

## The demographics of football in the European labour market

Drs Raffaele Poli, Loïc Ravenel and Roger Besson

### 1. Introduction

The 49th Monthly Report of the CIES Football Observatory analyses clubs from 31 European top divisions from the standpoint of the demographic characteristics of their players. The study covers the period from 2009 to 2019. For this last year, the sample is made up of 11,692 footballers spread out over 463 teams (25.3 players per club).

To be included, a player has to be present on the 1st of October of the year of reference in the first team squad of the clubs analysed. Moreover, he must have already played in domestic league games during the current season or, this being not the case, to have played matches in adult championships during each of the two preceding seasons (B-teams not included). The second and third goalkeepers are taken into account in all cases.

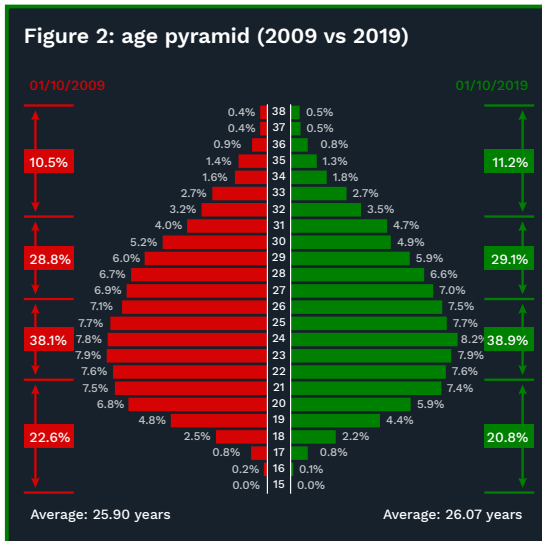
Figure 1: study sample (2019)

Country	League	Clubs	Players	Players/club
AUT	BUNDESLIGA	12	300	25.0
BEL	PRO LEAGUE	16	429	26.8
BLR	PREMIER LEAGUE	15	393	26.2
BUL	FIRST LEAGUE	14	337	24.1
CRO	1. HNL	10	262	26.2
CYP	1. DIVISION	12	295	24.6
CZE	CZECH LIGA	16	399	24.9
DEN	SUPERLIGA	14	336	24.0
ENG	PREMIER LEAGUE	20	496	24.8
ESP	PRIMERA DIVISION	20	507	25.4
FIN	VEIKKAUSLIIGA	12	305	25.4
FRA	LIGUE 1	20	500	25.0
GER	BUNDESLIGA	18	468	26.0
GRE	SUPER LEAGUE 1	14	356	25.4
HUN	NB I	12	299	24.9
ISR	LIGAT HAAL	14	322	23.0
ITA	SERIE A	20	519	26.0
NED	EREDIVISIE	18	429	23.8
NOR	ELITESERIEN	16	380	23.8
POL	EKSTRAKLASA	16	420	26.3
POR	PRIMEIRA LIGA	18	486	27.0
ROM	LIGA I	14	404	28.9
RUS	PREMIER LEAGUE	16	405	25.3
SCO	PREMIER LEAGUE	12	311	25.9
SRB	SUPER LIGA	16	406	25.4
SUI	SUPER LEAGUE	10	253	25.3
SVK	SUPER LIGA	12	296	24.7
SVN	1. SNL	10	241	24.1
SWE	ALLSVENSKAN	16	378	23.6
TUR	SÜPER LIG	18	458	25.4
UKR	PREMIER LEAGUE	12	302	25.2
TOT	TOTAL 31 LEAGUES	463	11692	25.3

## 2. Age

The average age of players in the leagues analysed has changed little since 2009. On the 1st October 2019, it was 26.07 years compared to 25.90 ten years before. The lowest value was measured in 2014 (25.83 years of age). The average age then increased slightly (+0.24 years). In 2019, the most numerous age class was that of players aged 24. Players of 21 years of age or under account for 20.8% of clubs' squads in the sample studied.

