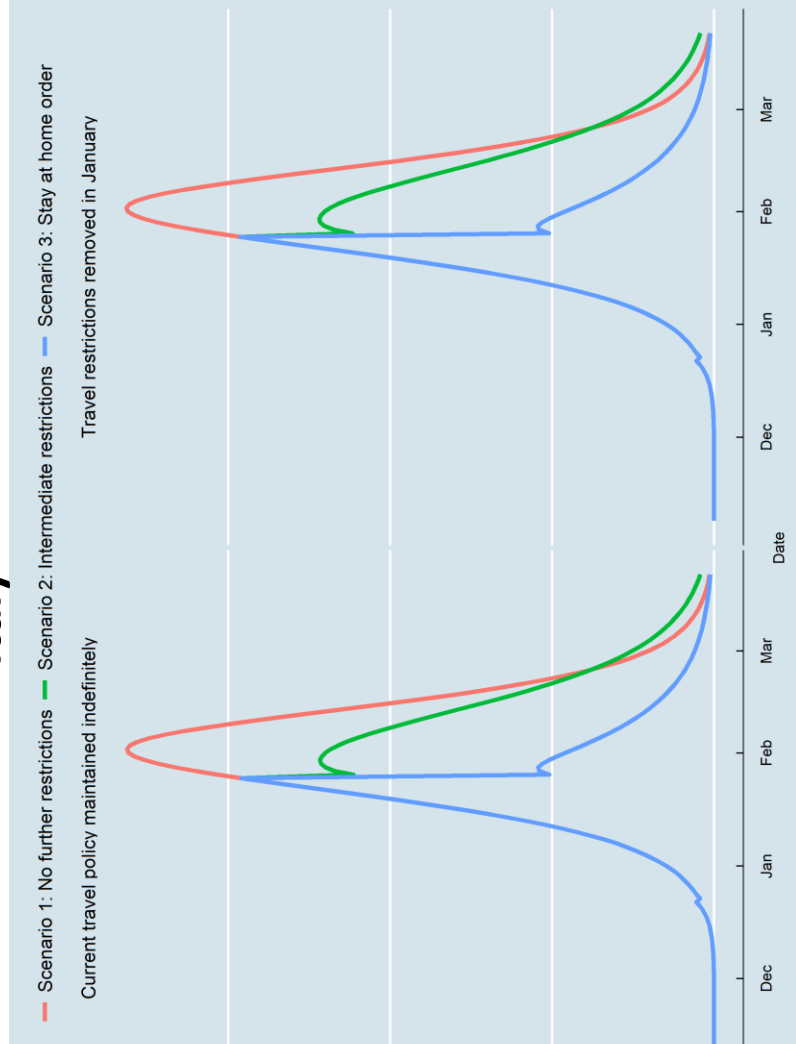
Even though pre-departure travel testing had been introduced at all, Omicron's spread in Italy and Finland would not have been significantly reduced.

Even if more stringent travel testing requirements had been in place from the beginning of November, it is unlikely that South Africa reported Omicron to the WHO—they would not have had any meaningful impact on the spread of Omicron in Finland, and would have had a small impact on the spread of Omicron in Italy.

Summary: what has Omicron taught us about travel restrictions?

Now that Omicron is highly prevalent in Italy and Finland, removing all travel testing requirements would not increase domestic Omicron spread. However, continuing to impose travel restrictions would impose a significant economic cost on the Italian and Finnish economies.

Italy



Finland

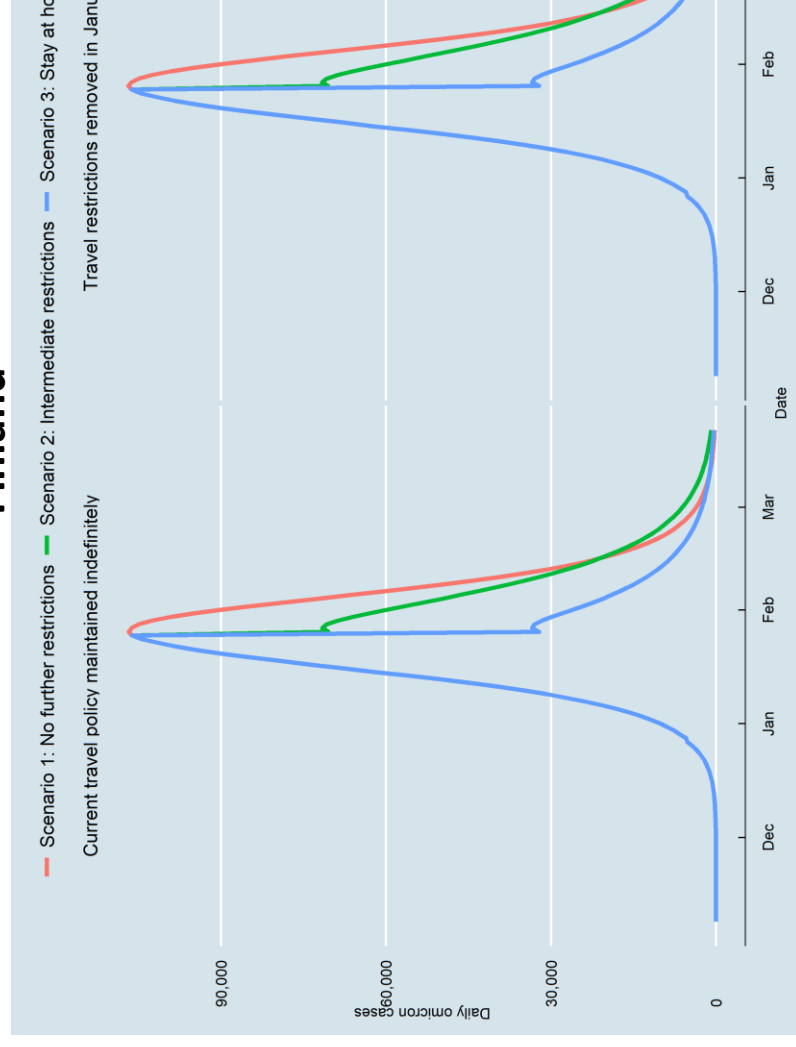


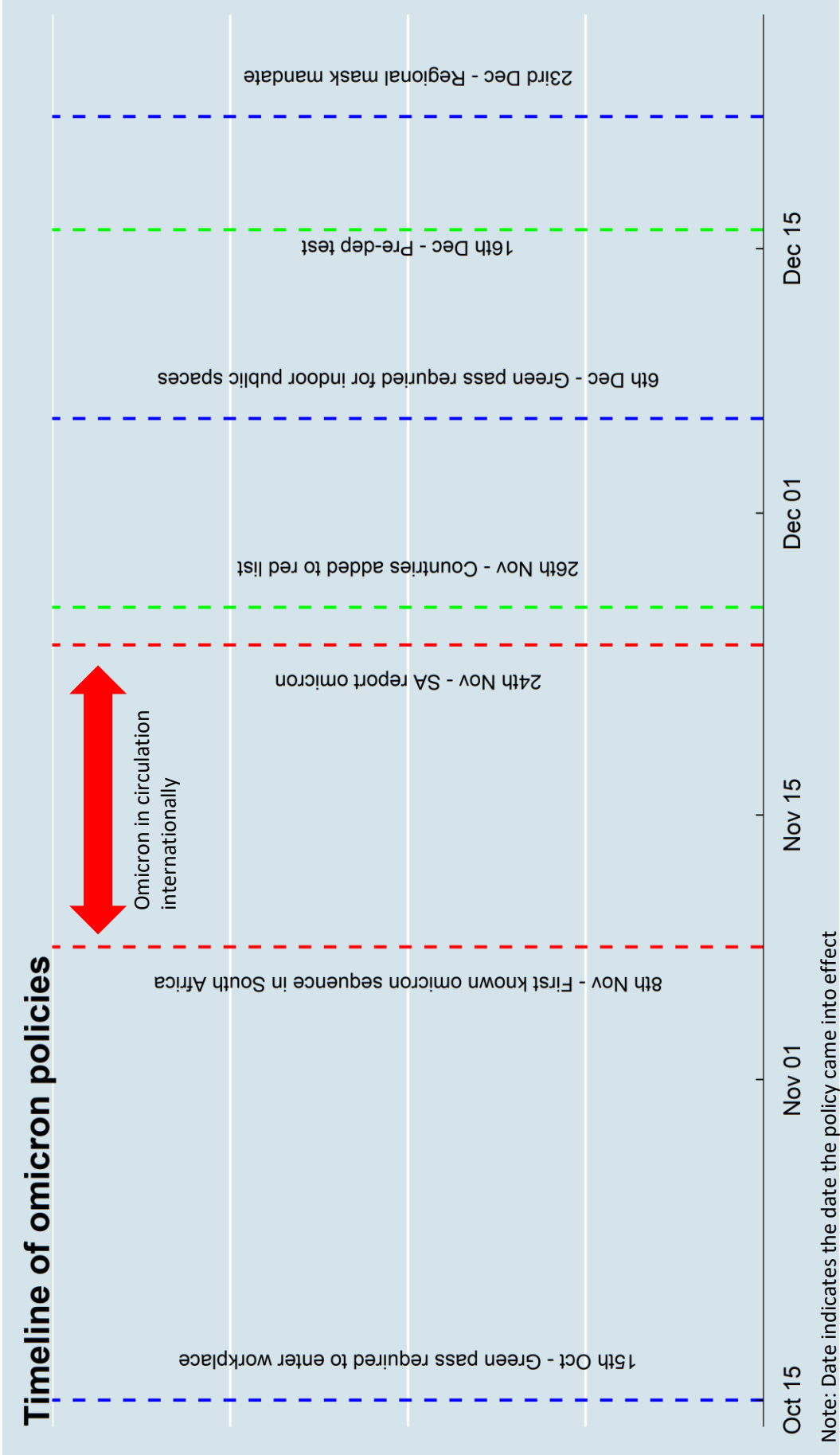
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1. Impact of travel restrictions on Omicron in Italy

