

## World expatriate footballers

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### 1. Introduction

The 25th edition of the CIES Football Observatory Monthly Report analyses the presence of expatriate footballers in 137 leagues of 93 national associations worldwide<sup>1</sup>. The championships have been selected according to their level of development, as well as the possibility to access reliable information on squad members.

The sample is made up of players present on the 1st of May 2017 in the first team squad of clubs from the leagues analysed having been fielded in championship matches during the current season. In the 116 competitions where the list of substitutes was available, the simple presence on the bench also constituted a criterion for inclusion.

For all the players listed, we have determined the association of origin. This notion refers to the national federation where the players grew up and started playing football. If the player is outside of his association of origin, he is considered to be an expatriate.

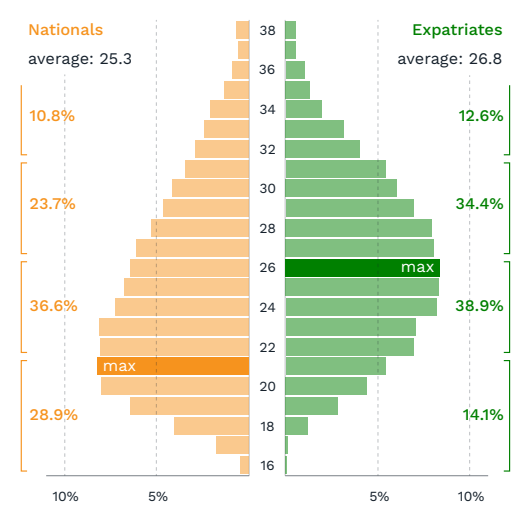
In total, 12,051 expatriate footballers were recorded in the 2,120 clubs that make up our sample. On average, a team has 5.7 expatriate footballers (21.6% of squads). These values vary from 7.6 (27.9%) in the OFC (New Zealand) to 3.2 (11.9%) at CONMEBOL level.

As for age, the expatriate footballers surveyed were 26.8 years old on the 1st of May 2017. For comparison, the average age of national players is 25.3. The most represented age group among expatriates is that of players aged 26. Footballers aged 21 or under make up 14.1% of expatriate players, as opposed to 28.9% for nationals.

Figure 1: study sample, by confederation

	Associations	Leagues	Clubs	Expatriates	Per club	% expatriates
AFC	18	20	274	1,164	4.2	16.9%
CAF	3	4	64	236	3.7	12.8%
CONCACAF	11	13	182	1,072	5.9	22.2%
CONMEBOL	9	13	217	695	3.2	11.9%
OFC	1	1	10	76	7.6	27.9%
UEFA	51	86	1,373	8,808	6.4	24.3%
Total	93	137	2,120	12,051	5.7	21.6%

Figure 2: age pyramid for expatriate and national footballers



<sup>1</sup> The list of competitions covered is to be found in the appendix.

## 2. The most represented origins

In total, 174 national associations had at least one representative active abroad in a club included in the analysis. Brazil is the most represented country in absolute terms (1,202 expatriates), followed by France (781) and Argentina (753). The nationals from these three associations make up 22.7% of the total number of expatriates. This percentage increases to 43.5% when taking into account the ten principal exporting countries.

Among the associations with more than 200 expatriates are nine European nations, four from South America and two from Africa. With the exception of Argentina, Uruguay and Colombia, all these countries have a majority of nationals in clubs from UEFA member associations. This result reflects the centrality of Europe in the world football economy. The biggest exporter at CONCACAF level are the United States (130 representatives abroad), while Japan tops the list for the AFC (also 130 expatriates).

Thirteen of the 20 associations whose number of expatriates is between 100 and 200 are also European. The remaining countries are to be found in Africa (Cameroon, the Ivory Coast and Senegal), North America (United States), South America (Paraguay), as well as in Asia (Japan and South Korea). Among these different origins, the Paraguayans, the Japanese and the Koreans are the only ones for which Europe is not the principal destination.