Almost four years separate the youngest league (Slovakia) from that made up of the oldest players (Turkey). The French Ligue 1 is the only big-5 league where footballers are younger than the average measured for the 31 championships studied. Several Eastern European countries are among those whose clubs are made up of the most experienced players (Hungary, Bulgaria, Russia or Czech Republic).



**Figure 3: average age per league (2019)**

SVK	SUPER LIGA	24.31
NED	EREDIVISIE	24.54
SVN	1. SNL	24.57
CRO	1. HNL	24.66
DEN	SUPERLIGA	25.01
SUI	SUPER LEAGUE	25.24
BEL	PRO LEAGUE	25.28
FIN	VEIKKAUSLIGA	25.36
FRA	LIGUE 1	25.58
AUT	BUNDESLIGA	25.60
UKR	PREMIER LEAGUE	25.60
POR	PRIMEIRA LIGA	25.64
NOR	ELITESERIEN	25.73
POL	EKSTRAKLASA	25.86
ISR	LIGAT HA'AL	25.94
SRB	SUPER LIGA	25.99
SCO	PREMIER LEAGUE	26.03
ROM	LIGA I	26.09
GER	BUNDESLIGA	26.20
SWE	ALLSVENSKAN	26.32
BLR	PREMIER LEAGUE	26.56
CZE	CZECH LIGA	26.64
RUS	PREMIER LEAGUE	26.69
ESP	PRIMERA DIVISION	26.76
GRE	SUPER LEAGUE 1	26.81
ENG	PREMIER LEAGUE	26.82
BUL	FIRST LEAGUE	26.91
ITA	SERIE A	26.93
HUN	NB I	27.01
CYP	1. DIVISION	27.41
TUR	SÜPER LIG	28.00

### 3. Training

The training analysis is based on the notion of club-trained players. In accordance with the UEFA definition, the latter are those having spent at least three seasons between the ages of 15 and 21 in their home team. After having fallen sharply up until 2018, the presence of club-trained players in the leagues studied has stabilised. On the 1st October 2019, it was 17.2% (+0.2% in comparison to the historic minimum of the previous year).

The highest percentage of club-trained players was recorded in Denmark (27.4%). In only three other countries was this proportion over a quarter: Slovenia, Norway and Switzerland. At the other end of the scale, club-trained players only accounted for around 9% of squads of Turkish, Portuguese and Italian teams. As for the five major championships, the highest value was measured in Spain: 20.9%.

Figure 4: % of club-trained players (2009-2019)

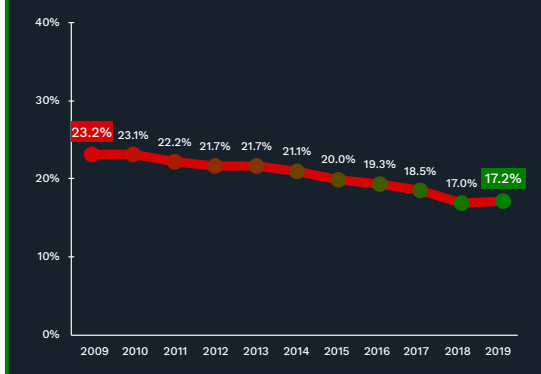


Figure 5: % of club-trained players per league (2019)

