

Attendances in football stadia (2003-2018)

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1. Introduction

The 44th Monthly Report of the CIES Football Observatory analyses match attendances in 51 national football leagues situated in 42 different countries. For 26 leagues, the crossing of different sources available online has allowed us to go back to 2003 (15 seasons). For 25 supplementary competitions, the data refers to the past five years.

The first part of the Report focuses on the sample of 26 championships. It retraces the evolution in attendance figures over the last three lustres. The second part studies comparatively the average attendances recorded over the last five seasons for all of the 51 leagues included in the analysis.

2. Historical analysis of 26 leagues (2003-2018)

The average attendance per match in the 26 championships studied since 2003 was just over 15,000 spectators. This average has only slightly increased between the first and last five seasons studied: +4%. The level of popularity of football in the 22 countries hosting the 26 leagues included in this analysis remains therefore relatively stable.

The trends per league are much more marked. Between 2003-2008 and 2013-2018, the greatest relative increase was observed in the Polish top division: +47%. The co-organisation of the final phase of the European Championships in 2012 certainly had a positive impact in this regard. The popularity of the Major League Soccer (MLS) in the United States and Canada also increased strongly: +34%.

Conversely, professional football in Scandinavia is on the decline. The average attendances have fallen throughout: between -11% in Sweden (with, however, some signs of recovery) and -29% in Norway. The greatest relative decrease between the first and last lustre studied was recorded in Greece. The frequent scandals and incidents marring matches had a very unfavourable impact on the interest of spectators.

Figure 1: average attendances, 26 leagues (2003-2018)

League	2003-2018	2003-2008	2008-2013	2013-2018	Evolution
POL/D1	7,620	6,114	7,711	8,959	+47%
USA/MLS	18,786	15,920	17,720	21,358	+34%
GER/D2	16,352	14,211	16,031	18,814	+32%
BRA/D1	15,482	13,698	15,452	17,402	+27%
SUI/D1	10,315	9,182	11,059	10,705	+17%
NED/D1	18,621	17,147	19,562	19,154	+12%
BEL/D1	11,077	10,408	11,349	11,551	+11%
CZE/D1	4,790	4,568	4,738	5,064	+11%
GER/D1	41,825	39,078	43,093	43,302	+11%
ENG/D2	17,813	17,224	17,688	18,526	+8%
ENG/D1	35,478	34,649	35,111	36,675	+6%
POR/D1	10,652	10,505	10,427	11,000	+5%
FRA/D2	7,163	6,786	7,642	7,062	+4%
FRA/D1	20,887	21,304	19,801	21,556	+1%
ITA/D1	23,439	23,245	24,101	22,967	-1%
RUS/D1	12,126	11,990	12,737	11,650	-3%
JPN/D1	18,239	18,880	17,624	18,227	-3%
ESP/D1	28,409	29,510	28,337	27,381	-7%
SWE/D1	8,491	9,677	7,358	8,586	-11%
FIN/D1	2,466	2,761	2,220	2,390	-13%
ITA/D2	6,701	7,912	5,473	6,708	-15%
AUT/D1	7,526	8,150	7,845	6,581	-19%
DEN/D1	7,327	8,309	7,377	6,391	-23%
SCO/D1	13,605	15,737	13,380	11,697	-26%
NOR/D1	7,866	9,379	7,778	6,632	-29%
GRE/D1	5,347	5,724	6,493	3,896	-32%
26 leagues	15,382	15,077	15,352	15,709	+4%

3. Contemporary analysis of 51 leagues (2013-2018)

The analysis of the average attendances over the past five years highlights the incredible passion surrounding professional football clubs in Germany. The Erste Bundesliga is the most followed competition in absolute terms (+18% in comparison to the English Premier League), while the Zweite Bundesliga is the second division championship with the greatest average number of spectators (just ahead of the English championship).

The Mexican top division is the most popular competition outside of the non-European leagues covered by the study. In the top ten championships with the most spectators are two other competitions taking place outside of Europe: the Chinese top division (6th) and the MLS (8th). The Japanese J-League is 12th, just ahead of the Brazilian Serie A.

