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# 2023 MEN'S FOOTBALL WORKPLACE SAFETY REPORT

THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE  
TOWARDS FOOTBALLERS  
IN THEIR WORKPLACE



**PLAYER  
IQ**

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**FIFPRO** **PLAYER IQ** THE PLAYER-CENTRIC KNOWLEDGE CENTRE IN THE FOOTBALL INDUSTRY

This publication has been developed by FIFPRO Player IQ, a player-focused knowledge centre that aims to help shape decision-making in the football industry to protect and improve the careers and working lives of professional footballers.  
<https://fifpro.org/en/player-iq>

# 01 / WELCOME

## WELCOME TO THE FIFPRO WORKPLACE SAFETY REPORT 2023

With this report, FIFPRO is seeking to understand the scale and impact of violence and abuse towards footballers in their workplace. The report features the insights of more than two-thirds of the global FIFPRO membership and builds on previous publications focusing on other safety concerns in the workplace as well as research in domestic playing markets by player unions.

In almost every profession, safety in the workplace is a fundamental right, and regulatory and legal frameworks exist to ensure that employees are kept safe from accident and injury while at work.

However, for footballers, these fundamental rights are often overlooked - with abuse, violence and threats towards players occurring around the world.

A football player's workplace is not only the pitch - where acts of violence towards players are most visible - but also elsewhere in the stadium, including the changing rooms, the bus ride to the match, the training ground, and their family homes.

Often, we can see this violence. Team buses being attacked. Players being punched and kicked or hit by missiles. Flares being thrown on the pitch. Pitch invasions that threaten players' safety.

Often, we can hear this abuse. Chants directed at players and their families. Racism and sexism. Fans screaming in players' faces at corners or as they get off the team bus.

But there is a lot we cannot see or hear. There are instances of violence and abuse that do not make it into the statistics - 'hidden instances' of abuse which are rising and making players feel increasingly uncomfortable.

Therefore, a player-centric perspective on health and safety is needed, in order to better understand the impact workplace violence has on players, and the hidden damage it causes to male and female footballers around the world.

Working with FIFPRO member unions, competition organisers, clubs, fans, the Council of Europe, the International Labour Organisation, law enforcement and researchers, our ambition is to continue to monitor the prevalence of violence towards players in the workplace and publish updates to this report, fostering a greater dialogue on player-centric safety solutions that benefit the security and well-being of every participant in the professional game.

### WOMEN'S FOOTBALL INSIGHT

**As women's football continues to professionalise across the world and fan rivalries begin to show intensity, workplace safety and security concerns start to become more pertinent.**

A first survey finding shows that 34% of unions indicated that they noticed growing instances of workplace violence in women's football, indicating that match day safety concerns are emerging in women's football.<sup>1</sup>

1. Specific risk factors for female players such as sexual violence and abuse are excluded from this definition and are addressed by specific FIFPRO research and ongoing workstreams. Visit <https://fifpro.org/en/reports/no-more-silence-action-against-abuse>.



# METHODOLOGY

## ACADEMIC REVIEW

- This report is underpinned by a **detailed academic research paper** provided by Dr Joel Rookwood, a lecturer in Sport Management and director of the Sport & Exercise Management degree at University College Dublin in Ireland<sup>11</sup>
- The review looked at relevant **current and historic issues** including: crowd management, fan culture,

violence towards players, fan trends and more widely the concept of occupational health and safety in the context of football.

- The **full academic review** can be accessed separately as a standalone annex to this report (please visit [FIFPRO Player IQ](#) for more information).

## GLOBAL MEDIA AUDIT

- The study **covered the 2022-2023 season and analysed all media coverage** of violence and abuse towards players.
- The audit sought to **uncover reported instances of violence** in the 2022-23 season with analysis of: Polish, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Portuguese,

English, and Arabic speaking countries, to cover most major football leagues.

- Where season dates existed within a single year (e.g. January-December 2022, as in Mexico), **data from the last complete season (2022) has been analysed.**

## SURVEY OF MEMBER UNIONS

- We conducted a survey of FIFPRO member unions to **understand how player unions perceive the issue** of workplace safety around the world.
- We invited **every FIFPRO Union** to take part in a survey mostly focused on the men's game throughout September and October 2023. Those that had sufficient knowledge and were tracking such issues were also able to opt into a survey focused on the women's game.

- **41 unions participated in the initial survey**, with a further 15 also opting into the survey dedicated to women's football. Key findings to emerge from these surveys have been outlined in this report. These participation rates mean we can report with confidence from a global level on the men's game. Regional level findings or differences should be understood as an indicative, rather than as statistically, representative.

## INTERVIEWS WITH CURRENT AND FORMER PLAYERS

- A series of **in-depth interviews with six professional players** were conducted by FIFPRO. Six interviewees included three players in women's leagues, and three

players in men's leagues. This provided players with the opportunity to express in detail their lived experiences of workplace safety issues.

## STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

- To complement the research, and to ensure the voice of players and industry is reflected in this report, we conducted a **series of consultation engagements** with

relevant football stakeholders, security experts and other institutional actors in this space.

11. He has also been a visiting fellow in Sport Management and Marketing at the University of Vic - Central Catalunya in Spain since 2010. Joel previously held lecturing positions in British universities in Preston, Southampton, Liverpool and Leeds, and has given invited guest lectures in 20 countries. He undertook a BSc in Science and Football and an MRes in Sport and Exercise Science at Liverpool John Moores University, followed by an MSc in Sport Management at the University of Leicester. His PhD awarded by the Football Industries Group of the University of Liverpool's Management School examined fan disorder and crowd management.

I have this feeling that this constant access to the real me as a player has lowered the threshold for fans in the stadium to a point where some think they are entitled to do things which they really aren't.

One men's footballer



# 02

## KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

Since 2022 the right to a safe and healthy working environment has been integrated in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work - a framework that the ILO has concluded in 2020 to be fully applicable as a minimum standard not just to all workers but also athletes.<sup>2</sup>

2. Specific risk factors for female players are excluded from this definition and are addressed by specific FIFPRO research and ongoing workstreams. Visit <https://fifpro.org/en/reports/no-more-silence-action-against-abuse>



# 02 / KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

## WORKPLACE HEALTH & SAFETY IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

ACROSS OUR RESEARCH - INCLUDING A LITERATURE REVIEW, PLAYER INTERVIEWS AND UNION SURVEYS - WE HAVE FOUND THAT:

01

THE SAFETY OF PLAYERS IS A GROWING CONCERN - ACTION IS NEEDED



of unions agree that workplace safety and health is a growing concern for professional footballers.

02

THERE IS AN ABSENCE OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH (OSH) FRAMEWORKS:



Existing research focuses on crowd management and fan behaviour and only very limited work focuses on the application of player centric OSH concepts in the industry.

03

WORKPLACE ABUSE & VIOLENCE IS NORMALISED WITHIN FOOTBALL CULTURE



of unions agree that there is a strain within football culture that is strongly associated with violence and abuse.



04

THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE HAS A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON PLAYERS



believe it contributes to mental health issues, such as depression.



of members believe that the threat of violence and abuse leads to poor performance

05

PLAYERS ARE UNCOMFORTABLE SPEAKING OUT DUE TO POSSIBLE REPERCUSSIONS



of unions think that players are hesitant to speak out because of the impact it will have on their sporting or employment position and the additional abuse they may receive because of it.

06

UNIONS WANT REAL LIFE ACTION TO TACKLE WORKPLACE SAFETY ISSUES INCLUDING EDUCATION



of unions want clubs to be more aggressive on banning fans who attack players alongside fan education and dialogue on workplace safety (including competition organisers)

07

LEGAL ENFORCEMENT AND USE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR IDENTIFICATION PURPOSES ARE IMPORTANT



think there should be tougher legal and criminal penalties for attacks on players.