1.1 Background – the Omicron response in Italy

Testing of air travellers was introduced on 16 December, a few weeks after South Africa reported Omicron. The variant was likely in circulation internationally for a month prior to being reported, meaning that it was **being seeded for at least six weeks** before the travel restrictions were introduced

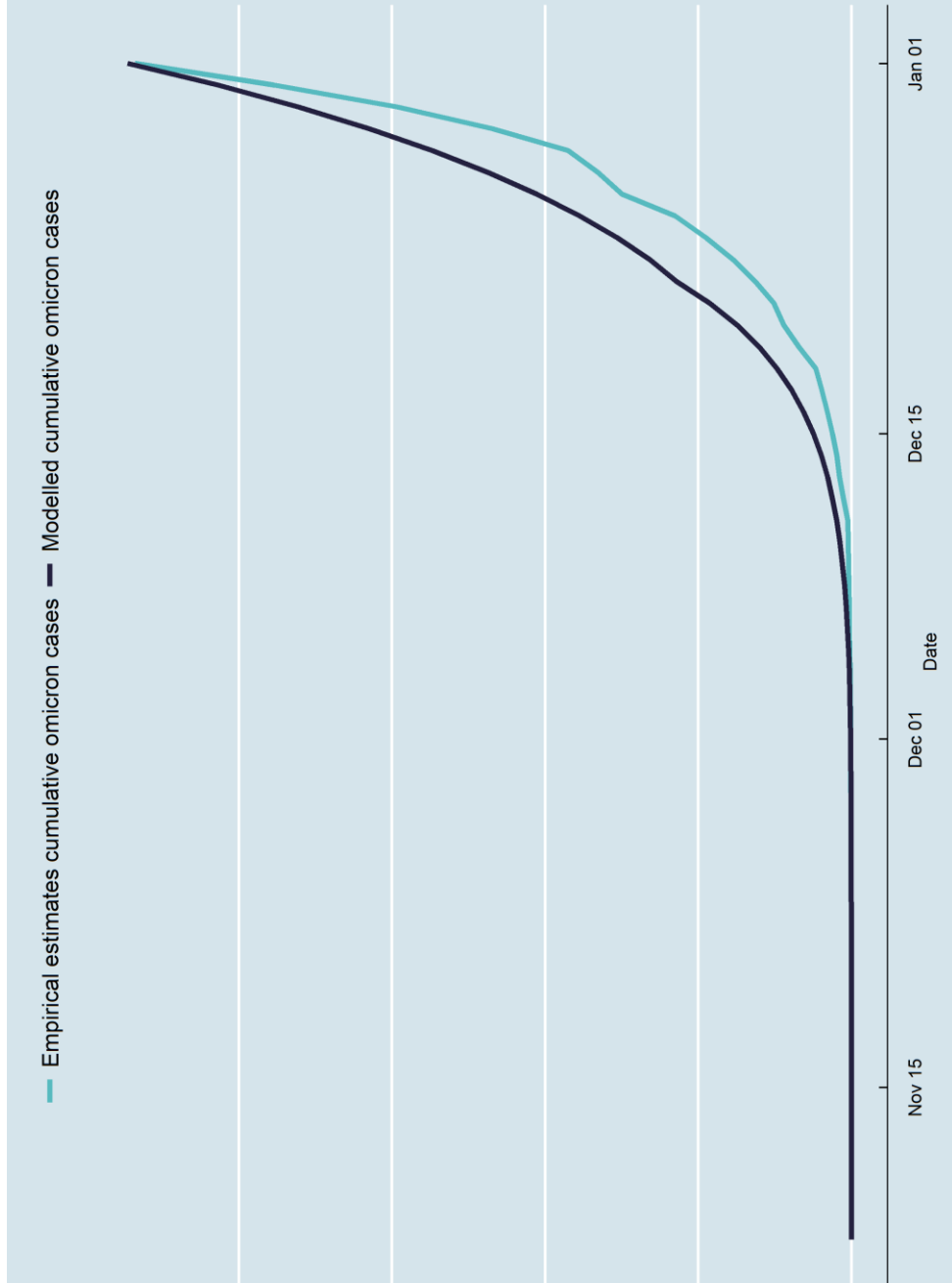


- International detection
- Italy travel
- Italy domes



1.2 Travel testing and quarantine policy - what we can learn from the Omicron response in Italy

Our model predictions closely match empirical estimates of Omicron cases in Italy. Both suggest that cases are growing exponentially.



- Based on the Italian government’s travel testing policy in November / December* and estimates of Omicron prevalence among passengers,** modelled cumulative Omicron cases closely match empirical estimates of Omicron cases in Italy.***

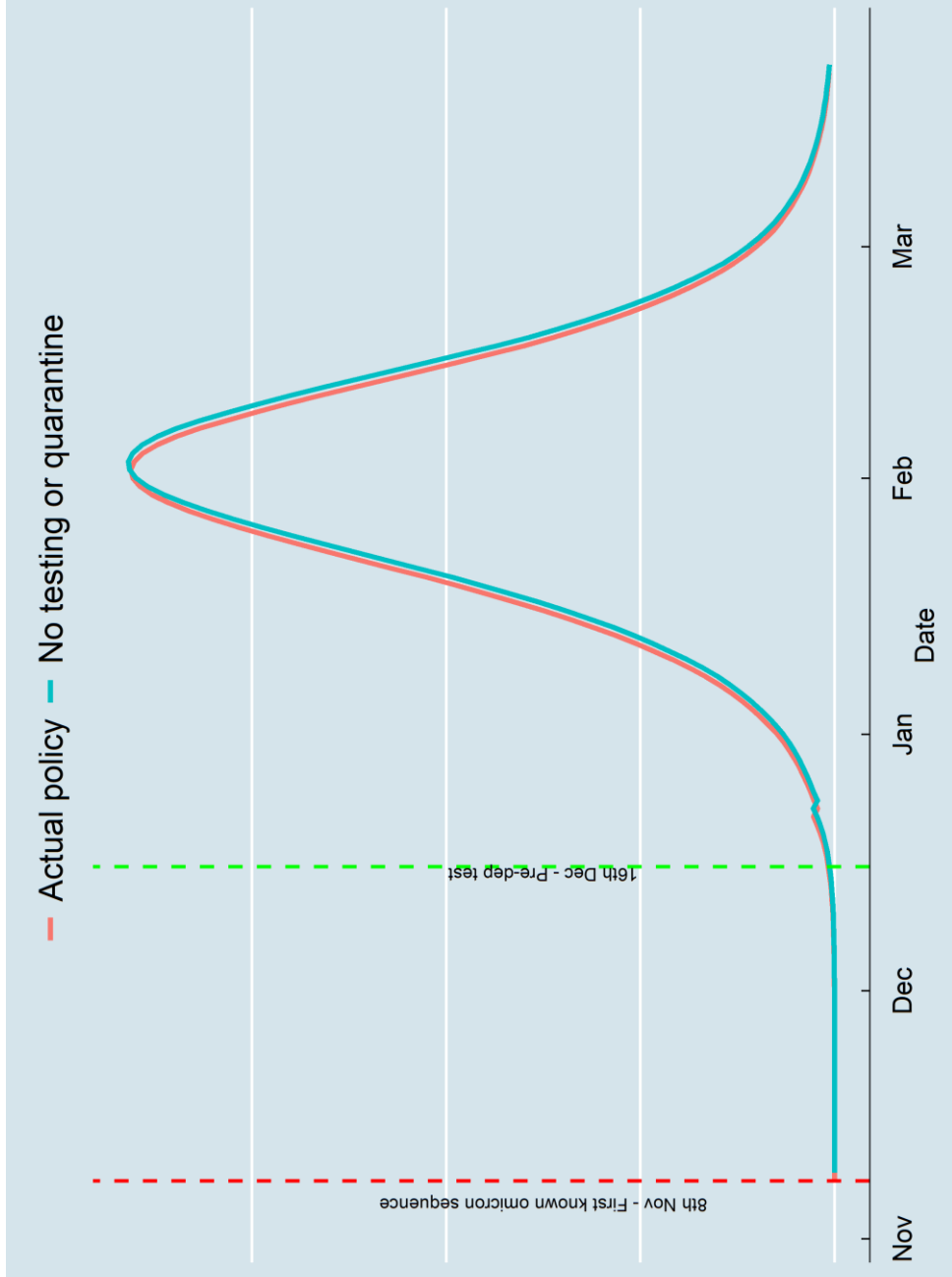
- We estimate Omicron cases in Italy based on recorded cases and domestic sequencing data.