Figure 3: principal player exporting associations

	Number of expatriates	% in UEFA countries
1. Brazil	1,202	65%
2. France	781	86%
3. Argentina	753	37%
4. Serbia	460	91%
5. England	451	79%
6. Spain	362	78%
7. Germany	335	89%
8. Croatia	323	92%
9. Nigeria	292	84%
10. Uruguay	288	26%
11. Colombia	284	26%
12. Portugal	240	92%
13. Ghana	236	76%
14. The Netherlands	232	86%
15. Belgium	216	96%
16. Ukraine	192	97%
17. Senegal	176	83%
18. Slovakia	176	96%
19. Cameroon	174	74%
20. Sweden	167	90%
21. Ivory Coast	163	79%
22. Bosnia Herzegovina	158	98%
23. Italy	150	88%
24. Denmark	146	91%
25. Ireland	140	87%
26. Russia	136	96%
27. Switzerland	131	90%
28. Japan	130	48%
29. USA	130	61%
30. Paraguay	123	15%
31. Romania	120	92%
32. Austria	114	96%
33. Scotland	105	90%
34. Greece	103	96%
35. South Korea	100	31%
36. Australia	97	63%
37. Montenegro	95	89%
38. Czech Republic	94	98%
39. Norway	91	90%
40. Slovenia	89	97%
41. Poland	84	98%
42. Chile	80	35%
43. Georgia	75	95%
44. Mexico	66	29%
45. Canada	66	52%
46. Venezuela	63	51%
47. Bulgaria	63	95%
48. Mali	63	79%
49. Finland	62	95%
50. Northern Ireland	60	90%

### 3. The Brazilians

Portugal is by far the chief destination for Brazilians. On the 1st of May 2017, 221 footballers from Brazil were playing in the two top levels of competition in Portugal. These footballers were, on average, younger than the Brazilian expatriates taken as a whole: 26.2 years of age as opposed to 27.6. For Brazilians, Portugal is often the first country of migration abroad.

The number of expatriate Brazilians is over 20 in 16 countries. Among these are as many European countries as associations outside of UEFA. We find six Asian nations (Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong, South Korea, China and Indonesia), Mexico and the United States. Today, the Brazilian player is the only truly global worker in the professional football industry. Brazilians are present in 82 of 93 associations covered in the study.

Figure 4: principal destinations of Brazilians

	Number	Age	Cumulative
1. Portugal	221	26.2	18%
2. Italy	71	27.0	24%
3. Japan	54	27.4	29%
4. Turkey	46	29.4	33%
5. Spain	43	26.3	36%
6. Mexico	34	27.2	39%
7. Greece	33	27.7	42%
8. Thailand	30	29.7	44%
9. South Korea	30	27.6	47%
10. Hong Kong	29	30.5	49%
Total	1,202	27.6	100%

### 4. The French

Almost a quarter of French expatriate footballers play in English (107) or Belgian clubs (83). Four other neighbouring countries are part of the ten principal destinations of French players: Luxembourg, Spain, Germany and Switzerland. In addition, more than 30 French nationals are under contract with Greek and Turkish professional clubs.

The French are also very present in the Algerian top division: 33 players. In the majority of cases, they are footballers of Algerian origin who grew up in France and migrated to Algeria in pursuit of their professional career. The United States is the second non-European destination (21 players). In total, French footballers are present in 60 of the 93 countries surveyed.

Figure 5: principal destinations of French

	Number	Age	Cumulative
1. England	107	27.0	14%
2. Belgium	83	27.2	24%
3. Luxembourg	64	28.6	33%
4. Spain	55	25.9	40%
5. Italy	53	26.4	46%
6. Germany	39	26.5	51%
7. Greece	39	28.3	56%
8. Turkey	37	28.7	61%
9. Algeria	33	27.1	65%
10. Switzerland	26	28.7	69%
Total	781	26.5	100%

## 5. The Argentinesans

Chile is the principal destination for Argentinean expatriates. On the 1st May 2017, 106 Argentineans were playing in the two professional Chilean leagues taken into account. The number of Argentinean footballers recorded in Mexico is also very high: 97 players. In the two cases, Argentineans are the most represented origin among expatriates.

Spain, Italy and Greece are the only three European associations among the ten principal destinations of Argentinean players. With the exception of the United States, all of the other countries are situated in South America. While Brazilians are the global source of labour par excellence, Argentineans play a similar role in Latin America. In total, they are present in 59 of the 93 associations analysed.