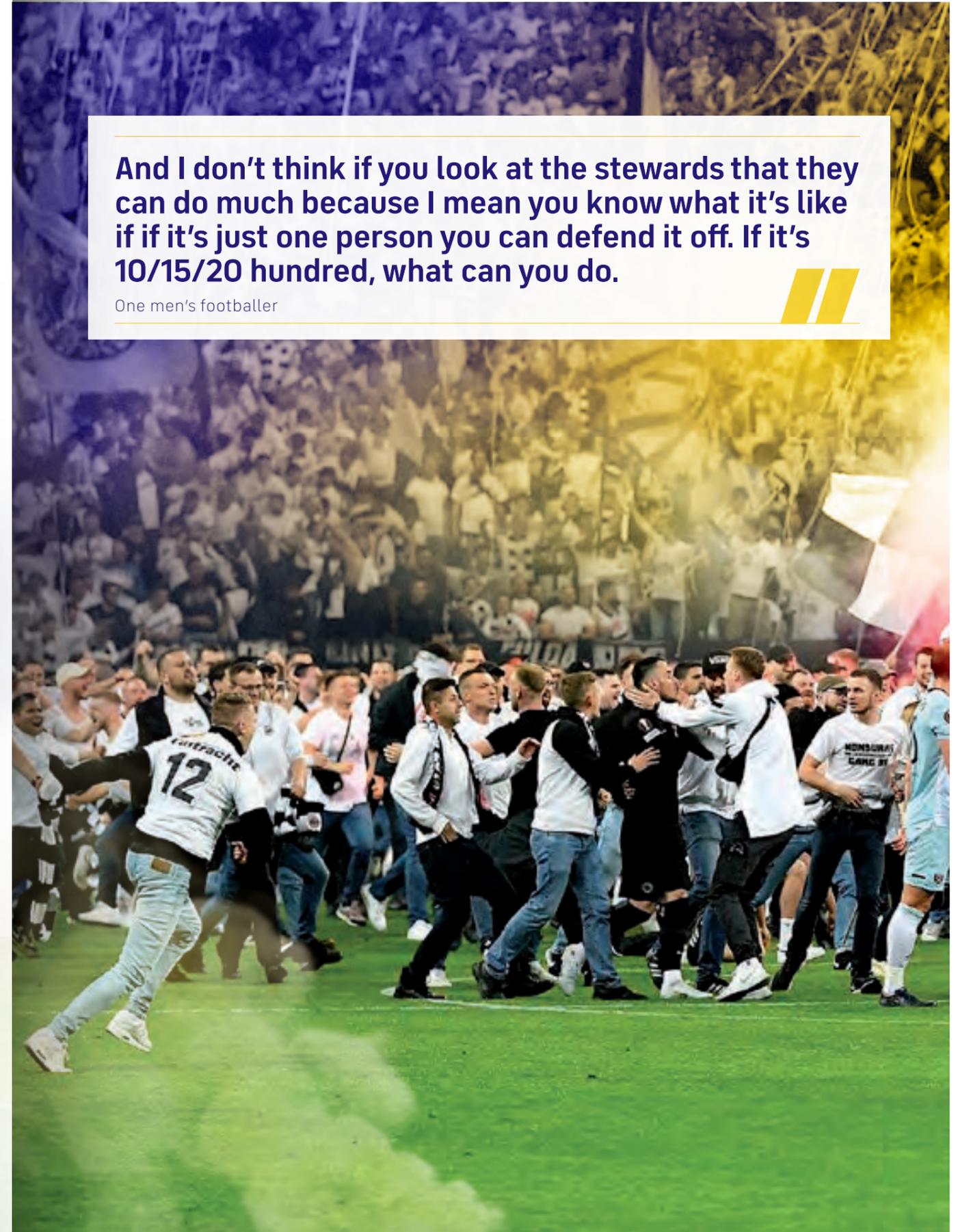
believe that this requires efforts to identify individuals with 98% believing that technology can play an important role in this regard.

## Understanding High-Risk Concerns for Player Safety & Health at Work



And I don't think if you look at the stewards that they can do much because I mean you know what it's like if it's just one person you can defend it off. If it's 10/15/20 hundred, what can you do.

One men's footballer



# 03

## NORMALISATION OF VIOLENCE - THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Violence in football has been recognised as an issue for decades.

Traditionally, it has been considered a problem associated with fan-on-fan violence, spectator safety and "hooliganism". Until now, there has been limited work done to consider the issue from a player-centric occupational safety and health (OSH) perspective. If we are to find long-term solutions to violence towards players, it is important to contextualise this issue historically, and understand how football violence has evolved over time.



SDP - Golunben

# 03 / NORMALISATION OF VIOLENCE – THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

## FOOTBALL WITHOUT FANS IS NOTHING

Fans are an essential part of professional football. In most cases, fans' relationships with players are extremely positive. Unions also highlight that fans play an indispensable role in football with 85% of them believing that "in most instances the relationship between fans and players is very positive and should be cherished."

Many examples from across the football world – in every country and every league – show a close integration between players and fans, highlighting an often-symbiotic relationship in the club and community environment.

A large number of professional football matches occur without any threat or acts of violence against players.

This shows that there is ground for structured dialogue, an increased understanding of the needs of both players and fans as well as growing opportunities to establish accountability and responsibility to address the occurrence of violence in the professional game.

However, when analysing the prevalence of violence and abuse towards players in the workplace, the relationship between spectator and player must be examined in men's football.

While most fans attend matches to enjoy the football, historical trends, and high-profile incidents in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in men's football mean that today, there remains a discourse surrounding problem spectators.

Discussions surrounding this type of fandom – found within certain fan subcultures – often highlight negative aspects, such as aggression, disorderly conduct, threats, violence and discrimination.

The concern is, where there is violence towards players, the perspective of the players is often simplified, with the events seen as a normal and acceptable hazard of being a professional player.

## A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE IN MEN'S FOOTBALL

Football violence is infamously rooted in hooliganism in 1960s Britain – when fan travel to games was first popularised. Supporters followed their favourite teams, bringing with them community pride – which often manifested itself as aggression towards opposing fans, resulting in segregation in many stadiums.

This spatial demarcation served to control some aspects of football violence within the grounds, but also created dynamics which escalated conflict between supporters and violence against players.

Broadcasters were fascinated by the rise of in-stadium violence, and increasingly chose to share footage on news channels. The broadcasting of these kinds of incidents effectively advertised football as a site to engage in violent disorder, attracting those inclined to 'hooliganism' and discouraging attendance from those who were not.

With the rise of international and club competitions, this kind of hooliganism – dubbed 'the English disease' – spread globally. Hooliganism took on new forms in each region – adapting to local cultures and contexts.

While this was often very negative, with hooliganism becoming synonymous with organised crime in southern Europe and Latin America, new fan bases, such as in the United States, have created their own fan cultures, creating family-friendly environments.

In recent years, this has been curbed to some degree through increased security and surveillance – but it remains an issue in some countries.

What remains true is that for historical, economic, and societal reasons, football continues to have an unhealthy relationship with violence, even if it is reserved for the minority.<sup>3</sup>

3. For more information, please access the full scientific literature review via [FIFPRO Player IQ](#)



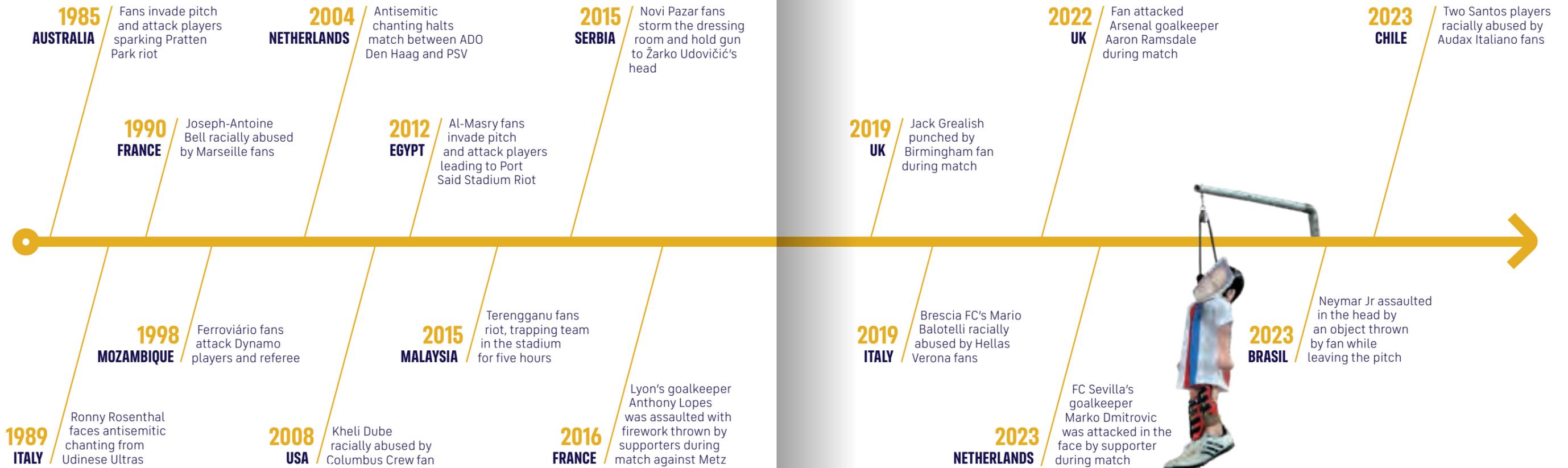
If there's one fan that is getting out of line, if other fans jump in and say that this behaviour is wrong, that can go a long way.

One men's footballer



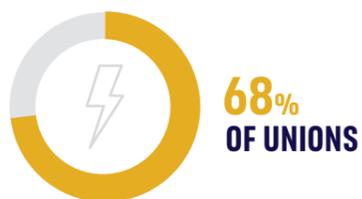
## VIOLENCE TOWARDS PLAYERS THROUGH TIME

Violence towards players is nothing new in football. The following timeline maps some of the most high profile incidents of violence and abuse towards players over the last four decades.



## THE PLAYER EXPERIENCE AT WORK

Football players are exposed to a significant amount of violent abuse in their workplace. Often this abuse is structural, deeply rooted in the culture of the game in the stands and the youth development pathway into the professional game.



agree that there is a **strain within football culture** that is strongly associated with violence and abuse.



believe that many players just accept that **verbal abuse and violence is part and parcel of the game**. A further 29% feel that players are largely fed up with the threat of violence and abuse and want things to change as a result. Regardless of whether players just accept the abuse or want to do something about it, few would argue that it is there.

### Who, if any, do you or players need more support from?



Televised matches provided a form of escape, with many fans feeling closer and more connected to the players they supported – and even more invested in the games they watched. This often manifests itself in increased rates of online abuse.