*The Italian government introduced pre-departure PCR testing on December.

**Based on an average of sequencing data across European countries (ECDC).

***Based on data from the ECDC.

Additional travel testing introduced in mid-December was ineffective at preventing the spread of Omicron in Italy

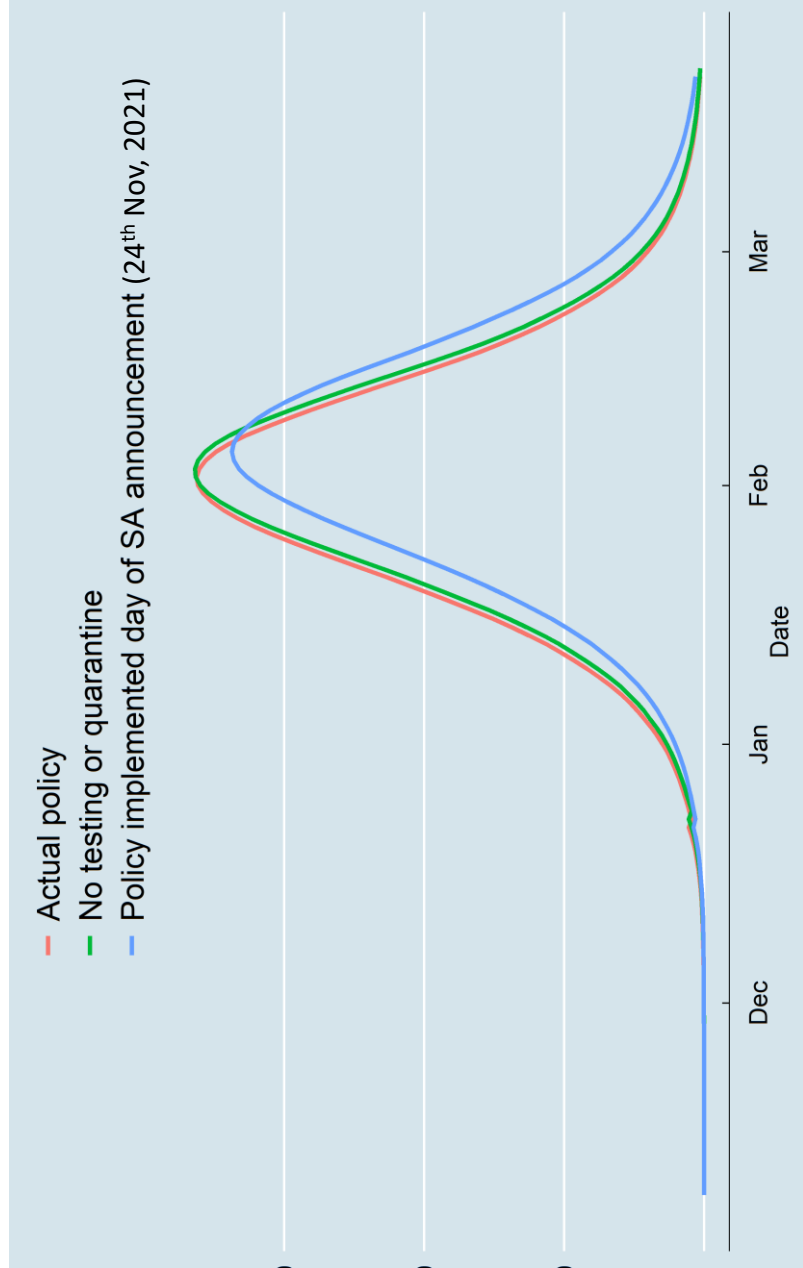


- We model Italy's actual travel testing policy* (red line) and compare it to what would have happened had the government made no changes to its testing policy—i.e. no testing or quarantine (blue line)
- The modelled trajectories of Omicron cases in Italy are **virtually indistinguishable**, suggesting that **introducing further travel restrictions on 16 December was ineffective**.

* The Italian government introduced pre-departure PCR testing on 16 December.

Assume that domestic policies continue as-is for all of the above scenarios. We have also lagged the position of the illustrative purposes, however, the raw modelling results in two perfectly overlapping curves.

Even if travel testing had been in place in November (i.e. the day Omicron was identified as an issue by the WHO), Omicron's spread in Italy would have only been minimally impacted



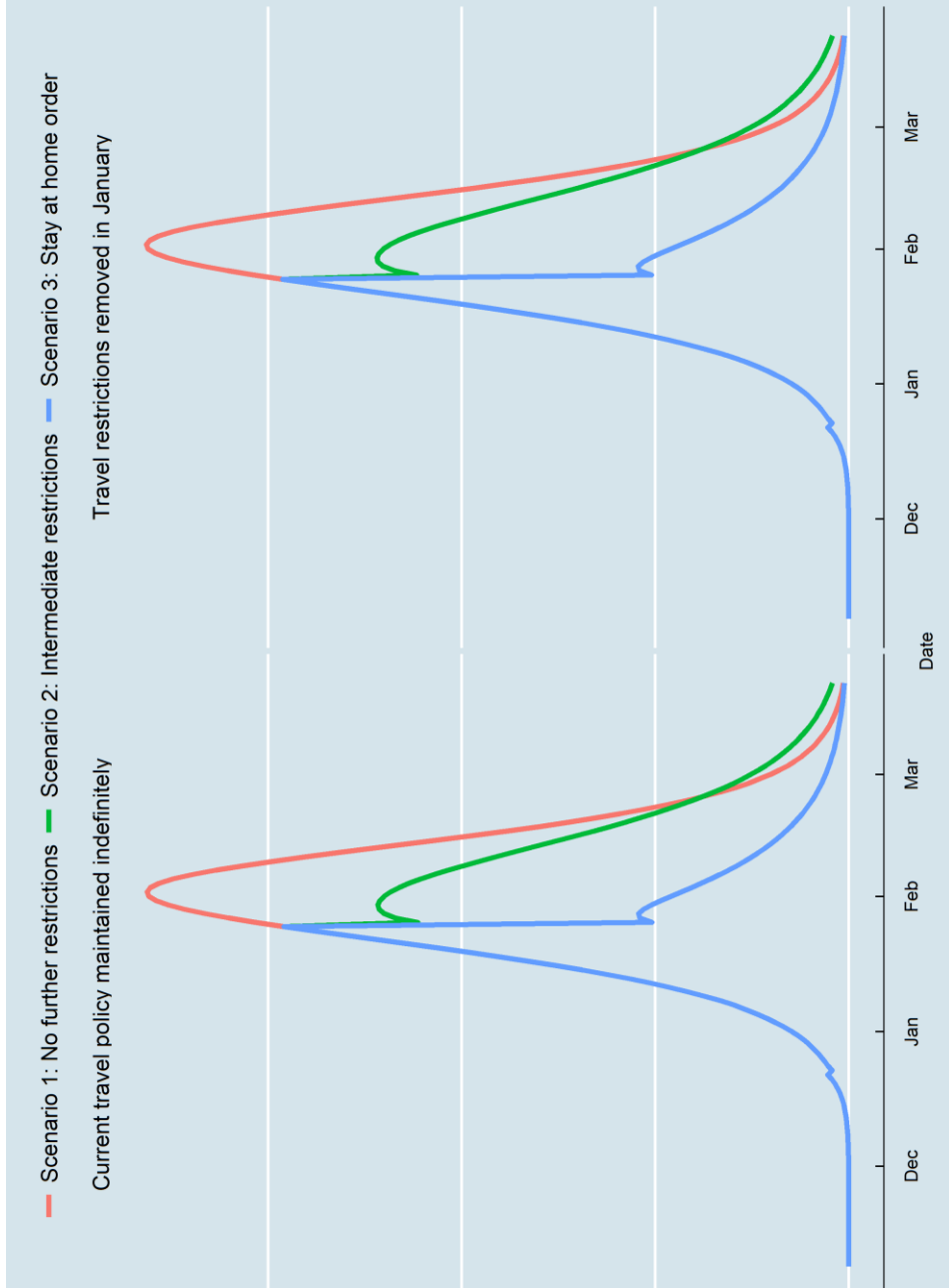
- If the government had not had any travel restrictions in place in November/December (green line), cases would have peaked only **10 days** sooner compared to a scenario where travel restrictions were put in place on the same day that Omicron was flagged as an issue to the WHO on 24 November (blue line).
- The peak would have been 8% higher without travel testing compared to a scenario where travel restrictions were introduced on the same day that Omicron was flagged as an issue to WHO in November (blue line).
- This is in large part due to the ongoing vaccination campaigns for children aged 5-11 and the booster dose campaign.

We assume that domestic policies continue as-is for all of the above scenarios. We assume that the day that PCR (48h) or PCR (24h) testing policy was put in place either on 24 November, the day Omicron was reported to the WHO (Policy implemented day of SA announcement) or on the day that Omicron was first reported in Italy (Actual policy).



1.3 Current response to the Omicron variant – weighing the impact of travel and domestic responses going forward in Italy

Now that Omicron is highly prevalent in Italy, removing all travel testing would not impact domestic Omicron spread. Domestic restrictions would now have a more significant impact on Omicron cases in Italy than travel testing.



