

## Team demographics in 48 leagues worldwide

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### 1. Introduction

The 89th edition of the CIES Football Observatory Monthly Report compares 48 leagues around the world according to the demographic characteristics of the players in their squads: 31 top divisions of UEFA member associations, nine of CONMEBOL, six of AFC and two of CONCACAF: the American MLS and the Mexican Liga MX.

To be included, a footballer had to have already played in domestic league games during the ongoing 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 eventual third choice goalkeepers were considered in all cases.

Figure 1: sample of the study (October 2023)

Confederation	Leagues	Teams	Players	Confederation	Leagues	Teams	Players
AFC	 CSL (CHN)	16	456	UEFA	 Superliga (DEN)	12	295
	 J1 League (JPN)	18	502		 Premier League (ENG)	20	533
	 K League 1 (KOR)	12	362		 LaLiga (ESP)	20	502
	 Saudi Pro League (KSA)	18	472		 Veikkausliiga (FIN)	12	312
	 Stars League (QAT)	12	300		 Ligue 1 (FRA)	18	459
	 UAE Pro League (UAE)	14	365		 Bundesliga (GER)	18	470
CONCACAF	 Liga MX (MEX)	18	477		 Super League 1 (GRE)	14	381
	 MLS (USA)	29	807		 NB I (HUN)	12	314
CONMEBOL	 Primera División (ARG)	28	872		 Ligat Ha'al (ISR)	14	348
	 Brasileirão (BRA)	20	647		 Serie A (ITA)	20	535
	 Campeonato Nacional (CHI)	16	414		 Eredivisie (NED)	18	459
	 Dimayor (COL)	20	613		 Eliteserien (NOR)	16	396
	 Liga Pro (ECU)	16	448		 Ekstraklasa (POL)	18	469
	 Primera División (PAR)	12	363		 Primeira Liga (POR)	18	467
	 División de Honor (PER)	19	508		 Liga I (ROM)	16	421
	 Campeonato Uruguayo (URU)	16	438		 Premier League (RUS)	16	410
	 Liga (VEN)	15	468		 Premiership (SCO)	12	310
	UEFA	 Bundesliga (AUT)	12		305	 Super Liga (SRB)	16
		 Pro League (BEL)	16	400	 Super League (SUI)	12	325
		 Premier League (BLR)	15	380	 Super Liga (SVK)	12	292
 First League (BUL)		16	402	 1. SNL (SVN)	10	259	
 HNL (CRO)		10	272	 Allsvenskan (SWE)	16	402	
 1. Division (CYP)		14	360	 Süper Lig (TUR)	20	543	
 Czech Liga (CZE)		16	416	 Premier League (UKR)	16	413	

## 2. Players' age

On average, the 20,779 players analysed were 26.38 years old on the 1st of October 2023. The Slovenian top division is the youngest (24.16 years of age on average), followed by ten other leagues from UEFA associations. The non-European competition with the youngest players, the Venezuelan top division (25.46 years), is only in 12th place. You have to go down to 22nd place to find a second non-European league: Argentina's Primera División (26.29 years).

At the other end of the table, the three leagues with the most experienced footballers are in Asia (China, Japan and Saudi Arabia). With the top divisions from South Korea, Peru and Ecuador, six of the eight oldest leagues are outside Europe. These results indicate the existence of geographical specificities in the age of the players making up the squads, with a much stronger focus on young players in Europe than elsewhere in the world.

Figure 2: players' age, by league (October 2023)

