

ANTI-ASIAN RACISM IN FOOTBALL



Power to the Players.

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DISCLAIMER

If you have experienced anti-Asian racism in football, you are not alone.

If you are a player looking for a safe space to talk, or want to share your experience with us, please feel free to reach out confidentially via asiaoceania@fifpro.org or via a DM on our Instagram account @fifproasiaoceania

We are here to listen, support and stand with you.



WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT ANTI-ASIAN RACISM IN FOOTBALL.

For too long, anti-Asian racism in football has been ignored or minimised.

It's time to change that.

A stance of neutrality or non-intervention is no longer acceptable for the players. It's time to listen, learn and take action.

Photos: Imago

Trigger Warning: This content discusses real experiences of anti-Asian racism, including harassment, exclusion and abuse. Some examples may be upsetting. Please take care as you read.



INTRODUCTION



FIFPRO

ERICA PUPPO

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, FIFPRO

At FIFPRO, our mission is to protect and promote the rights, safety, and dignity of professional footballers around the world. This responsibility includes confronting all forms of discrimination and making sure no experience is ignored, and no player left behind.

This report is a first step in raising awareness and taking a proactive approach in addressing anti-Asian racism in football, an issue that has often been overlooked or minimised. With an ever-growing line-up of Asian football players captivating the world's top leagues, we must celebrate their achievements — and at the same time lead the way in building safe, inclusive spaces where every player can thrive.

We reaffirm our commitment to challenging all types of discrimination, amplifying the oftenunseen experience of many players of diverse Asian heritage, particularly those playing outside their home regions, where isolation and vulnerability often intensify the impact of racism.

FIFPRO will continue to stand up for players' right to work in an environment that's safe, respectful and inclusive. Our commitment is visible in initiatives like the #ItsPersonal campaign, focused on players' voices and lived experiences; our intercultural integration toolkit for foreign players; and our ongoing collaboration on anti-discrimination policies, education, and research with partners, unions, and stakeholders.

As FIFPRO and Division Asia/Oceania, we're committed to taking proactive leadership and driving real change, creating opportunities for education, accountability, and concrete action.



FIFPRO ASIA/OCEANIA

SHOKO TSIIII

General Secretary, FIFPRO Asia/Oceania

This report forms part of a campaign led by FIFPRO Asia/Oceania to address anti-Asian racism in professional football. As more players of Asian heritage break through into major leagues and star in international tournaments, it has been accompanied by a concerning rise in reported incidents of racism targeting Asian players.

Having spent most of my adult life outside of Asia, I have personally experienced various forms of anti-Asian racism, in both my work and everyday life. It is a shared reality for many in our community, and players are no exception. Players have anonymously shared with FIFPRO their experiences of microaggressions, verbal abuse, cultural stereotyping and online hate, and this trend is also confirmed by organisations working on anti-racism in and outside of football.

Anti-Asian racism is not a single, uniform experience. These experiences intersect with other aspects of identity, such as ethnicity, gender, nationality and religion, requiring an inclusive and nuanced approach to the problem.

As such, this report aims to identify the myriad types of anti-Asian racism, highlight the prevalence of the issue, its harm, and how football can take steps to tackle it.

Through this report and campaign, our Division reaffirms our commitment to stand with players, educate communities, and challenge the systems that allow discrimination to persist in football.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, developed by FIFPRO Division Asia/ Oceania, addresses the urgent and often overlooked issue of **anti-Asian racism in professional football**. As players of Asian heritage gain visibility in top leagues worldwide, they are increasingly subjected to racism, both overt and subtle, on and off the pitch.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The report aims to raise awareness of anti-Asian racism in football, highlight the lived experiences of players, provide actionable recommendations for players, clubs, unions, media, and fans, and support a broader campaign for equity and inclusion in the sport.

KEY INSIGHTS

MISCONCEPTIONS DEDCICT

Many dismiss anti-Asian racism due to underreporting or stereotypes. The report debunks common myths and emphasizes the harm of microaggressions.

WIDESPREAD IMPACT Racism affects players' mental health, safety, and career progression. It manifests through verbal abuse, stereotyping,

exclusion, and online harassment.

UNDERREPORTING AND ISOLATION

AIIUN

Players often remain silent due to fear of backlash or lack of support, leading to a culture of normalized discrimination.

DATA AND TESTIMONIES

The report includes player interviews and data from organizations like Kick It Out and Signify, revealing disproportionate abuse toward East and Southeast Asian

players.

CALL TO ACTION

PLAYERS

Reporting, speaking out safely and seeking support.

TEAMMATES AND STAFF

Being allies, challenging racism and supporting players.