Post-pandemic, online abuse remains a significant issue. In the recent FIFA/FIFPRO Social Media Protection Service Report which examined the levels of online abuse aimed at participants during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, over

19,600 abusive posts were detected and reported with 74% of identifiable abuse coming from Europe and South America.

Many are concerned that this is a problem that is only growing, with 66% agreeing that “football fan culture has changed in recent years, and it has become increasingly more violent and abusive.”

Many attribute this change to social media, with 78% agreeing that media and social media coverage creates an expectation of increased fan access to players and limits players’ ability to draw boundaries in their work life.

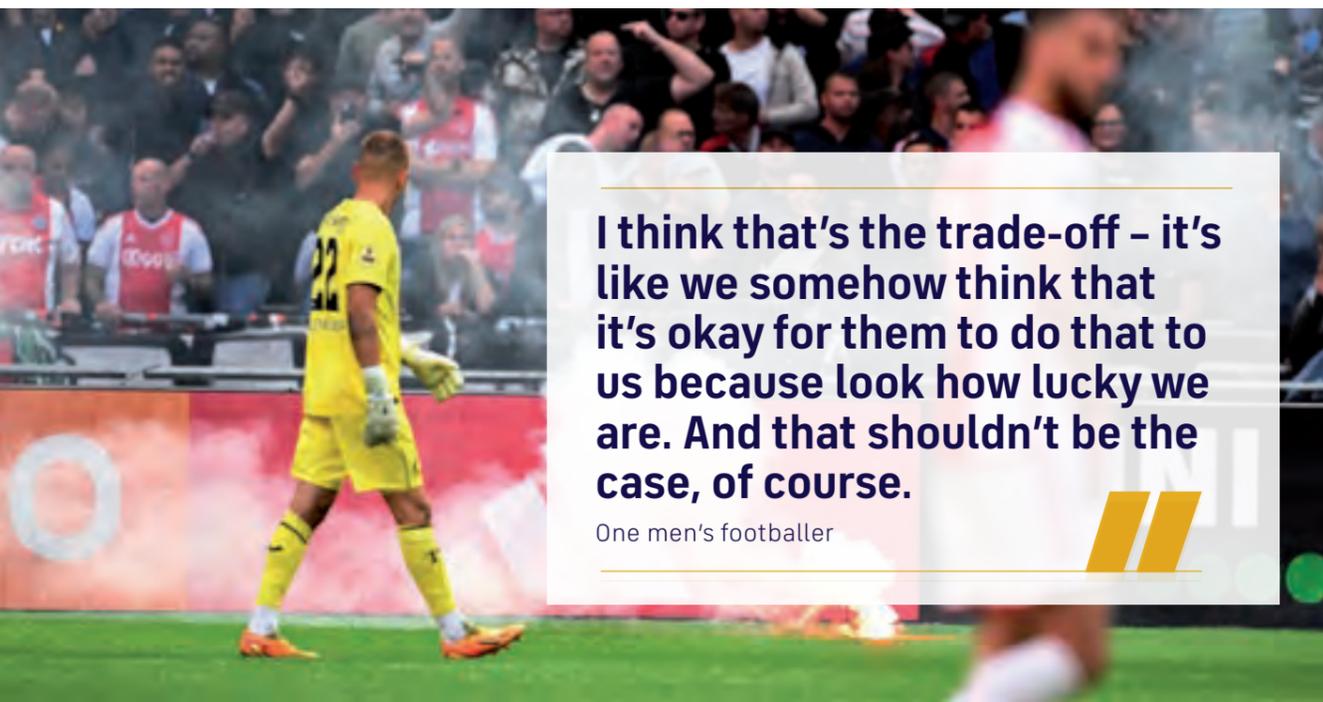
**[...] that’s why I said the media for me is massively complicit because...they criticize players all the time, right? The media base gives other people the blueprint.**

One men’s footballer



**I think that’s the trade-off – it’s like we somehow think that it’s okay for them to do that to us because look how lucky we are. And that shouldn’t be the case, of course.**

One men’s footballer





# 04

## ABOUT WORKPLACE SAFETY

### UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

The FIFPRO Workplace Safety Report 2023 provides a baseline of evidence which captures the scale of violence towards footballers in their place of work, aims to understand how this impacts them and presents a player-centric approach to creating a safer workplace in the years to come.

The report offers a complimentary resource to existing accounts that are collected by leagues, international competition organisers, and governments or law enforcement.

# 04 / ABOUT WORKPLACE SAFETY

## INTRODUCTION TO WORKPLACE SAFETY

When considering the nature of violence and abuse towards players, we have used the following definitions.

Physical and non-physical violence and abuse, in which professional footballers are the victims, occurring:



**ON MATCHDAYS**  
inside or near to  
the stadium or  
on the pitch



**DURING TRAVEL**  
to and from  
the stadium



**AT THE TRAINING  
FACILITIES**



**OTHER OFFICIAL EVENTS**  
linked to the  
employment  
of players

Such instances can include intimidatory or threatening behaviour, sexual misconduct, physical abuse or violence which does not result in player injury, physical abuse or violence that does result in injuries and/or other

psychological impacts. As well as physical injury, it can also result in deterioration in satisfaction, player performance and mental health.

## GLOBAL REGULATIONS ON WORKPLACE SAFETY

Governments and institutions worldwide have long placed a significant emphasis on safeguarding employees in the workplace.

**The International Labour Organization (ILO), as a United Nations agency, sets international labour standards.**

The 1981 ILO Convention 155 and 2006 ILO Convention 187 are legislative milestones that underscore the critical need for football players to enjoy the same level of protection as any other employee, whether they're on the field, at the training ground, or commuting to their place of work.

Notably, footballers benefit from an additional layer of security from the 2016 Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security, and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events, also known as the "Saint-Denis Convention".

This groundbreaking agreement serves as the sole internationally binding instrument that fosters a cohesive approach, uniting municipal authorities, governments, law enforcement agencies, football authorities, fans, and local communities in the pursuit of safety, security, and service excellence.

Importantly, for players, this Convention introduces a robust set of measures aimed at deterring, preventing and penalising incidents of violence or misconduct in the context of sporting events.

Together, these set an important legal and regulatory precedent for the protection of footballers in the workplace, both in Europe and around the world.



## OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY – AN ILO PERSPECTIVE



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**In 2020, at a landmark meeting on Decent Work and the World of Sport, government, employer and worker constituents of the International Labour Organization (ILO) concluded that "All workers, including athletes, regardless of the type of employment relationship, require, as a minimum, to be protected by the fundamental principles and rights at work."<sup>4</sup>**

Two years later, constituents of the ILO decided to include the right to a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work. For the ILO, all athletes have the right to safety and health at work, and it promotes this principle through key international labour standards.

**Convention No. 155** provides the cornerstone of protecting workers' safety and health. The Convention underscores the significance of the principle of prevention and applies to all workers in all branches of economic activity, thus including athletes. Importantly, the term "health" in relation to work is defined not only as "the absence of disease or infirmity", rather, it encompasses all "the physical and mental elements affecting health which are directly related to safety and hygiene at work".

Member states are required, in consultation with employers and workers' organizations, to establish a national policy on OSH to prevent work-related injuries. The Convention delineates specific areas for consideration, including the safety of working environments, equipment, substances, and processes, along with training relevant individuals on achieving adequate safety and health levels.

With regard to action at the organizational level, Convention No. 155 mandates employers to ensure, as reasonably practicable, that workplaces and processes under their control are safe and pose no risk to workers' health. This includes providing necessary protective clothing and equipment to prevent accidents or adverse health effects to workers. Arrangements shall be made to ensure that workers and their representatives receive adequate information, training, and the opportunity to inquire and be consulted about OSH measures related to their work.



**The International Labour Organization was founded in 1919 and became a specialized agency of the United Nations in 1946.**

It brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 Member States to set international labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men. International labour standards are legal instruments drawn up by the ILO's constituents, setting out basic principles and rights at work. They are either Conventions (or Protocols), which are legally binding international treaties that can be ratified by member States, or Recommendations, which serve as non-binding guidelines.

Over 40 up-to-date international labour standards deal with occupational safety and health (OSH), including two fundamental conventions,<sup>5</sup> namely the [Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 \(No. 155\)](#) and the [Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 \(No. 187\)](#).

4. ILO, *Points of consensus of the Global Dialogue Forum on Decent Work in the World of Sport*, 2020.  
5. In June 2022, the ILO International Labour Conference decided to include "a safe and healthy working environment" in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work, designating as fundamental conventions the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187). Now, all ILO Members, even if they have not ratified these two fundamental conventions on OSH, now have an obligation, arising from the mere fact of their membership, to respect, promote and realize the right to a safe and healthy working environment.

Convention No. 155 is complemented by the 2002 Protocol (P 155), that calls for the establishment and periodic review of requirements and procedures for the recording and notification of occupational accidents and diseases.

**Convention No. 187** aims to promote continuous improvement of OSH to prevent occupational injuries, diseases and deaths, by developing national OSH policies<sup>6</sup>, systems<sup>7</sup> and programmes<sup>8</sup>. It emphasizes cultivating a national preventive safety and health culture, wherein the right to a safe working environment is respected at all levels, and all stakeholders actively participate in its assurance.

Other OSH-related conventions particularly relevant for the world of sport include the **Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161)** and the **Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)**.