- Removing all travel testing would not impact the spread of Omicron in Italy.
- We consider a scenario where travel tests were lifted on 1 January 2022. Peaks are 0.11%-0.23% higher with travel restrictions are removed.
- On the other hand, retaining travel testing could impose a significant cost on the Italian economy.
- This is consistent across scenarios when different domestic restrictions (e.g. limits on gathering, work from home orders) are applied on 26 January 2022.

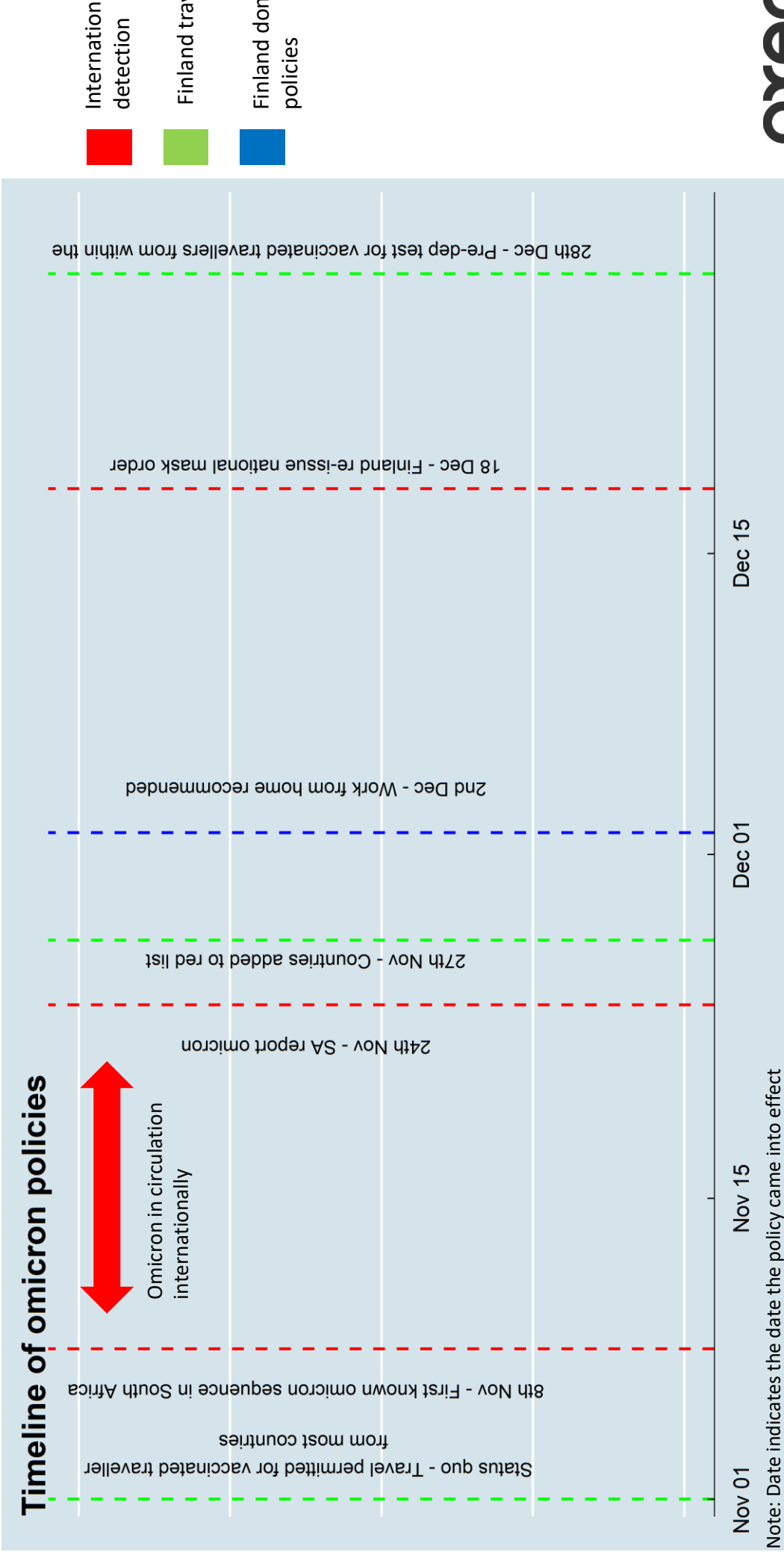
Appendix A.3 for assumptions on the impact of domestic restrictions.

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2. Impact of travel restrictions on Omicron in Finland

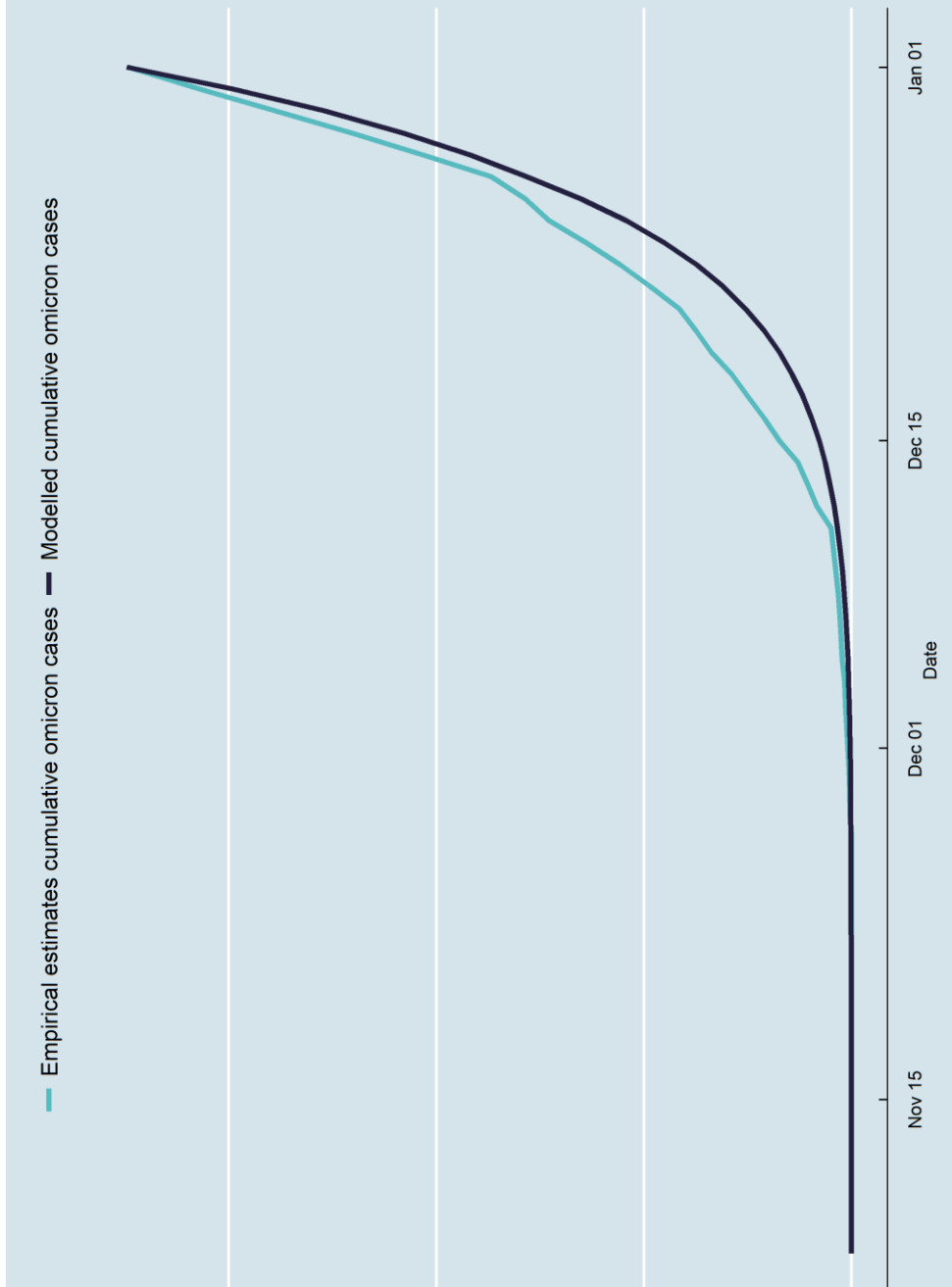
2.1 Background – the Omicron response in Finland

Testing of air travellers was introduced on 28 December, a month after South Africa reported Omicron. The variant was likely in circulation internationally for a month prior to being reported, meaning that it was being seeded for at least eight weeks before the travel restrictions were introduced.



2.2 Travel testing and quarantine policy - what we can learn from the Omicron response in Finland

Our model predictions closely match empirical estimates of Omicron cases in Finland. Both suggest that cases are growing exponentially.



- Based on the Finnish government's travel testing policy over the course of November/December* and estimates of Omicron prevalence among passengers,** our modelled cumulative Omicron cases closely match empirical estimates of Omicron cases in Finland.***
- We estimate Omicron cases in Finland based on recorded cases and domestic sequencing data.

*The Finnish government introduced pre-departure PCR testing on December.