TUR	SÜPER LIG	8.7%
ITA	SERIE A	8.9%
POR	PRIMEIRA LIGA	9.1%
GRE	SUPER LEAGUE 1	10.4%
BEL	PRO LEAGUE	11.2%
GER	BUNDESLIGA	12.0%
BUL	FIRST LEAGUE	12.5%
ENG	PREMIER LEAGUE	12.7%
RUS	PREMIER LEAGUE	14.1%
CYP	1. DIVISION	14.2%
HUN	NB I	15.7%
SRB	SUPER LIGA	16.0%
ROM	LIGA I	16.1%
POL	EKSTRAKLASA	16.4%
FRA	LIGUE 1	17.2%
SCO	PREMIER LEAGUE	18.0%
UKR	PREMIER LEAGUE	18.5%
BLR	PREMIER LEAGUE	19.8%
CRO	1. HNL	19.8%
NED	EREDIVISIE	20.0%
AUT	BUNDESLIGA	20.3%
ESP	PRIMERA DIVISION	20.9%
ISR	LIGAT HAAL	21.1%
FIN	VEIKKAUSLIIGA	22.3%
SWE	ALLSVENSKAN	22.8%
SVK	SUPER LIGA	24.3%
CZE	CZECH LIGA	24.6%
SUI	SUPER LEAGUE	25.3%
NOR	ELITESERIEN	26.1%
SVN	1. SNL	27.0%
DEN	SUPERLIGA	27.4%

### 4. Importation

The internationalisation level of the football players' labour market can be measured through the notion of expatriates. It defines players having grown up outside of the national association of their employer club and having gone abroad for football-related reasons. This definition has the advantage of isolating migrations directly linked to the practice of football. Indeed, the foreign players having grown up in the association of their employer team are not considered as expatriates.

For the fifth consecutive year, a record value was recorded for expatriates. The latter henceforth account for 41.8% of players in the sample. Ten years previously, this percentage was only 34.7%. The increase observed over the last year was, however, the lowest recorded since 2014: +0.2%.

The highest levels of expatriate players were measured in four Mediterranean countries: Cyprus, Portugal, Turkey and Italy. Greece also has many players imported from abroad. The other leagues where expatriates represent a majority of squads are to be found in Great Britain (England and Scotland) and in Western Europe (Belgium and Germany).

Figure 6: % of expatriate players (2009-2019)

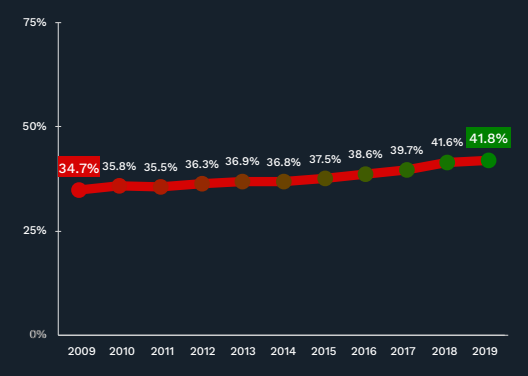


Figure 7 : % of expatriate players per league (2019)

SRB	SUPER LIGA	14.8%
UKR	PREMIER LEAGUE	23.2%
ISR	LIGAT HA'AL	25.2%
CZE	CZECH LIGA	25.3%
NOR	ELITESERIEN	27.4%
AUT	BUNDESLIGA	28.7%
SWE	ALLSVENSKAN	31.2%
DEN	SUPERLIGA	34.2%
SVN	1. SNL	34.4%
FIN	VEIKKAUSLIIGA	35.1%
CRO	1. HNL	36.6%
BLR	PREMIER LEAGUE	36.9%
BUL	FIRST LEAGUE	37.1%
ESP	PRIMERA DIVISION	37.3%
NED	EREDIVISIE	37.3%
ROM	LIGA I	37.6%
RUS	PREMIER LEAGUE	38.3%
FRA	LIGUE 1	38.6%
HUN	NB I	38.8%
SUI	SUPER LEAGUE	39.5%
POL	EKSTRAKLASA	41.4%
SVK	SUPER LIGA	44.3%
GER	BUNDESLIGA	50.2%
SCO	PREMIER LEAGUE	52.7%
GRE	SUPER LEAGUE 1	56.7%
BEL	PRO LEAGUE	57.6%
ENG	PREMIER LEAGUE	57.9%
ITA	SERIE A	58.0%
TUR	SÜPER LIG	62.4%
POR	PRIMEIRA LIGA	63.6%
CYP	1. DIVISION	66.8%

### 5. Stability

Between 2009 and 2017, the average length of stay of players in the first team squad of their employer club has progressively fallen to reach an all-time low of 2.22 years. This value has little changed since then. In 2019, 42.9% of players in the sample had been recruited during the year. This percentage does not include players freshly promoted from a youth academy. In total, 63.9% of players present on the 1st October 2019 were recruited after the 1st January 2018.