Convention No. 161 stresses the importance of specialized and easily accessible occupational health services for all workers across economic sectors (thus, including professional athletes). It mandates the establishment of occupational health services at the workplace level, focusing on preventive and advisory functions.

Convention No. 190 protects all workers (including athletes) from violence and harassment<sup>9</sup> connected to or arising from work, regardless of contractual status, covering also those in training and those whose contracts have been terminated. The protection from violence and harassment is not limited to the physical workplace, but extends to places where a worker is paid, takes breaks, or uses facilities, during work-related travel, training, events, or social activities, through work-related communications including technology, in employer-provided accommodation, and during commuting.

This coverage ensures athletes facing violence during competitions or encountering harassment on social media

platforms fall within the Convention's protective scope. The Convention outlines actions covering prevention, protection, enforcement, remedies, guidance, training, and awareness-raising. Importantly, it calls for integrating violence and harassment considerations into OSH management, identifying hazards, and providing information and training to workers (in this case athletes) and other relevant individuals.

6. A national OSH policy, formulated in line with Convention No. 155, shall promote fundamental principles like assessing and addressing occupational risks, as well as fostering a national preventive safety and health culture through information, consultation, and training.

7. A national OSH system is the infrastructure supporting the implementation of the national OSH policy and programme. Article 4 of [Convention No 187](#) defines all the elements that shall be included in such a system.

8. A national programme on OSH shall include objectives, priorities and means of action. It shall be supported, where possible, by other complementary national programmes and plans which will assist in achieving progressively a safe and healthy working environment.

9. Convention No. 190 defines violence and harassment as "a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment" (Article 1). Notably, the definition does not include intent as one of its constitutive elements but rather focuses on the unacceptability of the behaviour – thereby ensuring a victim-centred and pragmatic approach.



## THE CONVENTION ON AN INTEGRATED SAFETY, SECURITY AND SERVICE APPROACH

 **SECRETARIAT**  
The Saint-Denis Convention, COUNCIL OF EUROPE

**The Council of Europe (CoE) is the European continent's leading human rights organisation. This intergovernmental organisation comprises 46 Member States, including all the 27 European Union (EU) members.**



**The Council of Europe has adopted over 220 Conventions (also called treaties), with one of the most recent being the Saint-Denis Convention.**

These are legally binding upon state once they have officially expressed the wish to become "States Parties", usually through a procedure called "ratification". The State of signatures and ratifications of all treaties can be checked at the treaty office website: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/Conventions/full-list>

**The following Council of Europe conventions are the cornerstone of its activities:**



**The European Social Charter, which safeguards the economic and social rights of Europe's citizens, including those related to employment, social and legal protection, housing, health, education, free movement and non-discrimination.**



**The European Convention on Human Rights, which secures fundamental civil and political rights. All CoE member States are Parties to this Convention, which has established a unique system for ensuring respect for human rights: the European Court of Human Rights.**



The Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events, also known as the "Saint-Denis Convention", entered into force on 1 November 2017. The aim of this Convention is to make football matches and other sports events more safe, secure and welcoming. Three of its main features are the following: it is the only legally binding instrument in the world dealing with this subject; it establishes modern principles and the highest standards and best practices in this field; and it promotes institutional co-operation between all relevant stakeholders and experts in the organisation of sporting events.

The Saint-Denis Convention promotes a balanced and integrated multi-agency approach, covering three interdependent and overlapping pillars: Safety, Security and Service, to ensure a safe, secure and welcoming environment for all participants at sports events, in and outside of stadia. It identifies six key actors, equally important: government, municipal authorities, police, football authorities, supporters and local communities.

The Convention's scope covers all the measures aiming at ensuring the appropriate safety, security and service conditions for all participants at sporting events, from the stadia safety personnel, police, firefighters, medical staff, volunteers, to the teams' technical staff, players, referees, journalists, the spectators and the neighbour communities and businesses that are impacted by the sporting event. Moreover, as the Safety pillar comprises all measures "with the primary aim of protecting the health and well-being of all these participants", it means that the Convention is also concerned with their health conditions, including the occupational health and safety, both inside and outside of the sports venue.

This mechanism is further reinforced by the European Social Charter, which states, in Article 3 (The right to safe and healthy working conditions), paragraph 1, the need for a "national policy on occupational safety, occupational health and the working environment, with the primary aim to improve occupational safety

and health and to prevent accidents and injury to health arising out of, linked with or occurring in the course of work, particularly by minimising the causes of hazards inherent in the working environment".

**The Convention identifies the following three main safety and security risks (Article 5.5), which all affect players in a significant way:**



**THE USE OF PYROTECHNICS**



**ANY VIOLENT OR OTHER PROHIBITED BEHAVIOUR**



**ANY RACIST OR OTHER DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIOUR**

The Convention has its own monitoring body, the Committee on Safety and Security at Sports Events, also known as the "Saint-Denis Committee".

Moreover, the Convention calls for a "policy of proactive and regular communication with key stakeholders, (...), based on the principle of dialogue, and with the aim of generating a partnership ethos and positive co-operation as well as identifying solutions to potential problems" (Article 8). Again, players representatives have a role to play in the national or local multi-agency instances to contribute with solutions for common or their specific potential or existing problems.

States Parties' alignment with the provisions of the Convention is promoted through a monitoring programme of visits, technical assistance activities, but also through an annual monitoring questionnaire and report, which enables them to assess the level of implementation of the Convention and the trends and challenges ahead, notably in terms of risks and threats to the security, safety and service at sporting events.

10. Further to the sport conventions, the European Sports Charter is a non-binding text which provides guidance for member States to develop a comprehensive framework for sport including by perfecting existing legislation and policies. The Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) monitors and supports the implementation of the Charter in its States Parties. The Charter complements the ethical principles and policy guidelines set out in the three sports Conventions.



# 05

## WORKPLACE SAFETY IN THE 2022-23 SEASON

Research, and surveys with FIFPRO members, has revealed that the safety of players in the workplace is a growing concern.

This chapter sets out the trends and major incidents in the 2022-23 season, the hidden impact this has on players and potential solutions. Unions and players from across the globe are increasingly of the view that action needs to be taken.

# 05 / WORKPLACE SAFETY IN THE 2022-23 SEASON

The full extent of safety issues that players face is not well understood – with only 15% of unions agreeing that “enough data is collected to effectively monitor such instances”. With that in mind, the 2023 Workplace Safety report aims to provide an inaugural baseline of understanding, based on union engagement with its members, high profile instances which have driven media coverage and accounts from players.

**THE SAFETY OF PLAYERS IS A GROWING CONCERN FOR UNIONS AND ACTION IS NEEDED**



**76%**  
of unions

**agree that “workplace safety and health is a growing concern for professional footballers in the context of violence and physical or mental abuse at work.”**

Players are concerned about the threat of violence and abuse in the workplace, with 66% of unions reporting that they think players are worried about their safety in and around the stadium on match days. This is particularly the case in the Africa, and the Asia/Oceania regions, with a majority of unions from these areas agreeing that players have grown increasingly concerned about violence and abuse in the past two seasons.

The majority of unions in Europe reported no change in concern over the last two seasons. However, this does

not necessarily indicate that there are fewer instances of player abuse in Europe. Analysing media coverage from the 2022-23 season, we identified over 50 reported incidents of abuse in men’s football and violence suffered by players across the Americas, Africa, and the Asia/Oceania regions, and over 180 instances of player abuse in Europe.

We know that there are further instances of workplace abuse – ‘hidden incidents’ – that are not identified or reported by the media. To shine a light on these and given the concern of their members, unions are calling for better player protection, with **93% saying that “violence and abuse is a workplace safety & health issue for players and needs specific regulation to design and enforce player protection.”**

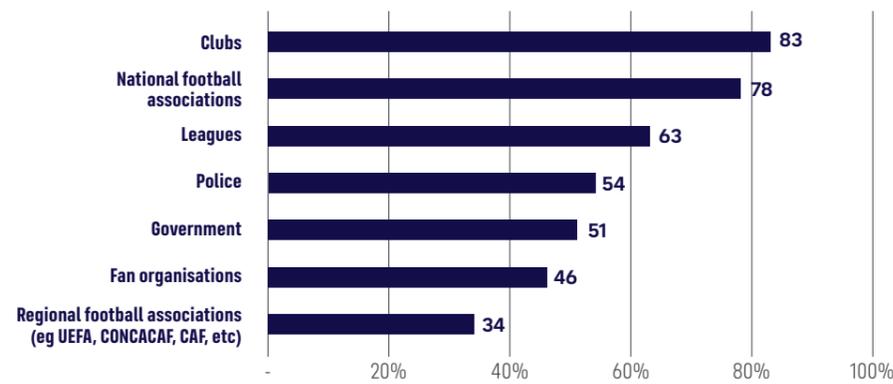
The concern for players needing better protection was highlighted by former Hearts manager, Robbie Nielson, after an incident last season when his defender, Alex Cochrane, was struck on the head by a lighter thrown from the Hibernian stands.

**Violence and abuse is a workplace safety & health issue for players and needs specific regulation to design and enforce player protection.**

Unions



Who, if any, do you or players need more support from?



Football bodies need to collectively come together to tackle player safety issues, with unions saying that players need more protection from **clubs (83% of unions)**, from **national associations (78%)**, and from **leagues (63%)**.