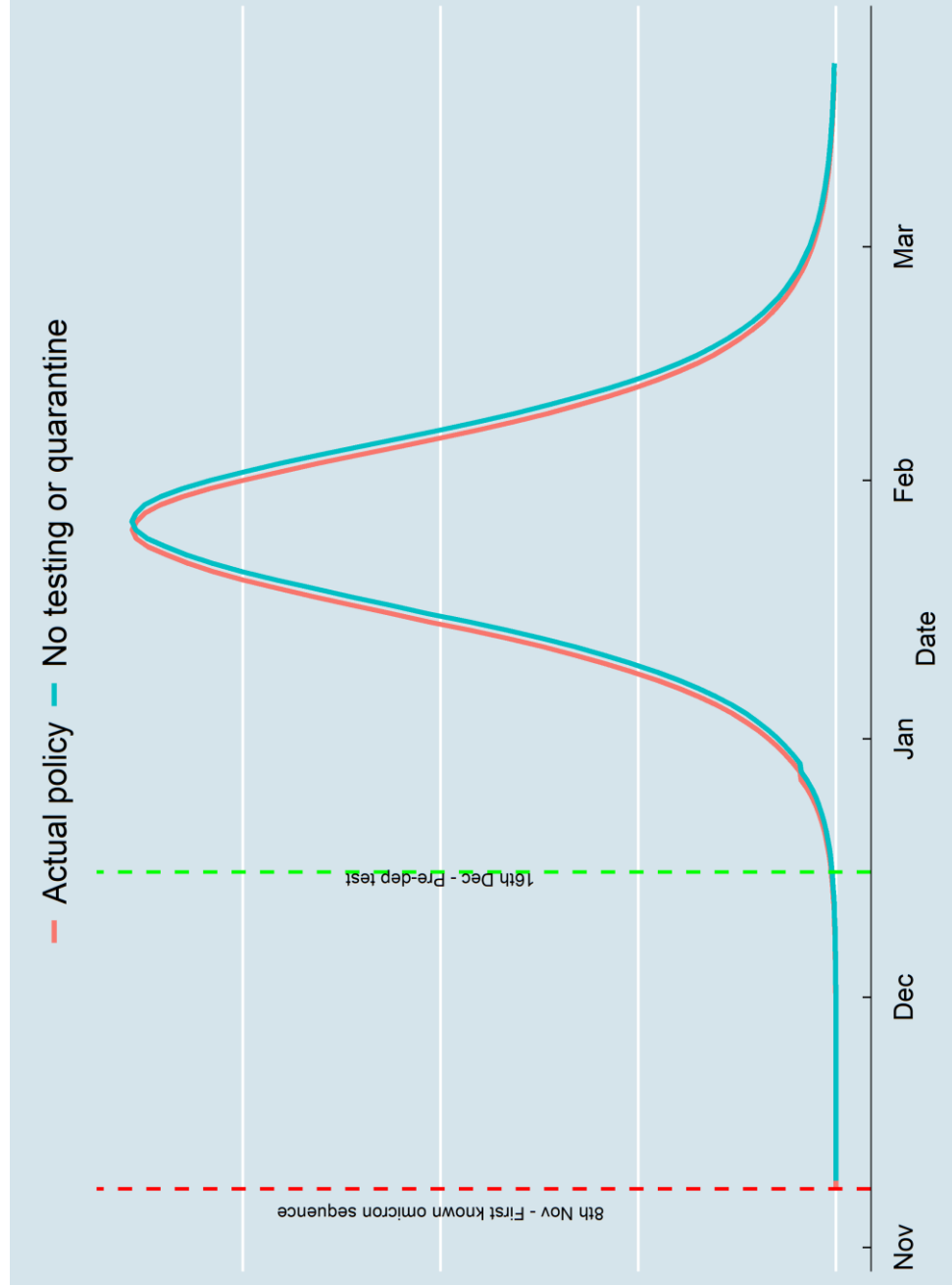
**Based on an average of sequenced cases across European countries (ECDC).

***Based on data from the ECDC.

Additional travel testing introduced at the end of December was ineffective at preventing the spread of Omicron in Finland

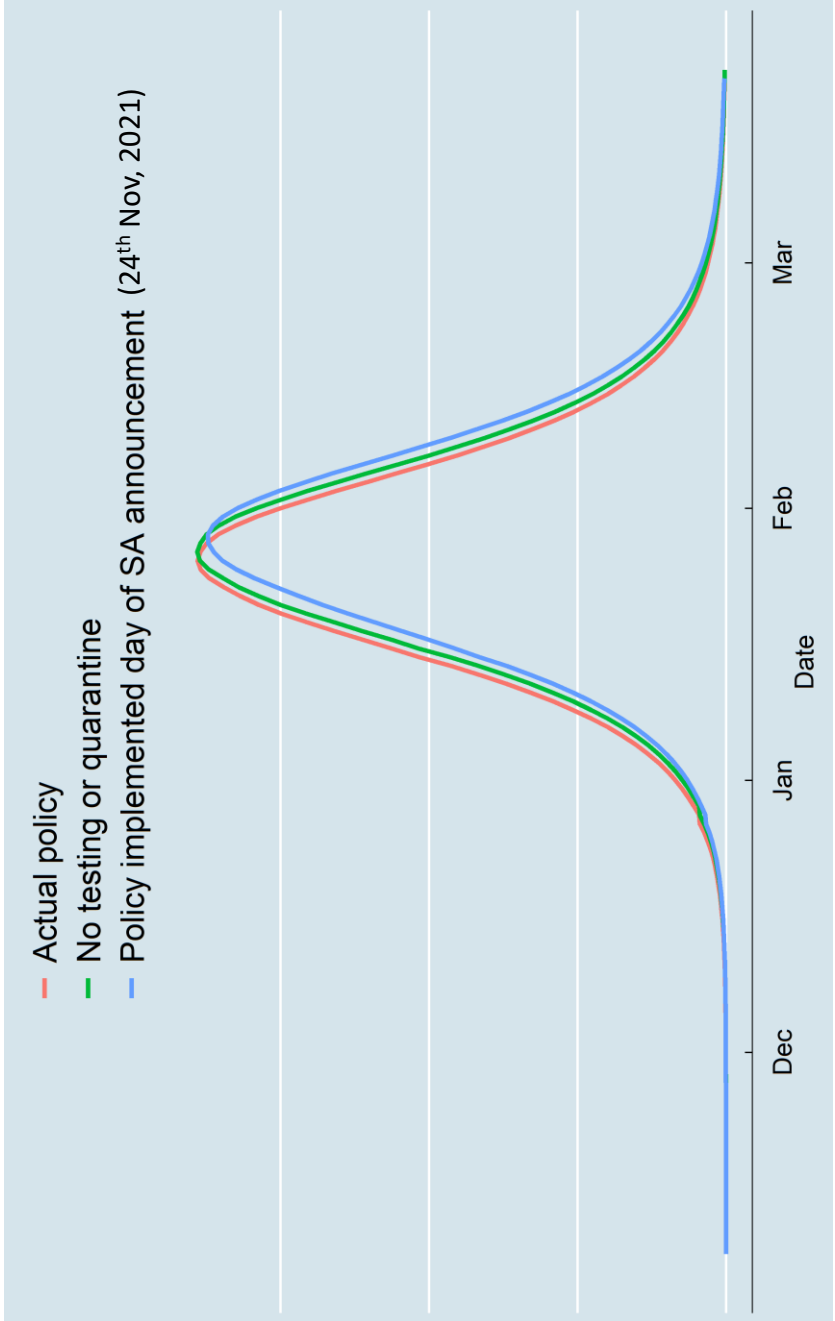
- We model Finland's actual travel policy* (red line) and compare it to a model where no testing or quarantine would have happened had the government made no changes to testing policy—i.e. no testing or quarantine (blue line).
- The modelled trajectories of Omicron cases in Finland are indistinguishable, suggesting that **introducing travel restrictions on 28 December was ineffective.**

*The Finnish government introduced pre-departure PCR testing on 28 December.



We assume that domestic policies continue as-is for all of the above scenarios. We have also lagged the position of the illustrative purposes, however, the raw modelling results in two perfectly overlapping curves.