UNIONS

Providing safe reporting channels, mental health support

and policy changes.

CLUBS

Creating inclusive environments, acting on reports and

ensuring representation.

MEDIA

Avoiding stereotypes, amplifying Asian voices and diverse

representation.

SUPPORTERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

Reporting abuse, challenging harmful narratives and

supporting players.

CONCLUSION

This report is the first phase of a broader campaign to combat anti-Asian racism in football. It calls for collective responsibility and sustained action to ensure that all players, regardless of background, can thrive in a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment.



MISCONCEPTIONS: WHAT IS ANTI-ASIAN RACISM?

Anti-Asian racism refers to prejudice, discrimination, or hostility directed toward people of Asian descent. It can take many forms, including verbal abuse, physical attacks, social exclusion, stereotyping, and systemic inequalities. This type of racism often stems from harmful stereotypes, historical injustices, and misinformation, and can intensify during times of social or political tension—such as the rise in anti-Asian sentiment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Anti-Asian racism affects individuals' safety, mental health, and sense of belonging, and addressing it requires education, solidarity, and systemic change.

"What anti-Asian racism?"

Just because it is not widely reported does not mean it does not happen. Silence often reflects fear of speaking out, not absence of harm.

"It was just a joke."

What some call a joke can reinforce harmful stereotypes and minimize the severity of the issue and disregards the impact on players.

"But no one is speaking up about it."

Many players experience racism but stay silent due to fear of being unsupported or facing backlash and further exclusion.

"All racism is the same."

All racism is harmful, but different communities experience it in different ways. Recognising anti-Asian racism does not minimise anyone else's experience. It helps us protect everyone more effectively.

"Asians are successful though."

It is not possible to generalise 'Asians'. Stereotypes disregard the diversity of Asian identities and realities. Success in one context doesn't erase the experience of racism.

"WHAT ABOUT ABUSE WE DON'T HEAR ABOUT?"

One key finding from this work is the ongoing and often overlooked impact of microaggressions on players of Asian backgrounds. Racism doesn't always make headlines. It can show up in subtle but persistent ways.

These everyday experiences may not go viral, but they are just as damaging. Over time, microaggressions and forms of discrimination can seriously affect a player's sense of safety, belonging, and confidence.

Ignoring this creates a culture where exclusion is normalized and players are left without support.

To change this, we need more awareness, better reporting systems, and stronger education to challenge everyday racism in all its forms in football.

This report aims to be a step towards greater awareness and more inclusive spaces for all footballers.



WHYTHIS MATTERS

ANTI-ASIAN RACISM IS ON THE RISE

Asian representation is increasing in the most competitive football leagues around the world. Players, staff and fans from Asian backgrounds are making vital contributions to the game. But as visibility increases, so do incidents of anti-Asian racism, both on and off the pitch.

PLAYERS FEEDBACK

The discriminatory experiences of all racially or ethnically marginalized players are often normalized — and thus oftentimes invisible.

This report is based on direct interviews with players, combined with a review of existing Players Union work, research and literature on the topic.

Interviews with Asian players show that this is a widespread issue impacting physical safety, mental health, and career progression, on and off the pitch.

Recognising anti-Asian racism is essential to protecting players' wellbeing, safety and career progression.

"

"I've seen young kids in the stands shouting racist comments.

They've clearly learned it from their parents. If nothing changes,

this cycle of hate will just keep repeating itself."

"

"Even if they didn't mean harm, I would hear jokes about me eating dogs or make eye gestures. It made me realise that people still see us as

different or look down on us — and that really impacted me.





DATA EVIDENCE AND INSIGHTS



KICK IT OUT

- In the 2023-2024 Premier League season, over half of racist player abuse reports targeted professional players of East Asian background.
- Over 1,200 (27%) of all discrimination reports received by Kick It Out over the last six seasons targeted professional players.
- Of the nearly 400 different players Kick It Out received a report about over the last six seasons, only 13 are players from ESEA countries. However, despite only making up 3% of the players abused, they account for over 30% of the reports.
- Of the racist abuse reports targeting ESEA players, one player was targeted repeatedly, making up 8% of Kick It Out's overall reports total for the last six seasons.
- Only 1% of the nearly 2,500 registered players at England's 92 men's team are from the ESEA region (26 players in total), showing the scale of abuse targeting a very small proportion of the playing workforce.