While unions prioritise support from employers over fans in order to stop workplace abuse, one player interviewed provided some insight into the role of fans that fans may be able to play in reducing abuse, saying: "I think in a

perfect world you'd love to have it where a fan culture or club and everyone involved with a football community aligns with a set of values and then can control behaviour by showing that that's the standard that they expect."

WORKPLACE ABUSE AND VIOLENCE IS NORMALISED WITHIN FOOTBALL CULTURE, WHICH PERPETUATES THE PROBLEM



68%  
of unions

agree that there is a strain within football culture that is strongly associated with violence and abuse, and players interviewed agree that abuse is normalised within football culture. As one player put it:

"I think we normalize [violence towards players]. It's not that footballers think we deserve that kind of abuse, but [being a professional footballer] seen as being such a privilege ... that [people think] they should be able to

handle a little bit of [abuse] because of all the other stuff that comes with being a professional footballer."

"When it comes to a point when you feel genuinely unsafe then it's gone too far."

The normalisation of abuse in football culture is compounded by media and social media. 78% of unions agree that media and social media coverage creates an expectation of increased fan access to players and limits players' ability to draw boundaries in their work life.



But when that falls short, then it falls to security and the people that exist [off the pitch] to control that. It's a tough one because you don't really want to punish offenders and do it that way, you want to create a culture where that doesn't happen in the first place. And who's responsible for creating that environment? I'm not totally sure.

One men's footballer



 / **MISSILES**

The most significant threat to footballers' safety on the pitch is posed by missiles. In two thirds of surveyed unions countries, the throwing of objects is one of the most commonly occurring concerns. Goalkeepers, being the closest targets, are particularly vulnerable.

While the majority of thrown objects harmlessly land on the pitch, there are numerous instances where missiles strike or injure players.

Managing thrown items is challenging, particularly given that everyday objects such as bottles, lighters and coins can be used as missiles. **Former Ajax midfielder Davy Klaassen suffered a significant cut to the head after a lighter was thrown on to the pitch by Feyenoord fans,** leading to the KNVB Cup game being suspended for the second time, after smoke from pyrotechnics had caused an earlier stoppage.

In some countries – including Croatia, Greece, Cyprus – it is normal protocol for fans to use flares to welcome

players onto the pitch at the start of the match. As such, it is easy for them to bring them into stadia and to be used as missiles or weapons.

Last season, there were approximately 114 instances of pyrotechnics or missiles disrupting football matches, with some significant injuries suffered by players. **Chilean goalkeeper Martín Parra was hospitalised after a firecracker was thrown onto the pitch in the fourth minute of a Campeonato Chileno match** against Universidad Católica. Tristán Suárez goalkeeper, Cristian Correa, was hit by a flare and hospitalised after the opposition team Maipu won the game.



Former Ajax midfielder Davy Klaassen

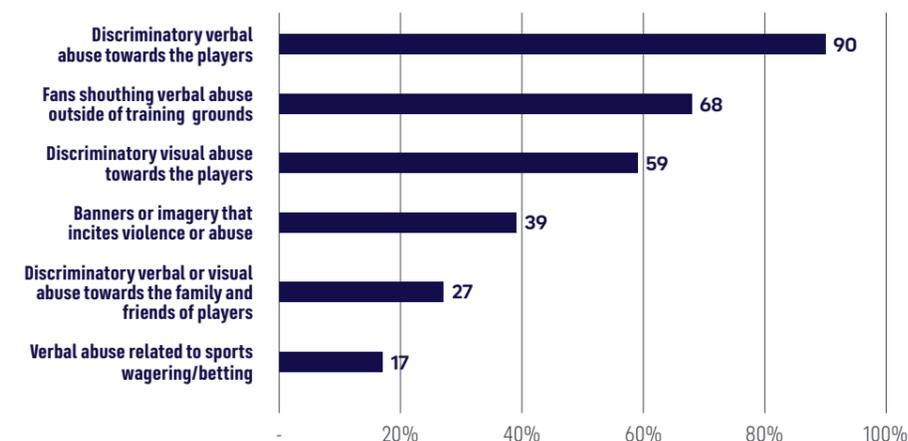


Chilean Goalkeeper Martín Parra

 / **DISCRIMINATION**

Players facing discriminatory verbal abuse from the crowd is a major issue, motivated by factors such as ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, disability, and religion.

What types of non-physical abuse did players face in and around the stadium, on the way to and from the stadium on match days or at the training ground? Please rank from most common to least common. (% ranked top 3)



Discriminatory abuse is also driven by on-field events, such as missed chances, losses or competition exits, while players also spoke of their experience playing in new regions, which has often resulted in racist abuse.



The media audit identified that there were more than 30 global instances of reported in-stadia racial abuse against players in the 2022-23 season, however, we know that many incidents go unreported in the media.

Some notable cases include:

- Former Inter Milan striker **Romelu Lukaku was racially abused** after he scored a penalty in the Coppa Italia which knocked Juventus out of the competition.
- Lazio's derby with AS Roma resulted in fans being reported to the police for chanting Nazi slogans throughout the game.

- Real Madrid forward **Vinicius Jr repeatedly experienced racist abuse** on the pitch, including during a match against Valencia. Several fans made racist gestures towards the Brazilian which led to Valencia's stadium being closed for three matches, and a €27,000 fine. An effigy of him was hung from a bridge ahead of Real's Copa del Rey match against Atletico Madrid.



Vinicius Jr experiencing racist abuse

 / **PITCH INVASIONS**

Although less common than other forms of violence and abuse, the potential severity and impact of pitch invasions, make them a significant threat to players.

While pitch invasions are more regularly seen towards the end of the season, with fans celebrating title wins or avoiding relegation, supporters entering the pitch with the intent to violently attack footballers is a concern for players and unions – such as when **Rodez player Lucas Buades was assaulted by a Bordeaux fan** as he celebrated a goal alongside teammate Wilitty Younoussa in 2023.

These fears have been fuelled and realised by high profile instances around the world, most notably **last season at the Melbourne derby, when in December 2022, 150 supporters stormed the pitch. During the 20-minute pitch invasion, fans attacked players and threw flares.** Melbourne City FC goalkeeper Tom Glover was concussed after being hit with a bucket of sand which resulted in



Supporters storming the pitch at the Melbourne derby

Melbourne Victory being fined \$550,000 AUD, and 29 people were arrested following the incident.

Many of the 2022-23 season's most offensive or dangerous incidents have taken place at derbies. In addition to the Melbourne derby, there was on-pitch urination at the Athens derby between Olympiacos and AEK Athens, and dangerous missiles being fired during the Edinburgh derby.

Often tensions are higher between local clubs, where rivalries and history are more strongly felt. This was the case in 2023, when Barcelona players were forced to flee into their dressing rooms, after they won the La Liga title against local rivals Espanyol whose fans invaded the pitch, putting the safety of Barcelona players and staff in danger.

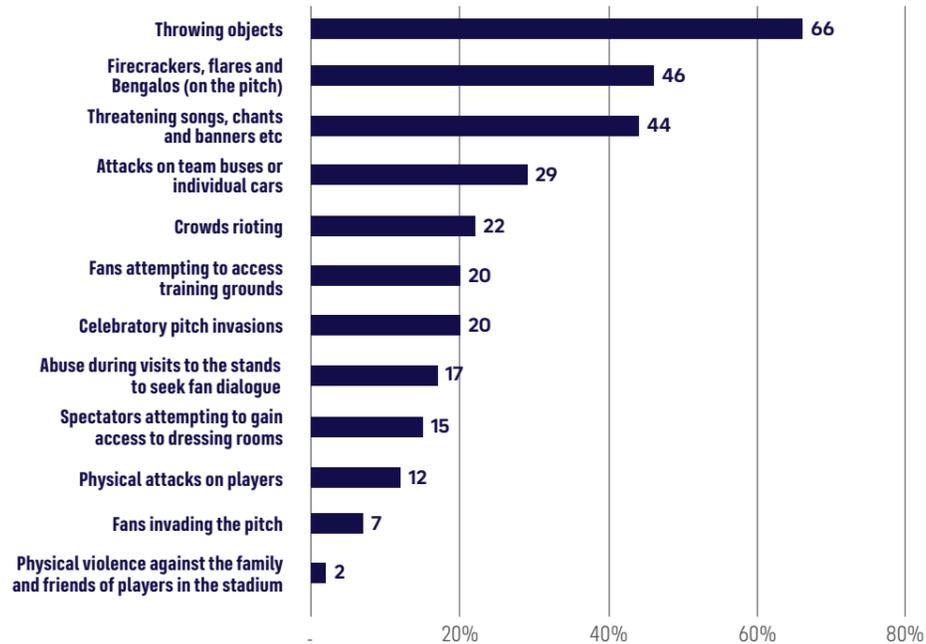


Lucas Buades assaulted by a Bordeaux fan

 / **PLAYERS ARE THREATENED BY NUMEROUS FORMS OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSE**

We have highlighted some of the more prevalent forms of violence and abuse that players face but as we can see from the chart below, there are a number of ways in which players are under threat as they enter the field.