Even if travel testing had been in place in November (i.e. the day Omicron was identified as an issue by the WHO), Omicron's spread in Finland would not have been impacted



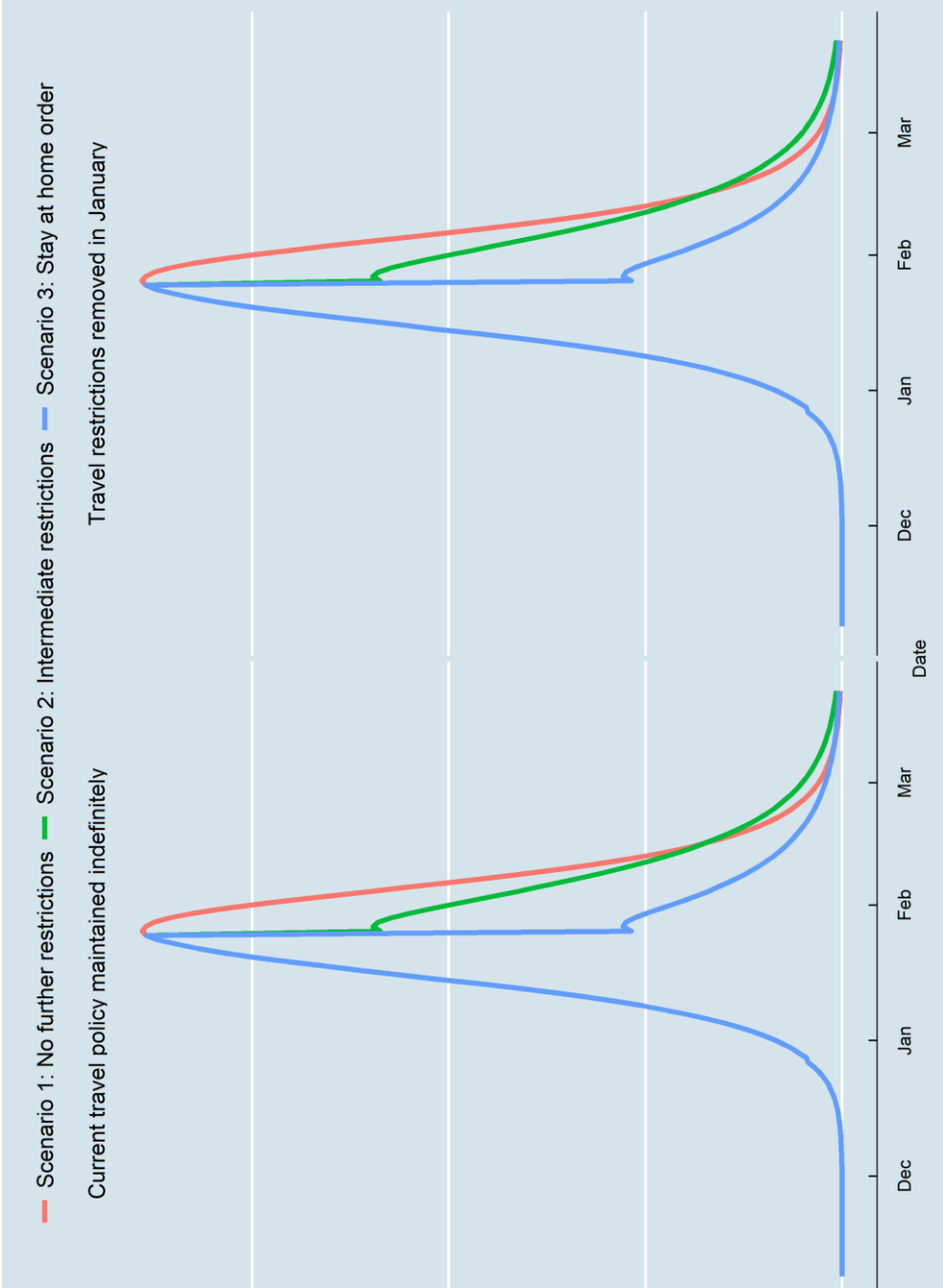
- If the government had not had any travel restrictions in place in November/December (green line), cases would have peaked **three days** sooner compared to a scenario where travel restrictions were put in place on the same day that Omicron was flagged as an issue to the WHO on 24 November (blue line).
- The peak would have been 2% higher without any travel testing compared to a scenario where travel restrictions were in place immediately once Omicron was flagged as an issue to the WHO in November (blue line).

We assume that domestic policies continue as-is for all of the above scenarios. We assume that surface antigen (48h) or PCR (48h) testing policy was put in place either on 24 November, the day Africa reported omicron to the WHO (Policy implemented day of SA announcement) or on 28 November (Actual policy).

2.3 Current response to the Omicron variant – weighing the impact of travel and domestic responses going forward in Finland

Now that Omicron is highly prevalent in Finland, removing all travel testing would not impact domestic Omicron spread. Domestic restrictions would now have a more significant impact on Omicron cases in Finland than travel restrictions.

- Removing all travel testing in January would not impact the spread of Omicron in Finland
 - We consider a scenario where travel testing was lifted on 1 January 2022. Peaks are 0.06%-0.07% higher when travel testing is removed.
 - On the other hand, retaining travel testing could have a significant cost on the Finnish economy.
 - This is consistent across scenarios where different domestic restrictions (e.g. limiting gathering, work from home orders) are applied on 26 January 2022.



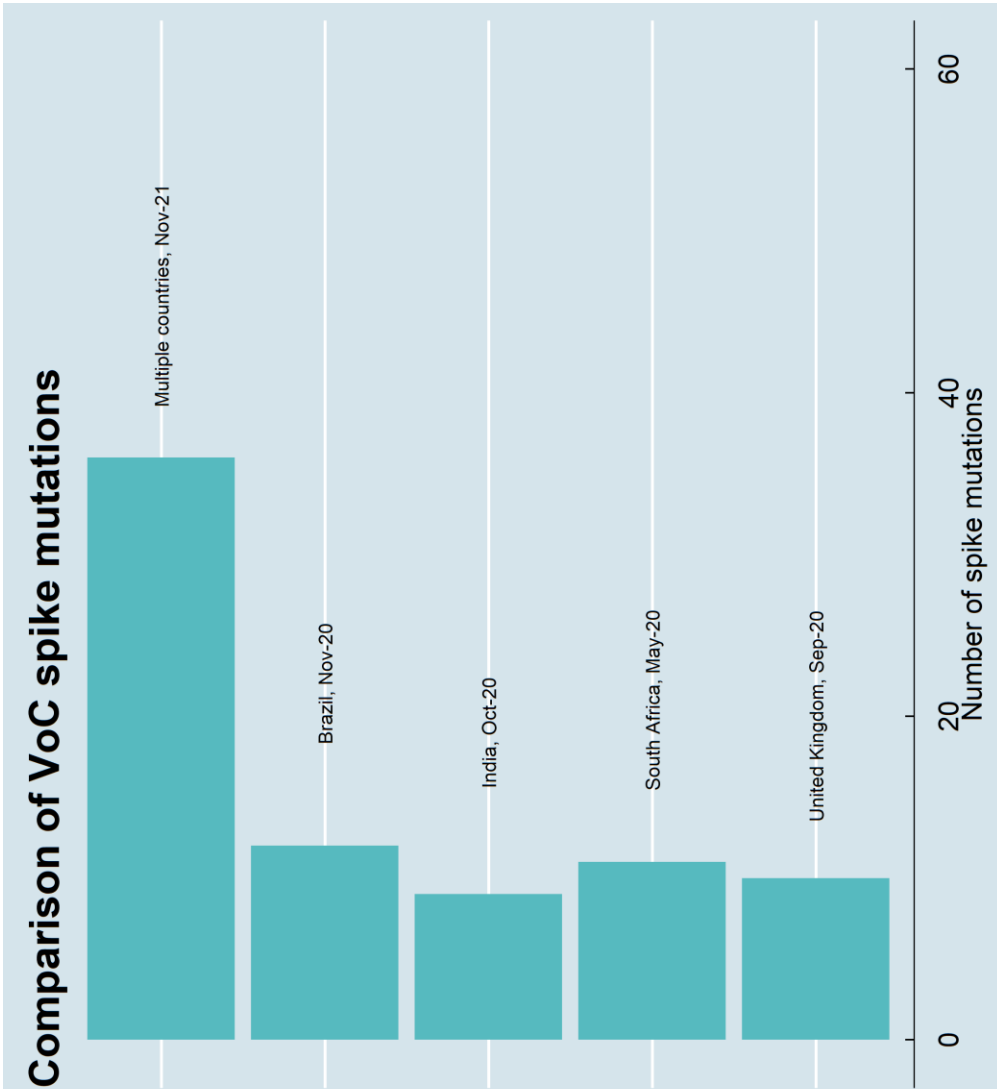
Appendix A.3 for assumptions on the impact of domestic restrictions.

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3. Appendix – literature review, modelling methodology and assumptions

A.1 Literature review – what we know about the Omicron variant

Omicron has more mutations in the spike protein than previous variants. While some of these mutations may be associated with increased infectiousness, others may be associated with reduced severity.



Note: Graph annotations indicate the month, year, and location where each variant was first sequenced (WHO).

- SARS-Cov-2’s spike protein has an important role in infectiousness and severity of Covid-19 as it is how the virus attaches to human cells.
- Many mutations in this area may change the virus’ infectiousness, severity, and ability of the virus to evade immunity.
- Omicron is thought to be more infectious. However, mutations in this area may also contribute to reducing the severity of resulting illness after infection. **

* <https://www.who.int/en/activities/tracking-SARS-CoV-2-variants/>
** [biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.12.17.473248v2](https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.12.17.473248v2)



Although evidence is still in early stages, laboratory and real-world studies to date indicate that while Omicron is more infectious and vaccines are less effective at preventing infections, illnesses resulting from infections may be less severe.

| | Infectiousness | Vaccine efficacy (i.e. immune escape) | Severity |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p>Omicron characteristics, relative to Delta (previously dominant variant in Italy and land)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data and laboratory studies to date indicate that Omicron is 2-3 times more infectious than delta. As studied populations are now highly vaccinated or have high levels of natural immunity, it is difficult to attribute the increase in observed infectiousness of Omicron relative to Delta to innate infectiousness or to immune escape/decreases in vaccine efficacy. It is likely to be a combination of both. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data and laboratory studies to date indicate that vaccines are 25-66% as effective at preventing Omicron compared to Delta infections (varies by dose). As studied populations are now highly vaccinated or have high levels of natural immunity, it is difficult to attribute the increase in observed infectiousness of Omicron relative to Delta to innate infectiousness or to immune escape/decreases in vaccine efficacy. It is likely to be a combination of both. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While studies and emerging data are still in early stages, several studies are now pointing to Omicron infections being milder than Delta infections. Real-world data suggests that patients' hospital admission risk decreased by 62%. This effect is demonstrated even when variation in vaccination status is accounted for. |

A.2: Modelling methodology

Background on SARS-Cov-2 infection spread dynamics

One measure of how easily a virus is spread from one person to another is the virus' reproductive ratio (called its 'R' value). R_t represents the average number of secondary infections that will result from an initial infection at a given time.