1	1. SNL (SVN)	24.16 years	●
2	Eredivisie (NED)	24.51 years	●
3	Premier League (BLR)	24.55 years	●
4	Bundesliga (AUT)	24.98 years	●
5	Veikkausliiga (FIN)	25.06 years	●
6	Pro League (BEL)	25.10 years	●
7	Eliteserien (NOR)	25.19 years	●
8	Superliga (DEN)	25.29 years	●
9	HNL (CRO)	25.32 years	●
10	Super League (SUI)	25.33 years	●
11	Ligue 1 (FRA)	25.45 years	●
12	Liga (VEN)	25.46 years	●
13	First League (BUL)	25.51 years	●
14	Super Liga (SVK)	25.63 years	●
15	Super Liga (SRB)	25.71 years	●
16	Allsvenskan (SWE)	25.73 years	●
17	Premier League (UKR)	25.79 years	●
18	Primeira Liga (POR)	25.94 years	●
19	Ligat Ha'al (ISR)	26.09 years	●
20	Premier League (RUS)	26.18 years	●
21	Czech Liga (CZE)	26.25 years	●
22	Primera División (ARG)	26.29 years	●
.	NB I (HUN)	26.29 years	●
24	Premiership (SCO)	26.30 years	●
.	Ekstraklasa (POL)	26.30 years	●
26	Bundesliga (GER)	26.35 years	●
27	Premier League (ENG)	26.45 years	●
28	Serie A (ITA)	26.46 years	●
29	Liga MX (MEX)	26.47 years	●
30	Campeonato Uruguayo (URU)	26.48 years	●
31	Dimayor (COL)	26.51 years	●
32	MLS (USA)	26.53 years	●
33	Liga I (ROM)	26.75 years	●
34	Stars League (QAT)	26.81 years	●
35	Brasileirão (BRA)	27.02 years	●
36	Primera División (PAR)	27.06 years	●
37	Campeonato Nacional (CHI)	27.09 years	●
38	UAE Pro League (UAE)	27.19 years	●
39	LaLiga (ESP)	27.24 years	●
40	Süper Lig (TUR)	27.31 years	●
41	Liga Pro (ECU)	27.35 years	●
42	División de Honor (PER)	27.43 years	●
43	K League 1 (KOR)	27.63 years	●
44	1. Division (CYP)	27.73 years	●
45	Super League 1 (GRE)	27.82 years	●
46	Saudi Pro League (KSA)	27.90 years	●
47	J1 League (JPN)	27.91 years	●
48	CSL (CHN)	28.41 years	●

● UEFA / ● CONMEBOL / ● CONCACAF / ● AFC

Geographical differences in the age of players in squads are also apparent at club level. Indeed, 18 of the 20 clubs with the youngest footballers are European, with two Belarusian teams topping the list (Energetik-BGU and FK Minsk). Venezuela’s Mineros de Guayana and Colombia’s Envigado are the only non-UEFA clubs in the top 20.

Conversely, twelve of the 20 clubs with the most experienced footballers are outside Europe, with China’s Qingdao Hainiu heading the list (31.48 years of age on average). All of the UEFA association teams in the top 20 oldest clubs are from Mediterranean leagues (Greece, Cyprus, Turkey and Spain), reflecting the existence of geographical determinants in the age structure of teams within the European continent itself.

Figure 3: youngest clubs (October 2023)

1		Energetik-BGU (BLR)	20.55 years	
2		FK Minsk (BLR)	21.01 years	
3		MŠK Žilina (SVK)	22.07 years	
4		RB Salzburg (AUT)	22.29 years	
5		NK Aluminij (SVN)	22.29 years	
6		FC Volendam (NED)	22.39 years	
7		Mineros de Guayana (VEN)	22.43 years	
8		FK Voždovac (SRB)	22.62 years	
9		Envigado FC (COL)	22.91 years	
10		FC Nordsjælland (DEN)	23.00 years	
11		PFK Beroe (BUL)	23.03 years	
12		FC Ilves (FIN)	23.04 years	
13		FC Isloch (BLR)	23.04 years	
14		FK IMT (SRB)	23.09 years	
15		NK Domžale (SVN)	23.11 years	
16		NK Bravo (SVN)	23.15 years	
17		SJK Seinäjoki (FIN)	23.25 years	
18		NŠ Mura (SVN)	23.33 years	
19		NK Rogaška (SVN)	23.40 years	
20		Viborg FF (DEN)	23.42 years	

Figure 4: oldest clubs (October 2023)

1		Qingdao Hainiu (CHN)	31.48 years	
2		PAS Lamia (GRE)	29.99 years	
3		Doxa Katokopia (CYP)	29.98 years	
4		OFI Crete (GRE)	29.83 years	
5		Chengdu Rongcheng (CHN)	29.80 years	
6		Ulsan Hyundai (KOR)	29.60 years	
7		Deportivo Garcilaso (PER)	29.51 years	
8		Deportes Magallanes (CHI)	29.51 years	
9		Panathinaikos FC (GRE)	29.47 years	
10		Pendikspor (TUR)	29.47 years	
11		Técnico Universitario (ECU)	29.46 years	
12		Aris FC (GRE)	29.42 years	
13		AEK Larnaca (CYP)	29.37 years	
14		Club Libertad (PAR)	29.36 years	
15		Shanghai Port (CHN)	29.35 years	
16		Consadole Sapporo (JPN)	29.34 years	
17		Kawasaki Frontale (JPN)	29.17 years	
18		Fortaleza EC (BRA)	29.17 years	
19		Al-Wehda FC (KSA)	29.14 years	
20		Cádiz CF (ESP)	29.12 years	