What types of physical abuse did players face in and around the stadium, on the way to and from the stadium on match days or at the training ground? Please rank from most common to least common. (% ranked top 3)

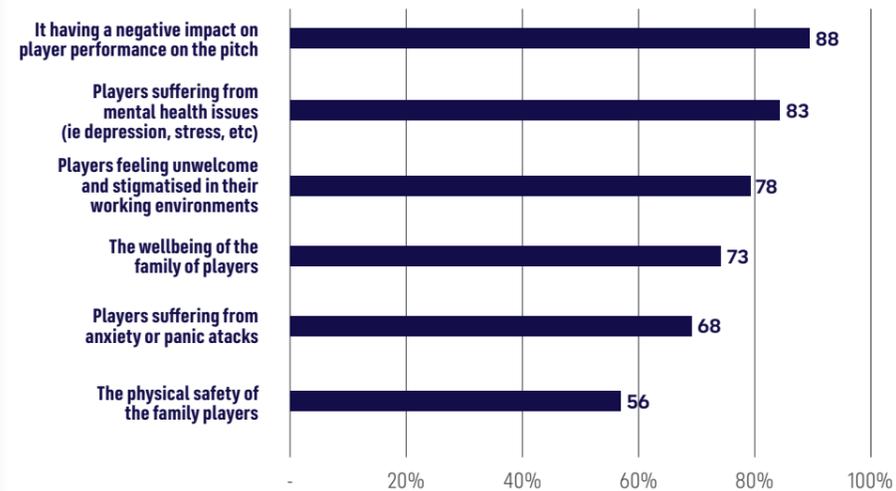


The variety of threats faced highlights the scale and complexity of the challenge of reducing instances of violence and abuse – and that there is no one single intervention that will remove all of the risks that players face. A set of very specific measures will be required to tackle each of the different forms of violence and abuse on a case by case basis.

**WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AND ABUSE HAS SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON PLAYERS – ON AND OFF THE PITCH**

Violence towards players not only causes injury but can have profound impacts on players' mental health and overall wellbeing.

Below are a series of potential impacts of workplace violence and abuse on players. How significant a risk are workplace safety issues on each of the following? (Somewhat or very significant risk)



Discriminatory abuse is also driven by on-field events, such as missed chances, losses or competition exits, while players also spoke of their experience playing in new regions, which has often resulted in racist abuse.

As depicted in the recent Netflix documentary, *Beckham*, the abuse that players suffer on the pitch also impacts their families.

A prime example is that of former Irish International captain James McClean, who earlier this year spoke out publicly after a decade of sustained sectarian abuse while playing for various English clubs. He movingly highlighted the impact of this abuse on his family stating "you can abuse me, I'll take it, but when you start bringing my children and my family into it, then that's crossed the line. That's a whole different ballgame." McClean's acceptance of abuse demonstrates the normalisation in football culture, while highlighting the mental and emotional toll that abuse takes on players, particularly when their families are targeted.



**You can abuse me, I'll take it, but when you start bringing my children and my family into it, then that's crossed the line. That's a whole different ballgame.**

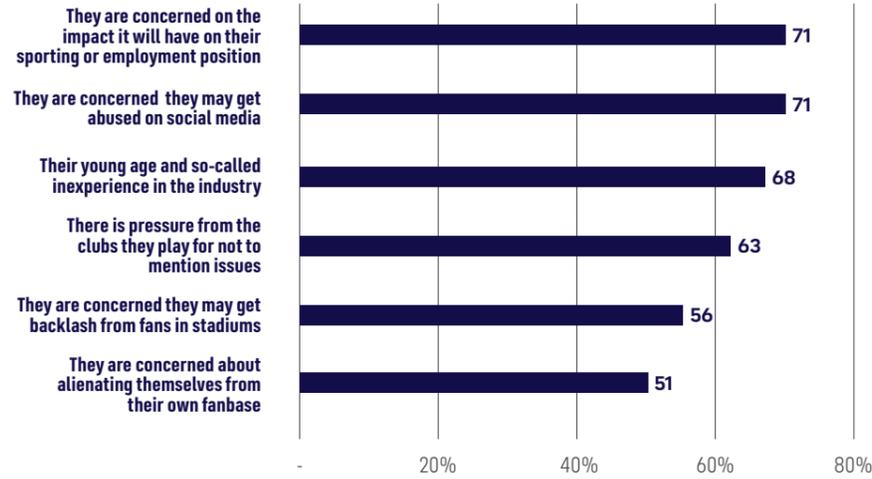
James McClean



**PLAYERS ARE ALSO OFTEN UNCOMFORTABLE SPEAKING OUT DUE TO THREAT OF RETALIATION**

Despite these very significant impacts, there is concern that players are not comfortable talking about and drawing attention to these issues.

Why do you think players might feel restricted talking about workplace violence and abuse?



**When you take strong stances on things, that definitely affects the way that you're perceived as a player.**

One men's footballer



think that players may be hesitant to speak out both because of the impact it will have on their sporting or employment position and the additional abuse they may receive on social media in response.

Players also feel that raising concerns will exacerbate and lead to more abuse, or that it will put their careers at jeopardy. One player interviewed discussed being hesitant to speak publicly on the impact of abuse upon his mental health because of potential backlash.

**We don't speak up about neither mental, sexual, verbal or physical abuse because we are scared, players are scared.**

One men's footballer

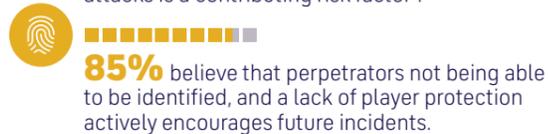


# UNIONS WANT REAL LIFE ACTION TO TACKLE WORKPLACE SAFETY ISSUES

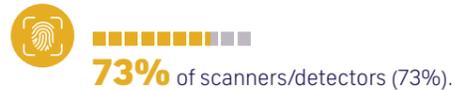
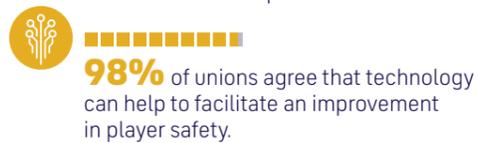
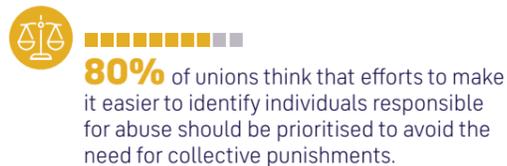
Current levels of security during matches are not good enough and unions want this prioritised to help protect players.



In addition to wanting greater security on match days, player unions also want tougher action on perpetrators to discourage further attacks and abuse.



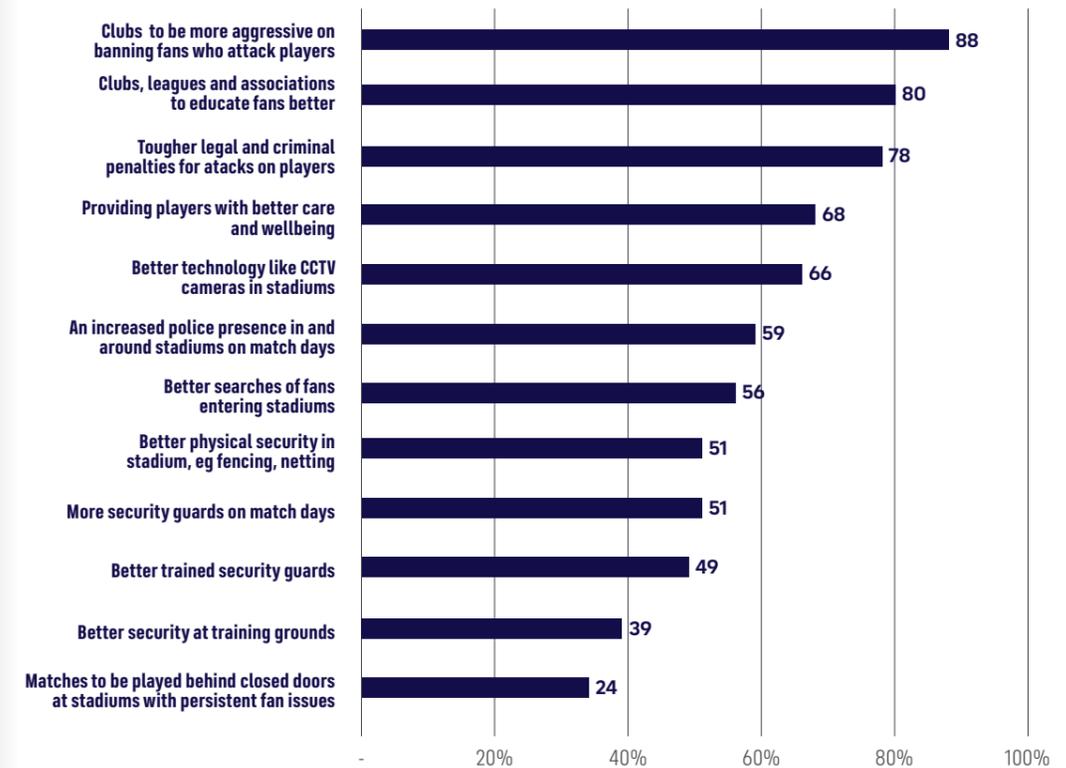
However, it should be acknowledged that these harsher punishments should be targeted at offenders, not at fans as a whole.



Education for fans is another solution favoured heavily by unions, in addition to more aggressive punishments by clubs.



What support do you need to keep players safe in the workplace?





# 06

## FOOTBALL WORKPLACE SAFETY SO FAR THIS SEASON

The Workplace Safety Report 2023 looks at instances of violence and abuse towards players in the context of the 2022/23 football season.