Effective reproduction number is determined by the following:

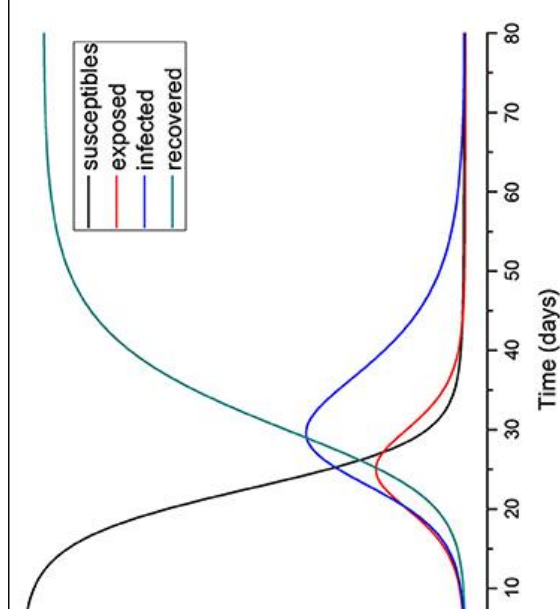
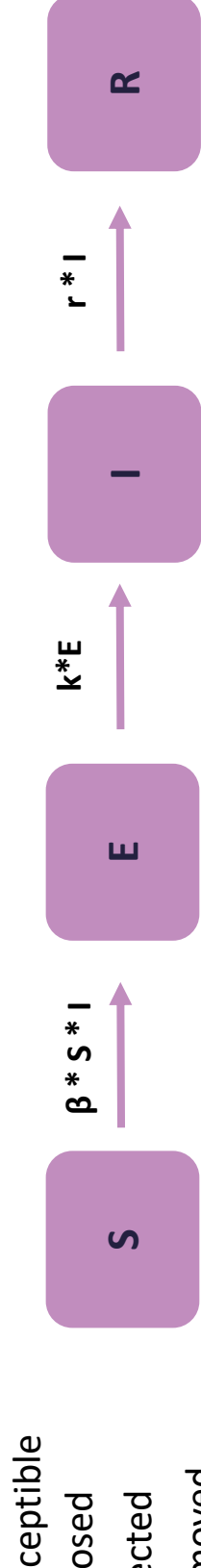
- **R_0 , basic reproduction number:** the average number of secondary infections resulting from an initial infection in a fully susceptible population.
- **Vaccination-induced immunity:** the proportion of the population prevented from being infected by the virus (either symptomatically or asymptotically) and hence prevented from spreading the virus due to being vaccinated.
- **Natural immunity:** the proportion of the population prevented from being infected by the virus (either symptomatically or asymptotically) and hence prevented from spreading the virus due to previous exposure to the virus
- **Behavioural patterns:** different patterns in interactions may hinder the spread of a virus. For example, reduced social interactions, social distancing and masks will contribute to reducing the spread.

If $R_t > 1$, the virus will spread in a population.

Basic SEIR modelling review

entire population is split into groups corresponding to the S , E , I , and R states

- where:
- β is the parameter for infection
 - r is the constant per capita rate
 - k is the constant per capita progression from exposed to infectious rate

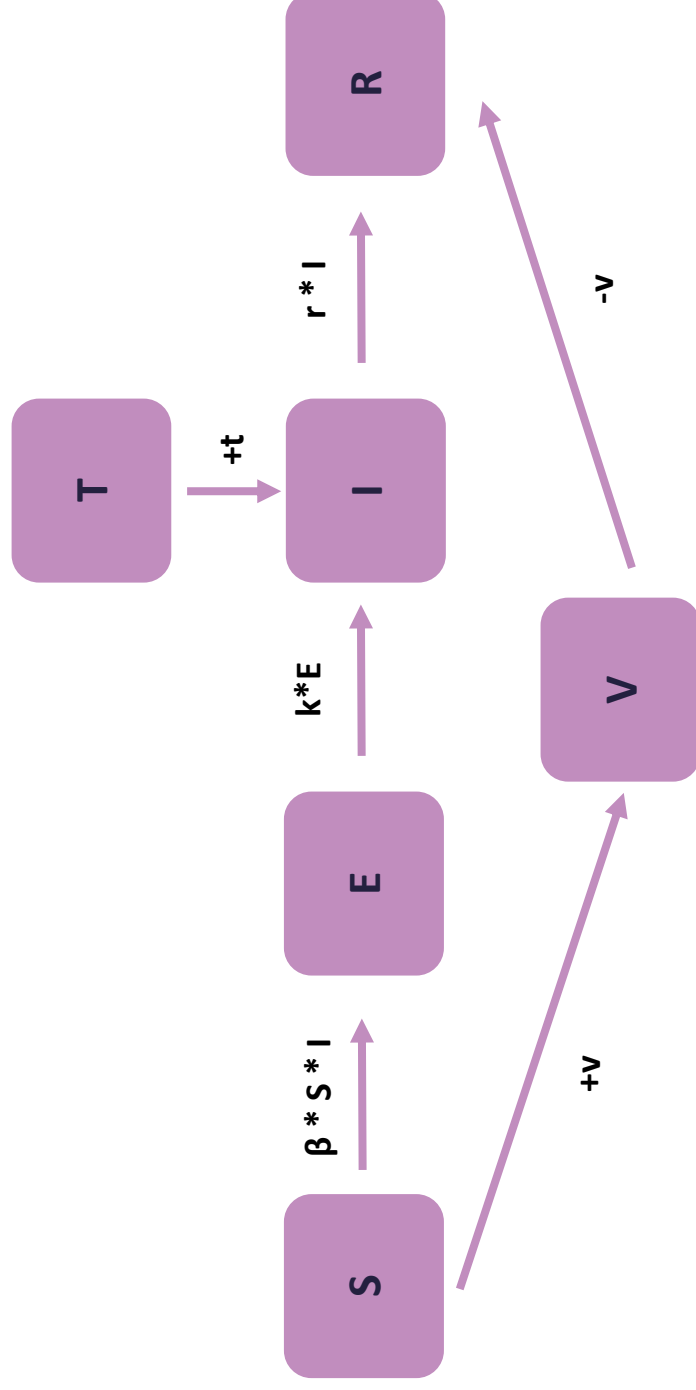


Assumptions

- No one is added to the susceptible group, since we are ignoring births and immigration
- The only way an individual leaves the susceptible group is by becoming infected
- A fixed fraction of the infected group recovers (or dies) every day and is immune to the disease

Our modelling approach: SEIR modelling including vaccinations and imported cases

entire population is split into groups corresponding to the S, E, I, and R states and others



ceptible
posed
ected
moved
cinated
vel-related cases

where:

- β is the param infectivity
- r is the consta capita recover
- k is the consta capita progres
- exposed to inf rate
- v is the chang induced immu
- population
- t is daily trav
- cases

ptions

is added to the susceptible group, since we are ignoring births and immigration

only way an individual leaves the susceptible group is by becoming infected or vaccinated

fraction of the infected group recovers (or dies) every day and is immune to the disease

Scenarios considered in the modelling

Key question:

What would be the impact of different travel policies have been on the outcome of Omicron spread in Italy / Finland?