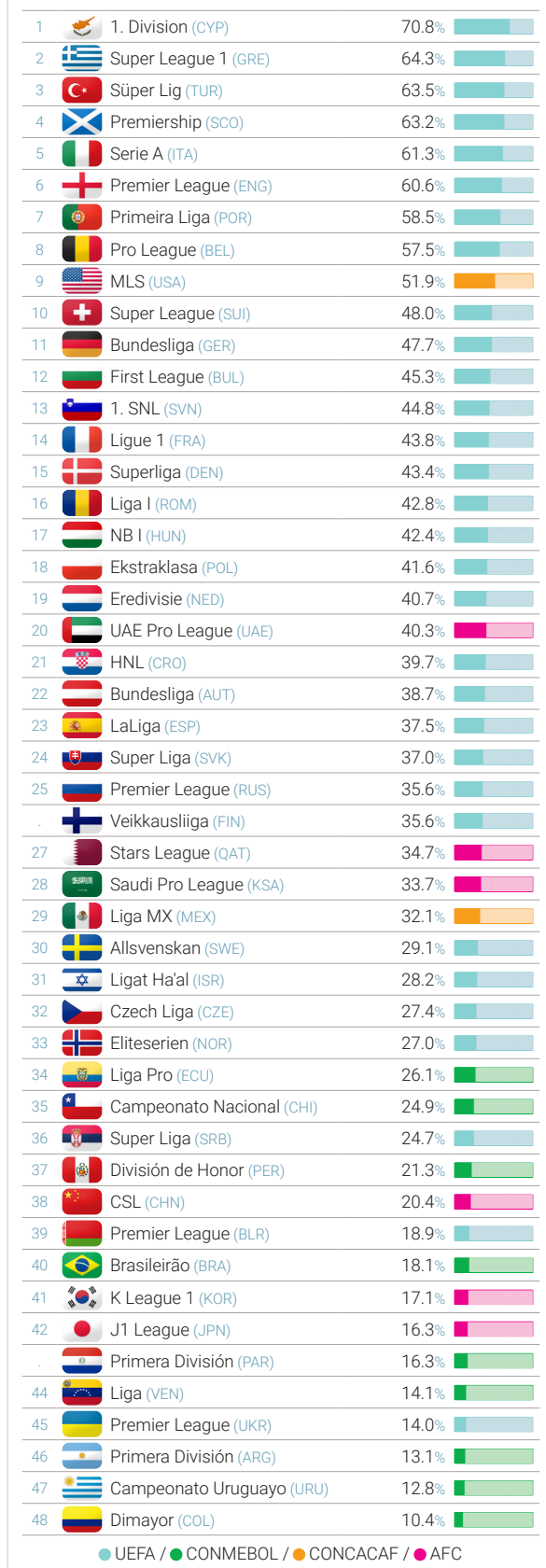
● UEFA / ● CONMEBOL / ● CONCACAF / ● AFC

### 3. Expatriate players

Spatial differences also emerge in terms of the presence of expatriate players in squads. Expatriates are defined as players who play outside the association in which they grew up, having left it following recruitment by a foreign club. No non-European league features among the eight competitions with the highest proportion of expatriates, with only the American MLS (9th) and the UAE Pro League (20th) in the top twenty.









































In contrast, ten of the twelve leagues with the fewest expatriates are located outside Europe, the only exceptions being the top divisions of two countries in a conflict zone: Ukraine and Belarus. The analysis therefore shows that the internationalisation of the footballers' labour market is far more advanced in Europe, and the United States, than anywhere else in the world.

Figure 5: % of expatriates, by league (October 2023)



All of the 20 teams with the highest proportion of expatriate players belong to UEFA member associations, with two Cypriot clubs heading the list: Pafos FC (92.3%) and Aris Limassol (88.5%). The leading non-European team, Portland Timbers of MLS, is only 22nd (74.2%). Al-Wasl from the United Arab Emirates is the Asian club with the highest percentage of expatriates (57.1%), as are Chile's Colo Colo in South America (37.9%).