However, we have already seen examples from across the globe, this season, that show the need to address this issue and its impact on players now.

# 06 / FOOTBALL WORKPLACE SAFETY SO FAR THIS SEASON

## SELECT INCIDENT AT A GLANCE



EUROPE

- **FRANCE** - A player's workplace is not just on the pitch but also includes travel to stadiums. The horrific attack on the Olympique Lyonnais bus, which was hit by rocks on its way to Stade Velodrome in Marseille for the OL - OM derby, resulted in OL manager Fabio Grosso being seriously injured and the game postponed. In the aftermath, around a hundred supporters were reported to be racially chanting outside the Stade-Vélodrome.
- **GREECE** - Panathinaikos defender Juan Carlos Pérez López was rushed to hospital for tests after being hit by a firecracker during the club's Greek Superleague match at Olympiakos, which resulted in the game being abandoned after 55 minutes. The Athens derby, referred to as the derby of the eternal enemies, has been marred by ugly scenes in the past, with a 2019 match abandoned when fans fought with riot police.



Fabio Grosso suffered facial injuries during the attack on the Olympique Lyonnais bus



SOUTH AMERICA

- **COLOMBIA** - During a match between Real Cartagena and Fortaleza, Real Cartagena fans invaded the pitch at the Jaime Morón stadium, and confronted players resulting in the attack of the goalkeeper after Fortaleza scored their second goal.
- **BOLIVIA** - The latest match between Aurora and Real Santa Cruz was marred by aggression at the final whistle after Jaime Cornejo, president of Aurora and member of the Executive Committee of the Bolivian Football Federation, entered the field of play and confronted Real Santa Cruz's goalkeeper, Alejandro Torrez. Further violence followed, with fans invading the pitch and fighting.



Juan Carlos Pérez Lopez was hit by a firecracker during the Greek Superleague match

The number of arrests, in particular in football top tier leagues, are considerable and can be considered a growing issue when organising sporting events.

2022 Annual Monitoring Report,  
Saint-Denis Convention, Council of Europe<sup>12</sup>



12. <https://rm.coe.int/t-s4-2023-37-en-monitoring-report-coe-executive-summary-2021-22-2022/1680ad823b>



# 07

## WHAT COMES NEXT?

This report has set workplace safety in the context of the current situation football players across the globe face on a daily basis. In order to protect the safety of players and the future of the game, it is important that action is taken.

# 07 / WHAT COMES NEXT?

## CREATING SAFER ENVIRONMENTS – FOR PLAYERS, FANS AND EVERY PARTICIPANT

Players, unions, clubs, and legislators have proposed a wide variety of solutions to violence against players, including:

01



### INCREASED UNDERSTANDING OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL AND ITS APPLICATION TO PLAYERS

There has been little work completed to understand the issue of workplace safety from a player-centric occupational health and safety perspective. Educating everyone on this aspect will be crucial moving forward.

02



### IMPROVING FAN CULTURE & DIALOGUE

A supportive fan culture makes a large difference in players' experiences, especially on match days. Ideally, it would be helpful to cultivate a fan culture that does not tolerate abuse, and, as one player suggested, empowers fans to police each other's behaviour. Education is also a strong tool to help prevent abuse of players. However, we are aware that most fans already do not participate in abuse, and changing an already entrenched fan culture presents a large challenge.

03



### COOPERATION AMONGST KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Working alongside and in coordination, the entire football ecosystem and public authorities has a significant role to play in improving player safety in the workplace. Player unions at the national level should be integrated into the ongoing dialogue between all actors to provide a realistic view on the players experience and their needs.

04



### ENGAGEMENT WITH LEADERSHIP

One union representative pointed out that "Increasing the presence of women in leadership positions is essential to ensure that women's unique needs and safety receive the attention they deserve, fostering inclusivity and equity in women's football." We are aware that players need to feel safe and supported by leadership in order to report on issues; at the same time, leaders need to protect players if we are to reduce incidence of violence.

05



### INCREASED IN-STADIUM POLICING, STEWARDING AND SURVEILLANCE

Higher levels of security can help to protect players from in-stadium violence. Higher levels of surveillance focused around vulnerable areas in the stadium could effectively support the implementation of banning orders. Similar improved training and support for stewards according to a formalised standard, to ensure that they know how best to respond to challenging incidents of any scale.

06



### STRONGER AND MORE RAPID APPLICATION OF FOOTBALL BANNING ORDERS

Football banning orders aim to prevent those who cause disruption at games from attending other events for a set period of time. However, they take a long time to process, may be difficult to apply, and are not always effective when used.<sup>13</sup>

I think there's ways to make sure that you don't have to come out and feel like now I'm just completely in the slaughterhouse.

One men's footballer



13. Case study: in 2019, a Birmingham City fan invaded the pitch during a game against Aston Villa, and punched player Jack Grealish in the jaw. The man was given a 14-week prison sentence plus a ten-year football banning order. The fan violated the football banning order in 2022 and ran onto the track around the pitch at The Hawthorns to celebrate after a goal.

# 08

## APPENDIX

This report looked to examine incidents of violence, how it can be managed and potential solutions - in the interests of both players and the long-term sustainability of the game.

The study covered the 2022-2023 season. Where season dates existed within a single year (e.g. January-December 2022, as in Mexico), sourced data from the last complete season (2022) has been used.



# 08 / APPENDIX

## DETAILED METHODOLOGY

This included undertaking a detailed audit of international media to uncover reported instances of violence in the defined time period.

Searches were conducted in Polish, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, English, and Arabic, using specific search teams.

This research was supported with a survey of 41 football unions from across the globe undertaken by the research team at Portland Communications.

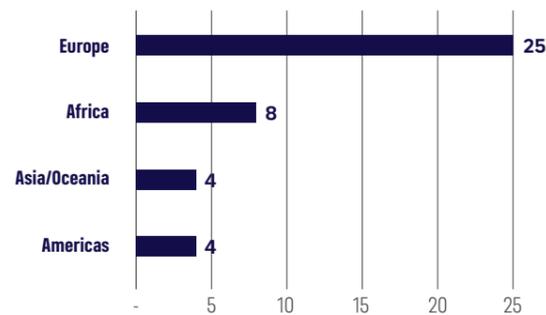
In addition, six interviews were conducted with players from across the sport both in the men's and women's game.



## UNION SURVEYS

We conducted a survey of FIFPRO member unions to understand how players perceive the issue of workplace safety around the world.

We invited every FIFPRO Union to take part in the survey throughout September and October 2023 with 41 global unions contributing to the overall findings outlined in this report. Below is a geographic breakdown of participating unions:



An overall participation rate of 62% of FIFPRO member unions provides us with a sample base from which we can report global level findings. The underlying geographic distribution, however, means that we can only report at a regional level for Europe where participation was higher

and where a greater proportion of unions participated. Findings for other regions can only provide us with an illustrative overview.

The survey included the following sections:

- The importance of workplace health and safety in football: to understand if workplace safety is a growing concern for Unions and the emphases across different markets
- Records of player workplace abuse: to understand the processes for tracking instances of workplace abuse and the most common issues that players face
- Player perceptions and experiences of workplace abuse: to understand union perspectives of the impact that safety issues have on players
- Union support needs: to identify what support and interventions unions believe would be most effective to prevent future instances

Two separate surveys were shared, one focused on the men's game and the other on the women's, to track the distinctive challenges that each face.

## QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH PLAYERS

- Interviews were conducted with 6 professional footballers. This qualitative research allowed players to elaborate on their experiences of workplace safety and health in greater detail. The interviews sought to understand how players feel in general about workplace safety and health, as well as discussing specific examples of times they have felt unsafe, and areas where players feel things could be improved.
- Common issues related to workplace safety and health identified in the interviews were those involving fan/media interactions, both in person and online, and coaching staff. Amongst the interviewees playing in men's leagues, fan and media interactions were of more concern in terms of safety, particularly in terms of mental health. For the interviewees playing in women's leagues, they cited coaching staff as a particular area of safety concern, more so than fans.

## ACADEMIC LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic literature review was delivered by Dr Joel Rookwood, a lecturer in Sport Management and director of the Sport & Exercise Management degree at University College Dublin in Ireland. He was supported by Tiernan Harris (a Sport Management MSc graduate) and Jack Keegan (a Sport & Exercise Management BSc graduate).

The full literature review is publicly available via the FIFPRO Player IQ research library.  
<https://fifpro.org/en/player-iq/research-reports>



## TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

### WORKPLACE\* VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Physical and non-physical violence and abuse occurring in the following instances, in which professional footballers are the victims:

- On matchdays inside or near to the stadium or on the pitch
  - During travel to and from the stadium
  - At the training facilities
  - Other official events linked to the employment of players
- Such instances can include intimidatory or threatening behaviour, sexual misconduct, physical abuse or violence which does not result in player injury, physical abuse or violence that does result in injuries and/or other psychological impacts. As well as physical injury, it can also result in deterioration in satisfaction, player performance and mental health.
- There are particular scenarios in which the risk of these incidents occurring could be heightened. Examples of which can be found below:
- Players travelling to away fixtures
  - Potential differences when playing for the national team rather than for domestic club teams
  - In the lead up, during and after games where there is a heightened rivalry between the fans
  - In the instances of a player being transferred from one team to another
  - As players approach fan bases at the end of matches for applause

\* the term workplace covers all places where workers need to be or to go by reason of their work and which are under the direct or indirect control of the employer.