What would the spread and impact of the Omicron variant in Italy / Finland have been under the following scenarios:

- Pre-departure antigen (24h) or PCR testing (48h) - Italy
- Pre-departure antigen (48h) or PCR testing (48h) - Finland
- Actual policy (a combination of all of the above, at different points in time)
- No testing or quarantine

What will be the spread and impact of the Omicron variant in Italy / Finland under the following scenarios:

- Mandatory masks, symptomatic testing
- Some restrictions on businesses (i.e. green pass/super green pass)
- Intermediate scenario: Limits on gathering sizes to 10 people, in addition to some restrictions of businesses
- Stay at home order: businesses closed, schools and universities closed in conjunction

Finland:

- Symptomatic testing
- Mandatory masks and work-from home order
- Intermediate scenario: Some restrictions to businesses and limits of gathering sizes to 10 people
- Stay at home order: businesses closed, schools and universities closed in conjunction

Compared with:

- Continued pre-departure policy or
- No testing or quarantine January onwards



A.3: Literature review and modelling assumptions

SARS-Cov-2 and Omicron-specific parameters (1)

| t | Description | Value | Source |
|--------------------------------|--|---|--|
| | Initial data suggests that the Rt and secondary attack rates of the Omicron variant is 2-3 times higher than that of the Delta variant. While some of this difference is likely due to differing immunity for the variants in the population, we conservatively assume that Omicron is 2.5 times more infectious than delta. | 8, assuming that Delta has an Ro of ~3.2 (this assumes pre-pandemic mixing patterns). | https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.12.19.212680 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1043466/20211222_OS_Daily_Omicron_dynamics/tree/master/estimates/omicron-countries_Ro_of_Delta.pdf https://github.com/blab/rt-from-frequency-dynamics/tree/master/estimates/omicron-countries . Ro of Delta https://academic.oup.com/jtm/article/28/7/taab124/6346388 |
| ous | We use the median time an individual is infectious calculated from previous variants. | 7-35 days | Oxera and Edge Health (2021) 'Effectiveness of dual-testing schemes for passengers'. For LSHM's work see: Clifford et al. (2020), 'Strategies to reduce the risk of SARS-CoV-2 re-introduction from international travellers' |
| eriod | Preliminary evidence suggests that the time from exposure to symptoms is shorter for the Omicron variant compared to other variants. | 3 days | https://www.eurosurveillance.org/content/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2021.26.50.2101147 |
| f Omicron cases to Delta cases | The ECDC publishes estimates of the % of sequenced samples which were determined to be Omicron by EU country. We use this to estimate the curves shown on pages 9 and 18. | --- | https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19/situation-updates/variant-dashboards |
| When vaccination efficacy | While immunity builds up over time after individuals are vaccinated, there is still substantial protection from vaccinations (~60%) on the first day after vaccination. Using a step function we are able to approximate this effect. | Step function, 1 week | http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID-19_vaccine/Public_health_statement_deferred_second_dose.pdf |



SARS-Cov-2 and omicron-specific parameters (2)

| Description | Value | Source |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Studies conducted in England suggest that a previous history of infection reduces the risk of re-infection by 84%. Infections with previous variants were protective against infection with the Alpha variant. Immunity was observed for a minimum of 7 months after initial infection.</p> <p>We assume that the immunity for the Delta variant is similar, and apply scaling based on estimates of the relative efficacy of vaccines to the Omicron and Delta variants.</p> <p>We estimate this using the relative efficacy (for vaccinated individuals with 2 or 3 doses) against the Omicron variant compared to the Delta variant, using a weighted average of the Pfizer +Pfizer and AZ + Pfizer combination.</p> <p>We conservatively assume that a portion of the unvaccinated population have natural immunity, based on confirmed covid cases in Italy and Finland in the 7 months prior to November 2021.</p> <p>Using modelling comparing reported cases with the actual burden of disease, we estimate that that only roughly a third of cases are reported.</p> <p>Modelling from Imperial has estimated the relative efficacy of vaccinations against the Omicron variant, extrapolating laboratory studies to real-world efficacy. We supplement this with data on real-world efficacy, which is now starting to become available.</p> <p>These estimates are conservative compared to the range of scenarios estimated by other modelling groups (LSHTM).</p> | <p>84% decrease in risk of infection, immune escape of 16%</p> <p>54%</p> <p>Finland: 14% Italy: 21%</p> <p>See table 1, page 14</p> | <p>https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673621000000 token=d-Aupl8roEYAAAAA:E_YnW1p75HIEH7DgPN_N_7aCANo7QcSrK9316rCwhCpwh8eYPh-bMGlscQ6k</p> <p>https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/medicine/medicine/12-16-COVID19-Report-48.pdf</p> <p>https://covid19.who.int/info?openIndex=2 https://demo.istat.it/popres/index.php?anno=2021&lingua=ita https://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/tau_en.html</p> <p>https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/medicine/medicine/12-16-COVID19-Report-48.pdf and https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1043807/technical-briefing-33.pdf for real supplementary data. https://cmmid.github.io/topics/covid19/reports/omicron_english_dec_2021.pdf</p> |

Assumptions: travel testing efficacy

| t | Description | Value | Source |
|---|--|------------|---|
| <p>re antigen or pre-PCR, 48 hours before</p> | <p>We use the efficacy of pre-departure testing at screening incoming air passenger infectious days as a model input. We used the estimated efficacy of antigen and PCR tests taken 48 h pre-departure, taking the weighted average assuming that 2/3s of passengers will opt for the cheaper antigen test option.</p> | <p>48%</p> | <p>Oxera and Edge Health (2021), 'Assessment of the of rapid testing for SARS-CoV-2'.</p> |
| <p>re antigen 24 hours rture of PCR 48 hours re</p> | <p>We use the efficacy of pre-departure testing at screening incoming air passenger infectious days as a model input. The estimated efficacy of these two different types of tests taken at different time periods is the same. From some countries pre-departure PCR testing is 72 h pre-departure, however we conservatively assume that PCR testing is 48 h from all countries.</p> | <p>54%</p> | <p>Oxera and Edge Health (2021), 'Assessment of the of rapid testing for SARS-CoV-2'.</p> |

We assume a 24 h delay to receive PCR test results. **Only used to model the impact of red-listing countries

Assumptions: vaccine roll-out

| input | Description | Value | Source |
|----------------------|---|-------------|--|
| ic vaccination rates | We use age-stratified daily vaccination data for Italy and Finland to estimate age-stratified vaccination uptake. We divide vaccine counts by population pyramid estimates to obtain vaccination rates. | See source. | https://sampo.thl.fi/pivot/prod/en/vaccreg/cov19_cov19covareatime https://github.com/italia/covid19-opendata-vaccin https://demo.istat.it/popres/index.php?anno=202 https://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/tau_en.html |
| ed vaccination rates | We calculate the average daily vaccinations delivered by age band in the last week of currently available data to estimate the speed of the vaccination roll-out. We assume that the number of individuals receiving a second dose cannot exceed the number of individuals who had received a first dose 3 months prior. This is based on medical recommendations to get second doses within 3 months of the previous dose. Equally, we assume that the number of individuals receiving a third dose (booster) cannot exceed the number of individuals who had received a second dose. As the speed of vaccination roll-out is dose-specific, to prevent a violation of the assumption above in later stages of the projection, the speed of roll-out of for a dose is set to the speed of the dose of the lower tier where required. We do not assume that anyone under the age of 12 for Finland or 5 for Italy will be vaccinated as they are ineligible for vaccination at the time of writing. | -- | https://sampo.thl.fi/pivot/prod/en/vaccreg/cov19_cov19covareatime https://github.com/italia/covid19-opendata-vaccin https://demo.istat.it/popres/index.php?anno=202 https://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/tau_en.html |

Assumptions: impact of domestic social distancing measures on infection spread (Italy)

| Input | Description | Value | Source |
|---|--|--------|--|
| of mandatory masks, automatic testing | The reduction in R_t resulting from non-pharmaceutical interventions. | -17.9% | https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.05.28.20116129v4.full.pdf , http://epidemicforecasting.org/containment-calculator https://bmcmmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-8/figures/5 |
| of some businesses being closed/restricted (combination of green pass and green pass) | The reduction in R_t resulting from non-pharmaceutical interventions. This is additive with impact of mandatory masks, symptomatic testing, limits of gathering sizes to 1000. | -46.3% | https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.05.28.20116129v4.full.pdf , http://epidemicforecasting.org/containment-calculator |
| of intermediate restrictions: Impact of gathering sizes to 10 | The reduction in R_t resulting from non-pharmaceutical interventions. All interventions are additive (i.e. in addition to interventions mentioned in previous scenarios). | -61.0% | https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.05.28.20116129v4.full.pdf , http://epidemicforecasting.org/containment-calculator |
| of stay at home order, schools and businesses closed in conjunction | The reduction in R_t resulting from non-pharmaceutical interventions. All interventions are additive (i.e. in addition to interventions mentioned in previous scenarios). | -82.2% | https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.05.28.20116129v4.full.pdf , http://epidemicforecasting.org/containment-calculator |

Assumptions: impact of domestic social distancing measures on infection spread (Finland)

| Input | Description | Value | Source |
|---|--|--------|--|
| of symptomatic testing | The reduction in Rt resulting from non-pharmaceutical interventions. | -9.6% | https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/20116129v4.full.pdf , http://epidemicforecasting.org/containment-https://bmcmmedicine.biomedcentral.com/article/s12916-020-01872-8/figures/5 |
| of work-from-home orders and mask | The reduction in Rt resulting from non-pharmaceutical interventions. All interventions are additive (i.e. in addition to interventions mentioned in previous scenarios). | -32.0% | https://bmcmmedicine.biomedcentral.com/article/s12916-020-01872-8#Abs1 |
| iate restrictions: Some restrictions sses and limits of gathering sizes to | The reduction in Rt resulting from non-pharmaceutical interventions. All interventions are additive (i.e. addition to interventions mentioned in previous scenarios). | -61.0% | https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/20116129v4.full.pdf , http://epidemicforecasting.org/containment- |
| of stay at home order, businesses hools and universities closed in on | The reduction in Rt resulting from non-pharmaceutical interventions. All interventions are additive (i.e. addition to interventions mentioned in previous scenarios). | -82.2% | https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/20116129v4.full.pdf , http://epidemicforecasting.org/containment- |