Figure 6: highest % of expatriates, by club (October 2023)

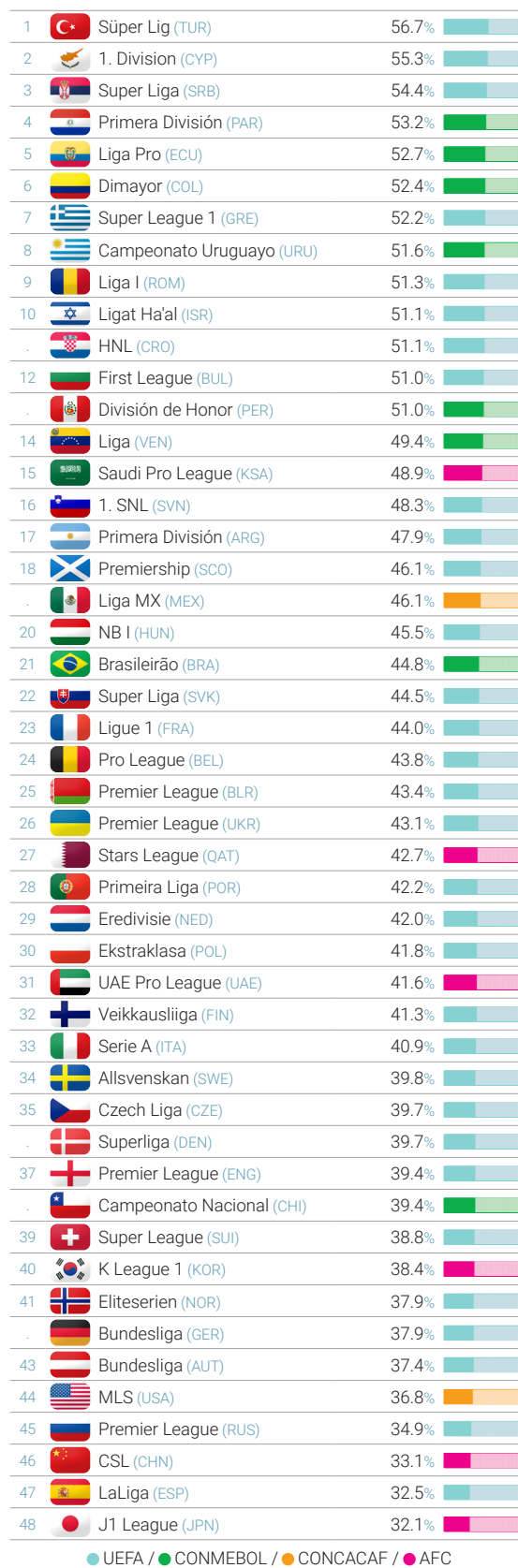
1		Pafos FC (CYP)	92.3%	
2		Aris Limassol (CYP)	88.5%	
3		Aris FC (GRE)	85.2%	
4		Fatih Karagümrük (TUR)	84.6%	
5		Panathinaikos FC (GRE)	81.5%	
.		AEK Larnaca (CYP)	81.5%	
7		Udinese Calcio (ITA)	81.3%	
8		Liverpool FC (ENG)	79.2%	
.		Wolverhampton FC (ENG)	79.2%	
10		Doxa Katokopia (CYP)	78.3%	
.		Galatasaray SK (TUR)	78.3%	
12		US Salernitana (ITA)	77.8%	
.		FC Arouca (POR)	77.8%	
.		RB Salzburg (AUT)	77.8%	
15		Genoa CFC (ITA)	76.9%	
.		VfL Wolfsburg (GER)	76.9%	
17		Torino FC (ITA)	76.0%	
18		Ludogorets Razgrad (BUL)	75.9%	
19		AEK Athens (GRE)	75.0%	
.		AS Monaco (FRA)	75.0%	

### 4. Squad stability

There are also major differences between leagues in terms of the stability of squads, as measured by the percentage of new recruits. These are defined as players who have been with the club for less than a year. Their proportion varies from 32.1% in the Japanese J1 to 56.7% in the Turkish Süper Lig, with an overall average of 44.2%. In 264 of the 775 clubs analysed, players signed in the last year account for at least half of the footballers.

While the East Asian leagues (Japan, China and South Korea) are among those with the most stable clubs, several South American championships (Paraguay, Ecuador, Colombia and Uruguay in particular) are in the opposite situation. In Europe, four of the five major leagues (big-5), the Dutch Eredivisie and the Nordic countries' top divisions are among the most stable, while the championships in south-eastern Europe (Turkey, Cyprus, Serbia, Greece and Romania in particular) are particularly unstable.