### WORKPLACE SAFETY & HEALTH – VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

The protection of professional football players from being injured or facing a risk to their health and well-being in the employment context from non-sporting related threats within and around the stadium on match days, during training at their training facility or other official employment related activities.

This brings together elements taken from the Saint Denis Convention, the ILO Convention 155 and 187 and FARE's Global Guide to Discriminatory Practices, which lay out the following complementary aims:

- Saint Denis Convention:** enable the "legitimate expectation of all individuals to attend sports events safely, and the associated need to tackle violence and maintain the rule of law inside and outside of stadiums".
- ILO Convention 155:** "prevent accidents and injury to health arising out of, linked with or occurring in the course of work, by minimising, so far as is reasonably practicable, the causes of hazards inherent in the working environment."
- ILO Convention 187:** that footballers have representation, engaging in open dialogue with authorities and governing bodies to contribute towards creating a model of best practice, in order to protect players from potential harm.
- FARE's Global Guide to Discriminatory Practices:** "exclude or erase the dignity of other human beings based on real or perceived differences - whether they are ethnic minorities, women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) people, or disabled people."



### PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse refers to instances in which players experience actual instances of violence directed to them or feel physically threatened. The notion of physicality may predominantly involve but does not necessarily infer connection between people. It can extend to the use of objects, weapons or missiles, for instance, all of which pose a potential threat to player safety.

Such examples would include:

- Throwing of objects
- Firecrackers, flares and Bengalos
- Physical attacks on players
- Fans invading the pitch to violently attack players
- Celebratory pitch invasions (after goals or at the end of matches)
- Crowds rioting
- Threatening songs, chants and banners etc.
- Spectators attempting to gain access to dressing rooms, mixed areas etc.
- Fans attempting to access training grounds
- The use of weapons
- Physical violence against the family and friends of players in the stadium
- Instances of physical sexual misconduct

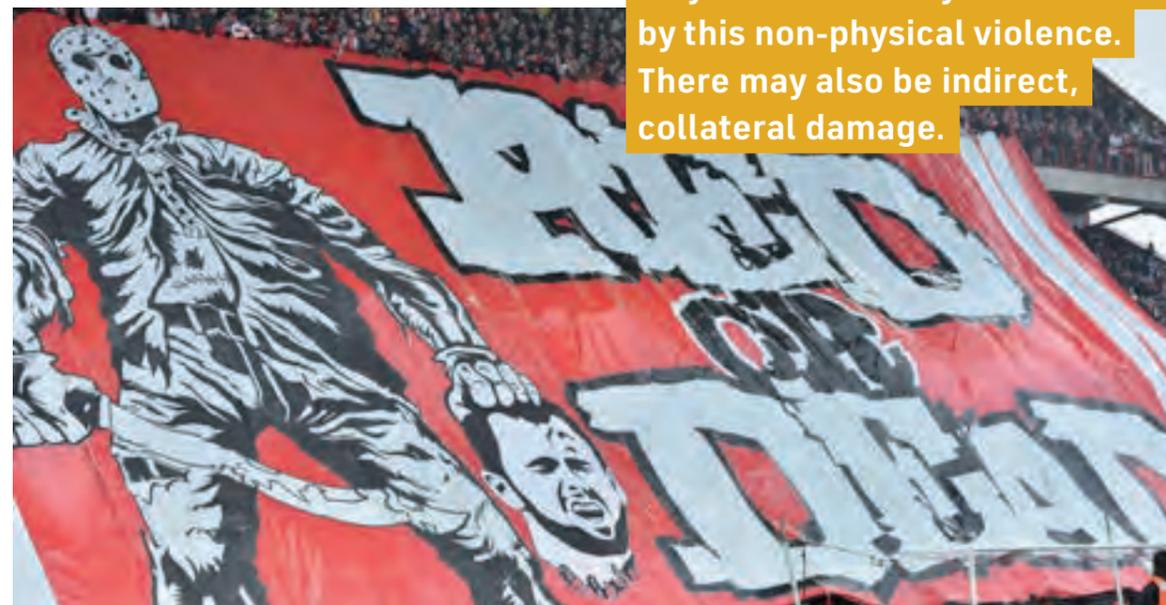
### NON-PHYSICAL ABUSE

Non-physical abuse refers to emotional, verbal, visual (i.e through signs or banners) abuse of a discriminatory nature, including on the basis of ethnicity, national or social origin, gender identity, language, religion, political opinions, birth status or sexual orientation.

Such instances could include the following:

- Discriminatory verbal abuse towards the players
- Discriminatory visual abuse towards the players
- Discriminatory verbal or visual abuse towards the family and friends of players
- Banners or imagery that incites violence or abuse
- Fans shouting verbal abuse outside of training grounds
- Instances of verbal sexual misconduct

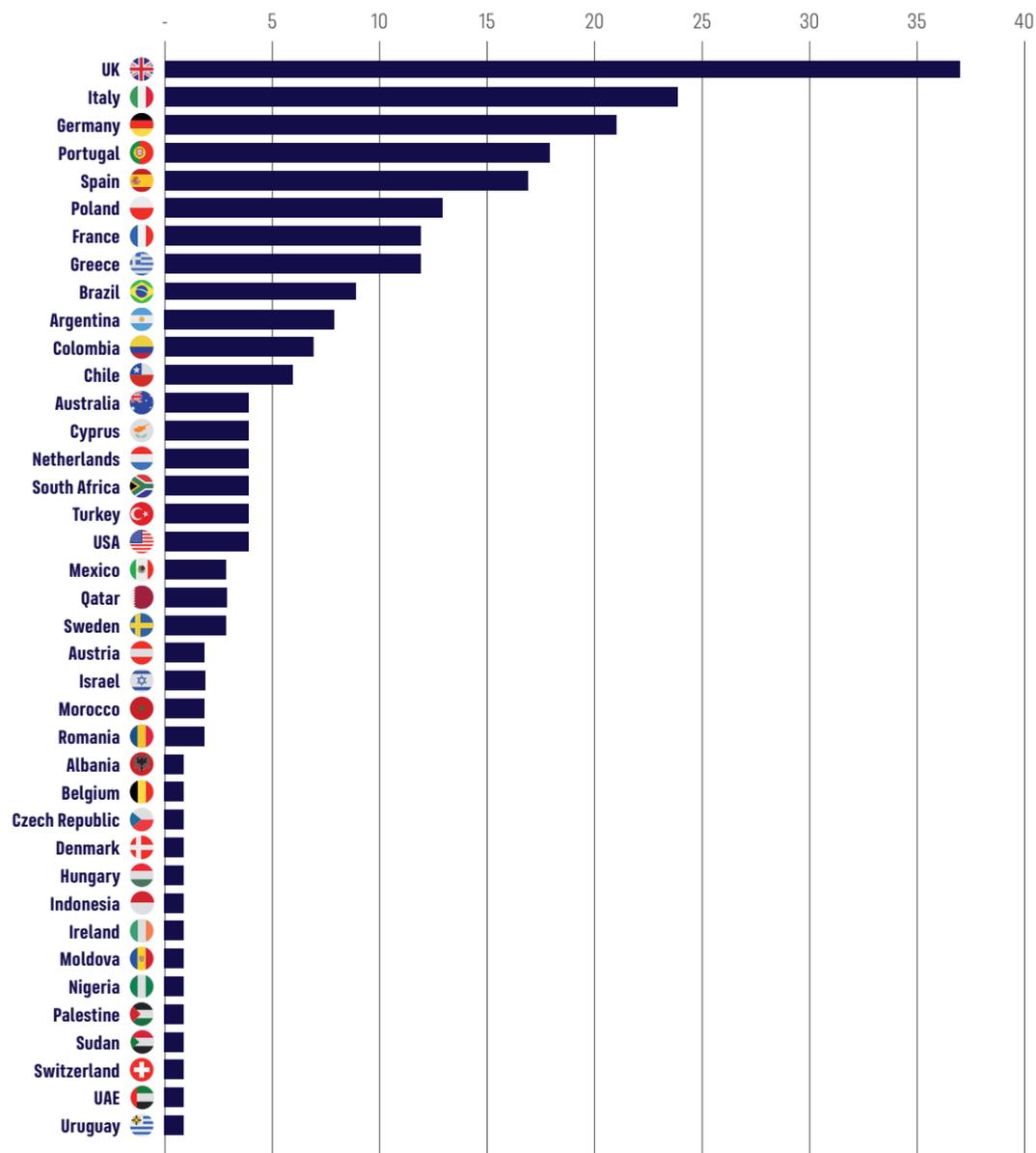
The footballer(s) targeted may not be the only one affected by this non-physical violence. There may also be indirect, collateral damage.



# 09 / DESIGN GLOSSARY

IN A MEDIA AUDIT OF COVERAGE OF THE 2022-2023 SEASON, THE FOLLOWING LEVELS OF INCIDENTS WERE IDENTIFIED:

Level of Reported Incidents by Country



IN A MEDIA AUDIT OF COVERAGE OF THE 2022-2023 SEASON, THE FOLLOWING LEVELS OF INCIDENTS WERE IDENTIFIED IN SPECIFIC REGIONS:

Level of Reported Incidents by Region