Figure 2: average attendances, per league (2013-2018)

1 GER/D1	43,302	27 ITA/D2	6,708
2 ENG/D1	36,675	28 NOR/D1	6,632
3 ESP/D1	27,381	29 AUT/D1	6,581
4 MEX/D1	25,582	30 GER/D3	6,427
5 ITA/D1	22,967	31 DEN/D1	6,391
6 CHN/D1	22,594	32 RSA/D1	6,345
7 FRA/D1	21,556	33 UKR/D1	6,257
8 USA/MLS	21,358	34 ECU/D1	5,996
9 NED/D1	19,154	35 THA/D1	5,180
10 GER/D2	18,814	36 CZE/D1	5,064
11 ENG/D2	18,526	37 ENG/D4	4,630
12 JPN/D1	18,227	38 GRE/D1	3,896
13 BRA/D1	17,402	39 PER/D1	3,741
14 SCO/D1	11,697	40 ROM/D1	3,510
15 RUS/D1	11,650	41 CRO/D1	2,852
16 BEL/D1	11,551	42 HUN/D1	2,733
17 POR/D1	11,000	43 SRB/D1	2,635
18 SUI/D1	10,705	44 FIN/D1	2,390
19 POL/D1	8,959	45 SVK/D1	2,170
20 SWE/D1	8,586	46 PAR/D1	2,115
21 ESP/D2	7,994	47 BUL/D1	2,019
22 IRN/D1	7,949	48 BLR/D1	1,806
23 ENG/D3	7,483	49 IRL/D1	1,727
24 KOR/D1	7,104	50 BIH/D1	1,582
25 FRA/D2	7,062	51 SVN/D1	1,212
26 JPN/D2	6,892	51 Leagues	11,355

With over 80,000 spectators per match, Borussia Dortmund is top of the rankings for attendance by club. The Ruhr team is ahead of four football giants: Manchester United, Barcelona, Bayern Munich and Real Madrid. Five German clubs are in the top ten rankings (the two already cited, Schalke 04, Hamburg and Stuttgart). Atlanta United is the most popular non-European club (10th in total).





















Figure 3: highest average attendances, by club (2013-2018)

1 Borussia Dortmund	80,230	27 Olympique Marseille	44,169
2 Manchester United	75,218	28 West Ham United	43,567
3 FC Barcelona	74,876	29 Seattle Sounders	42,797
4 Bayern München	73,781	30 Hannover 96	41,966
5 Real Madrid	69,822	31 CF América	41,527
6 Schalke 04	61,328	32 Milan AC	41,495
7 Arsenal FC	59,793	33 Chelsea FC	41,463
8 Hamburger SV	52,349	34 Tottenham Hotspur	41,335
9 VfB Stuttgart	52,012	35 Tigres de la UANL	41,091
10 Atlanta United*	51,547	36 Werder Bremen	40,860
11 Borussia M'gladbach	51,369	37 CF Monterrey	40,658
12 Manchester City	50,864	38 Sunderland AFC	39,249
13 Newcastle United	50,721	39 Sporting CP	39,068
14 SL Benfica	50,077	40 Olympique Lyonnais	38,995
15 AFC Ajax	49,781	41 Athletic Club Bilbao	38,974
16 Celtic FC	49,697	42 Juventus FC	38,778
17 Hertha Berlin	49,476	43 Beijing Guoan	38,761
18 Rangers FC*	49,054	44 SSC Napoli	38,475
19 1. FC Köln	48,346	45 Everton FC	38,451
20 Eintracht Frankfurt	47,942	46 AS Roma	37,621
21 Liverpool FC	47,861	47 Valencia CF	37,615
22 Atlético Madrid	47,553	48 Urawa Red Diamonds	36,468
23 Internazionale Milano	46,654	49 Persepolis FC	36,025
24 Feyenoord Rotterdam	46,314	50 Real Betis	35,664
25 Paris St-Germain FC	45,912	51 Chongqing Lifan*	35,032
26 Guangzhou Evergrande	44,905	FC Porto	34,520

* Only seasons in the domestic top division

During the five seasons between 2013/14 and 2017/18, Celtic FC attracted more than a third of spectators having attended Scottish premier division games. This percentage was also over 30% for Hajduk Split in Croatia, Crvena Zvezda in Serbia and NK Maribor in Slovenia. Cerro Porteño (Paraguay) and Persopolis (Iran) were the non-European clubs that contributed most to the attendance figures for their leagues.