Figure 7: % of new signings, by league (October 2023)



Taking into account the average tenure of players in the first team of their club of employment, the lowest value was measured for Cypriots AEZ Zakakiou, with 24 of the 27 players in the squad recruited during the last year and an average stay of 1.11 seasons including the current one. Most of the most unstable teams play in less competitive leagues and are of a rather modest level.

Many top clubs are among the teams whose players have been in the squad the longest, reflecting the link between stability and performance. The top 20 most stable teams include Real Madrid, Bayern Munich, Liverpool and Atlético Madrid, as well as other well-structured clubs such as Athletic Club, Heidenheim and SC Freiburg, three Japanese teams, Saudi Arabia's Al-Hilal, Czech Republic's FC Slovácko, as well as the top clubs from China, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

Figure 8: most unstable teams, average stay (October 2023)

1		AEZ Zakakiou (CYP)	1.11 seasons	
2		PFK Beroe (BUL)	1.16 seasons	
3		FK Novi Pazar (SRB)	1.17 seasons	
.		FK Krumovgrad (BUL)	1.17 seasons	
.		Deportivo Garcilaso (PER)	1.17 seasons	
6		Politehnica Iași (ROM)	1.19 seasons	
.		Central Córdoba SdE (ARG)	1.19 seasons	
8		Resistencia SC (PAR)	1.21 seasons	
9		Deportivo Municipal (PER)	1.23 seasons	
10		Club Tijuana (MEX)	1.24 seasons	
11		Muaither SC (QAT)	1.27 seasons	
12		Hatta Club (UAE)	1.28 seasons	
.		Hatayspor (TUR)	1.28 seasons	
14		Tacuary FC (PAR)	1.29 seasons	
.		Atlético Huila (COL)	1.29 seasons	
16		LNZ Cherkasy (UKR)	1.31 seasons	
.		FC Juárez (MEX)	1.31 seasons	
18		Pendikspor (TUR)	1.32 seasons	
19		FK Naftan (BLR)	1.35 seasons	
.		Karmiotissa FC (CYP)	1.35 seasons	

Figure 8: most stable teams, average stay (October 2023)

1		Shanghai Port (CHN)	5.39 seasons	
2		Shandong Taishan (CHN)	5.03 seasons	
3		Athletic Club (ESP)	5.00 seasons	
4		Real Madrid (ESP)	4.83 seasons	
5		Consadole Sapporo (JPN)	4.78 seasons	
6		Kawasaki Frontale (JPN)	4.67 seasons	
7		Al-Sadd SC (QAT)	4.63 seasons	
8		Al-Duhail SC (QAT)	4.62 seasons	
9		Al-Jazira Club (UAE)	4.52 seasons	
10		Sharjah FC (UAE)	4.35 seasons	
11		Bayern München (GER)	4.30 seasons	
12		FC Heidenheim (GER)	4.17 seasons	
13		Baniyas Club (UAE)	4.14 seasons	
.		Sanfrecce Hiroshima (JPN)	4.14 seasons	
15		Liverpool FC (ENG)	4.04 seasons	
.		SC Freiburg (GER)	4.04 seasons	
.		Al-Hilal SFC (KSA)	4.04 seasons	
18		Atlético Madrid (ESP)	4.00 seasons	
.		Shabab Al-Ahli (UAE)	4.00 seasons	
20		FC Slovácko (CZE)	3.92 seasons	

● UEFA / ● CONMEBOL / ● CONCACAF / ● AFC

## 5. Conclusion

The demographic analysis of the composition of football teams in 48 leagues around the world reveals major differences in the strategies followed by clubs. The European labour market stands out from the others, with both a greater presence of young players and a higher proportion of expatriate footballers.

In terms of age, the average measured across the 31 top divisions of UEFA associations analysed is almost one year lower than that recorded in the 17 non-European leagues in the sample: 25.97 versus 26.96 years. As far as the proportion of expatriates is concerned, the difference is 19.8%: 43.6% compared to 23.8%. These results reflect the greater propensity of European teams to rely on young players, whether having grown up domestically or imported from abroad.

While the South American and Asian leagues tend to be similar both in terms of age, with relatively few young players, and origin, with comparatively few expatriates, they differ greatly in terms of squad stability. The proportion of players who have been with the club for less than a year is 9.8% higher in the nine South American leagues than in the six Asian leagues analysed: 49.0% compared with 39.2%.

Also regarding to stability, there are spatial specificities within Europe too, with fairly different levels emerging around a double polarity of West (more stability) - East (less) and North (more stability) - South (less). These geographical differences also reflect economic disparities, with the most competitive clubs tending to have a more stable workforce than the others.