**Figure 6: principal destinations of Argentinesans**

	Number	Age	Cumulative
1. Chile	106	28.5	14%
2. Mexico	97	29.7	27%
3. Spain	75	26.9	37%
4. Italy	62	28.8	45%
5. Bolivia	38	28.9	50%
6. Peru	30	28.5	54%
7. USA	28	28.7	58%
8. Ecuador	25	29.9	61%
9. Greece	22	30.3	64%
10. Colombia	21	30.0	67%
Total	753	28.4	100%

## 6. The Serbians

Similar to French players, Serbian footballers are very present chiefly in neighbouring or geographically close countries: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greece, Hungary, Slovakia, etc. The first destinations outside of UEFA member associations are in Asia: Hong Kong and Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, the number of Serbians remains limited: 7 players.

Serbian footballers are present in 57 of the 93 countries included in the study. Although almost twice less numerous abroad than French players, Serbians benefit from migration networks that are as diverse as their French colleagues. The number of Serbian footballers playing abroad is also remarkable given the country's small size: about 7 million inhabitants.

**Figure 7: principal destinations of Serbians**

	Number	Age	Cumulative
1. Bosnia Herzegovina	38	27.7	8%
2. Montenegro	28	28.2	14%
3. Greece	26	28.0	20%
4. Slovakia	25	24.5	25%
5. Hungary	24	29.3	31%
6. Italy	22	25.4	35%
7. Belgium	17	26.5	39%
8. Spain	15	26.2	42%
9. Russia	14	26.8	45%
. Kazakhstan	14	30.1	48%
Total	460	26.5	100%

## 7. The English

England's presence among the five principal exporting associations is strongly linked to the number of English expatriated in the other UK nations, mainly in Wales (143 footballers) and Scotland (114). More than half of the English who play abroad are under contract with clubs from these countries<sup>2</sup>.

The English are also numerous in an up-and-coming football country: the United States (50 players). This number will most likely increase in the coming years. The English are the main expatriate contingent in another English speaking country: New Zealand (17 footballers). They are represented in 41 countries of the 93 studied.

**Figure 8: principal destinations of English**

	Number	Age	Cumulative
1. Wales	143	26.7	32%
2. Scotland	114	26.2	57%
3. USA	50	27.3	68%
4. Ireland	19	25.0	72%
5. New Zealand	17	27.6	76%
6. The Netherlands	14	22.2	79%
7. Northern Ireland	11	28.4	82%
8. Sweden	8	25.0	83%
9. Norway	7	25.0	85%
10. Spain	6	23.7	86%
Total	451	25.9	100%

<sup>2</sup> The English players in Welsh clubs participating in the English championships are not considered as expatriates. The same rule is applied for all similar cases (Americans in the Canadian teams of the MLS, etc.).

## 8. Conclusion

The migration of players is not a recent phenomenon in football. However, its scope has continually increased over the last three decades with the development of professional championships worldwide. Expatriate players are present in all of the 93 countries and 137 leagues covered in the study. In seven championships, this category even represents the majority of squads<sup>3</sup>.

The presence in foreign clubs of players from 174 national associations also illustrates the sweep of the process of globalisation in the football players' labour market. Nevertheless, this report highlights the concentration of the export of players from three countries in particular: Brazil, France and Argentina. In total, 2,736 of the 12,051 expatriates taken into account are from these nations (22.7%).

Although football is a global sport, not all of the associations have yet the ability to train players to a sufficient level to attract interest from the best foreign clubs. In a highly competitive context, all the countries where football is not a traditional sport need time and considerable funding to build up the culture necessary for the training of high quality players.

From this point of view, the FIFA's, the Confederations' and national associations' role in matters related to football development is of the utmost importance in contributing to football's growth from the point of view of universality. As passionate lovers of the game, we can only encourage any initiative aiming to create clubs and competitions worldwide. In this sense, it is worth reminding that the elite cannot exist without grassroots football.

As far as we are concerned, from next year onwards, we plan to broaden the scope of this study by integrating more and more championships. In doing so, we hope to make a contribution to a world of football that is both sustainable and wide-reaching.

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<sup>3</sup> In this regard, the **Digital Atlas** of the CIES Football Observatory presents the match time statistics for expatriates in 31 top division European leagues.