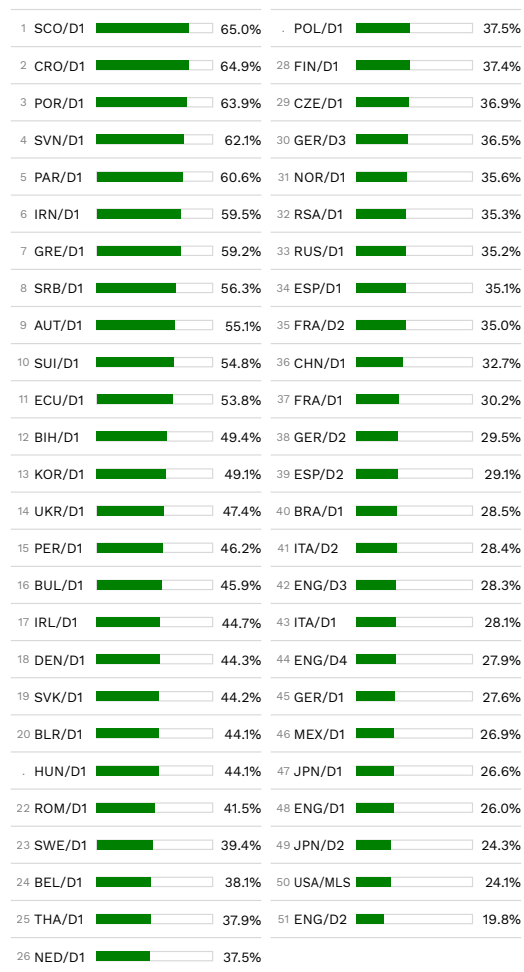
Figure 4: highest contributions to total league attendances, by club (2013-2018)

1	Celtic FC (SCO/D1)	36.5%		*(5)
2	HNK Hajduk Split (CRO/D1)	33.9%		(5)
3	FK Crvena Zvezda (SRB/D1)	33.4%		(5)
4	NK Maribor (SVN/D1)	32.5%		(5)
5	Club Cerro Porteño (PAR/D1)	29.4%		(5)
6	Persopolis FC (IRN/D1)	27.8%		(5)
7	Olympiacos FC (GRE/D1)	27.5%		(5)
8	Rangers FC (SCO/D1)	27.4%		(2)
9	SK Rapid Wien (AUT/D1)	26.7%		(5)
10	SL Benfica (POR/D1)	25.9%		(5)
11	FC Basel 1893 (SUI/D1)	25.8%		(5)
12	CS Emelec (ECU/D1)	22.6%		(5)
13	Ferencvárosi TC (HUN/D1)	22.2%		(5)
	Olimpia Asunción (PAR/D1)	22.2%		(5)
15	NK Olimpija Ljubljana (SVN/D1)	20.9%		(5)
16	Sporting Clube de Portugal (POR/D1)	20.2%		(5)
17	FK BATE Borisov (BLR/D1)	19.9%		(5)
	FK Dynamo Kyiv (UKR/D1)	19.9%		(5)
19	FK Željezničar Sarajevo (BIH/D1)	19.5%		(5)
20	CSKA Sofia (BUL/D1)	19.3%		(4)

* Number of seasons considered

By taking into account the three most popular clubs by league, the concentration of attendances in certain championships stands out more clearly. Given the number of teams involved, the value measured for the Portuguese top division is particularly impressive. The three teams having drawn the biggest crowds per season accounted for 63.9% of the total number of spectators, as opposed to 36.1% for the fifteen remaining clubs.

Figure 5: contribution by the three most popular clubs to total attendance, by league (2013-2018)



4. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of attendances shows substantial disparities according to league. Germany appears as the footballing country par excellence. Although also very popular, English and Spanish clubs have considerably less spectators than German teams. Outside of Europe, Mexican clubs attract the biggest crowds.

The study of the changes since 2003 reveals the growing enthusiasm for football in the United States and Canada. Despite the increase in the number of teams participating in the MLS, average attendances have consistently increased to break the 20,000-spectator threshold over the past five years. This limit has also been broken in China, where football's popularity is henceforth well established too.