All the countries where the players recruited in 2019 accounted for a majority of squads are situated in Eastern Europe (Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria) and Southern Europe (Cyprus, Turkey, Portugal, Israel and Greece). Conversely, most of the countries where clubs have the fewest new recruits are located in Western and Northern Europe. This finding reveals different cultural approaches to squad management and the transfer market.

Figure 8: year of recruitment pyramid (2009 vs 2019)\*

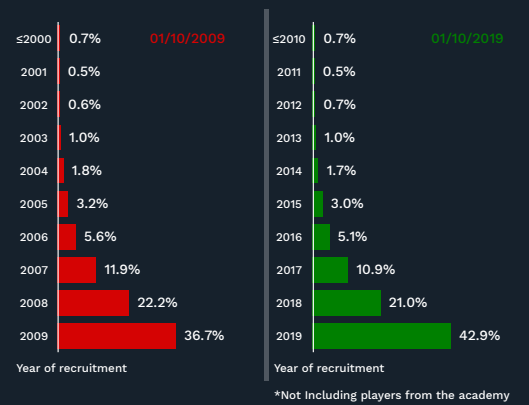


Figure 9: % of players recruited during the year per league (2019)

Country	League	% of players recruited
ENG	PREMIER LEAGUE	27.0%
GER	BUNDESLIGA	30.8%
DEN	SUPERLIGA	31.3%
AUT	BUNDESLIGA	33.0%
SUI	SUPER LEAGUE	34.0%
SVN	1. SNL	34.4%
NOR	ELITESERIEN	34.5%
SWE	ALLSVENSKAN	36.5%
FRA	LIGUE 1	37.0%
UKR	PREMIER LEAGUE	38.7%
ESP	PRIMERA DIVISION	39.1%
CZE	CZECH LIGA	42.1%
RUS	PREMIER LEAGUE	42.2%
SVK	SUPER LIGA	42.2%
CRO	1. HNL	42.4%
BEL	PRO LEAGUE	43.4%
HUN	NB I	43.5%
NED	EREDIVISIE	43.6%
ITA	SERIE A	44.5%
POL	EKSTRAKLASA	44.5%
BLR	PREMIER LEAGUE	47.8%
FIN	VEIKKAUSLIIGA	48.2%
SCO	PREMIER LEAGUE	48.2%
GRE	SUPER LEAGUE 1	50.0%
BUL	FIRST LEAGUE	50.4%
ISR	LIGAT HAAL	51.9%
SRB	SUPER LIGA	52.0%
POR	PRIMEIRA LIGA	52.7%
TUR	SÜPER LIG	54.1%
CYP	1. DIVISION	55.3%
ROM	LIGA I	58.2%

## 6. Conclusion

Particularly noticeable between 2009 and 2018, the trend in the European labour market for footballers towards less stability and a greater international mobility has declined over the past year. Although the level of expatriates in the leagues studied has reached a new record, the increase observed was less marked than in previous years: +0.2% as opposed to an average of +1.2% between 2014 and 2018.

For the first time since 2009, when the CIES Football Observatory started gathering the data presented in this report, the percentage of club-trained players has grown. However, this increase remains very limited (+0.2%). As a result, it is very difficult to claim that the tendency towards fewer club-trained footballers has reversed. In the same vein, the halt in the decrease in the average length of stay of players in their club does not necessarily imply a return towards more stability.

From next year onwards, it will be very interesting to monitor if the increasing economic disparities between teams from different countries will push a greater number of clubs with limited means to concentrate on the promotion of locally trained talents. This holds particularly true in Eastern Europe (Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, etc.) and Southern Europe (Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, etc.), where transfer market activity is particularly prevalent.