**Appendix : list of competitions covered by the study**

AFC	AUS	(1)	A-League	UEFA	ALB	(1)	Superliga
	CHN	(1)	CSL		ARM	(1)	Premier League
	HKG	(1)	Premier League		AUT	(2)	Bundesliga, 1. Liga
	IDN	(1)	Liga 1		AZE	(1)	Premyer Liqa
	IND	(2)	I-League, Indian Super League		BEL	(2)	First Division A, First Division B
	IRN	(1)	Persian Gulf Pro League		BIH	(1)	Premier Liga
	JPN	(2)	J1 League, J2 League		BLR	(2)	Premier League, 1. Division
	KOR	(2)	K League Classic, K League Challenge		BUL	(1)	First League
	KSA	(1)	Pro League		CRO	(2)	1. HNL, 2. HNL
	LIB	(1)	Premier League		CYP	(1)	1. Division
	MAS	(1)	Super League		CZE	(2)	Czech Liga, FNL
	QAT	(1)	Stars League		DEN	(2)	Superliga, 1st Division
	SIN	(1)	S.League		ENG	(4)	Premier League, Championship, League One, League Two
	THA	(1)	Thai League		ESP	(3)	Primera División, Segunda División, Segunda B
	UAE	(1)	Arabian Gulf League		EST	(1)	Meistriliiga
	UZB	(1)	PFL		FIN	(2)	Veikkausliiga, Ykkönen
	VIE	(1)	V.League 1		FRA	(3)	Ligue 1, Ligue 2, National
CAF	ALG	(1)	Ligue 1	FRO	(1)	Meistaradeildin	
	RSA	(2)	PSL, 1st Division	GEO	(1)	Erovnuli Liga	
	TUN	(1)	Ligue 1	GER	(3)	Bundesliga, 2. Bundesliga, 3. liga	
CONCACAF	CRC	(1)	Primera División	GRE	(2)	Super League, Football League	
	GUA	(1)	Liga Nacional	HUN	(2)	NB I, NB II	
	HON	(1)	Liga Nacional	IRL	(1)	Premier Division	
	JAM	(1)	Premier League	ISL	(1)	Úrvalsdeild	
	MEX	(2)	Liga MX, Ascenso MX	ISR	(2)	Ligat ha'Al, Liga Leumit	
	NCA	(1)	Primera División	ITA	(3)	Serie A, Serie B, Lega Pro	
	PAN	(1)	LPF	KAZ	(1)	Premier League	
	SLV	(1)	Primera División	LTU	(1)	A Lyga	
	TRI	(1)	T & T Pro League	LUX	(1)	National Division	
USA	(3)	MLS, USL, NAS	LVA	(1)	Virsliiga		
CONMEBOL	ARG	(2)	Primera División, Prim B Nacional	MDA	(1)	Divizia Națională	
	BOL	(1)	LFPB	MKD	(1)	First League	
	CHI	(2)	Primera División, Primera B	MLT	(1)	Premier League	
	COL	(1)	Primera A	MNE	(1)	First League	
	ECU	(1)	Primera A	NED	(2)	Eredivisie, Eerste Divisie	
	PAR	(1)	Division Profesional	NIR	(1)	Premiership	
	PER	(2)	Primera División, Segunda División	NOR	(2)	Eliteserien, 1. Division	
	URU	(2)	Primera División, Segunda División	POL	(2)	Ekstraklasa, I Liga	
VEN	(1)	Primera División	POR	(2)	Primeira Liga, Segunda Liga		
OFC	NZL	(1)	Premiership	ROM	(2)	Liga I, Liga II	
				RUS	(2)	Premier League, FNL	
				SCO	(2)	Premiership, Championship	
				SMR	(1)	Campionato	
				SRB	(2)	Super Liga, Prva Liga	
				SUI	(2)	Super League, Challenge League	
				SVK	(2)	Super Liga, 2. liga	
				SVN	(2)	1. SNL, 2. SNL	
				SWE	(2)	Allsvenskan, Superettan	
				TUR	(2)	Süper Lig, 1. Lig	
				UKR	(2)	Premier League, Persha Liga	
				WAL	(1)	Premier League	