FARE NETWORK

Over the past decade the Fare network has noted extensive racism directed at players of east Asian heritage. It remains one of the the least recognised and most socially comfortable expressions of racism in Europe and beyond. Between 2024 and 2025 alone we have seen five high profile examples of this type of racism openly expressed in European competitions and leagues, including incidents in Spain, Turkey, France and Italy. Many of the incidents involved highly audible chanting and gestures. It has become so accepted that the perpetrators are often supporters, media commentators, coaches and managers and other high profile players.



SIGNIFY

Signify's work across global sports including tennis, athletics and especially football has identified anti-Asian abuse as an area of unchecked concern, with a range of nuanced tactics being used to target Asian players. So much of this remains unchecked by platforms (an issue we hope to highlight as part of the outcomes of this initiative).

ASIAN VOICES EUROPE

ASIAN VOICES EUROPE

An EU-wide report by Asian Voices Europe found that racial discrimination causes detrimental consequences in Asian people's quality of life.

Understanding microaggressions and the different types of racial harassment is particularly important in the context of anti-Asian racism. These acts often go unnoticed or are not taken seriously, making them difficult to confront. Although microaggressions may seem small or harmless—like jokes, subtle insults, or social exclusion — they are a serious and long-lasting form of racism that can harm mental and emotional wellbeing.



EXAMPLES OF ANTI-ASIAN RACISM

Anti-Asian racism can take many shapes and forms. The following section highlights some of the ways in which racism shows up in language, gestures, and both the professional and personal experience of players.

WHAT IT CAN SOUND LIKE

VERBAL HARASSMENT	Being called "Corona" on the pitch. Comments like "Go back to your own country." Use of racial slurs such as the "C-word."
GENERALISING IDENTITIES AND APPEARANCES	Assuming all East Asian players are Chinese. Saying "they all look the same." Saying 'Nihao' to anyone of East Asian heritage.
SILENCE IN RESPONSE TO LOCKER ROOM RACISM	Racial slurs and jokes going unchallenged by teammates and staff.
ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PHYSICALITY AND PLAYING STYLE	Suggesting Asian players are not strong or competitive enough or too quiet to succeed in football.
MOCKING ACCENTS AND LANGUAGE SKILLS	Speaking slowly or loudly to a fluent English speaker. Mimicking Asian accents
DISRESPECTING CULTURAL PRACTICES	Mocking Asian cuisines. Making false, derogatory comments about "eating dogs" that reinforce harmful stereotypes or disrespecting cultural or religious practices.
NICKNAMES BASED ON FOOD, APPEARANCE OR ORIGIN	Calling a player "Chino" instead of using their real name.



"I was told to 'take the virus home'—on the street and

during matches."



"At a team meeting, the coach asked my teammate, 'Are you sleeping or

are you awake?' in a way that felt dismissive and uncomfortable."



"Even young kids in the stands were shouting racist things. It made me

think how this behaviour is passed down through generations."



"Fans mocked my eyes and laughed when

"

"In match analysis, players of colour were referred to by slurs, while

others were called by name or number. I was told it's 'normal' here.



RACIST GESTURES Slanted eye gestures. Mocking martial arts poses.

MASS CHANTING Coordinated racist chants targeting Asian players from crowds.

Players being spat at during games. Objects thrown from the stands, **PHYSICAL ABUSE**

especially during the pandemic.

Being excluded from group chats, bonding activities or informal team **SOCIAL ISOLATION IN TEAMS**

events. Feeling isolated without trusted allies.

ONLINE ABUSE Receiving racist abuse through direct messages or public comments*

Commentary that reinforce generalisations, stereotypes and bias such **BIASED MEDIA NARRATIVES**

as "surprisingly physical for an Asian player" or describing someone as

"disciplined and quiet."

LACK OF ALLYSHIP Asian fans are more likely to report incidents of anti-Asian racism while

non-Asian fans often fail to recognise it as abuse.



These range from obviously discriminatory content, through to more subtle terms (e.g. the term "Yellow") often deliberately used to avoid censure. Dogwhistle terms like "DVD" are used and will very rarely be detected by social media platform moderation functions (e.g. hidden words). These require sensitive analysis to detect and understand true meaning and call out as abusive.





WHERE IT TAKES PLACE

Anti-Asian racism can be pervasive and be part of a players' experience both on and off the pitch, sometimes in more subtle or overt ways.

The following section highlights some of the places in which racism shows up in the professional and personal experience of players.

WHERE ANTI-ASIAN RACISM CAN APPEAR

STADIUMS	Abuse from crowds, club staff, match officials or opposition players.
CLUB ENVIRONMENTS	Microaggressions, abuse and exclusion from team culture and leadership.
ONLINE SPACES	Comments, memes and direct abuse on social media. Specific players have been identified as being consistent targets of anti-Asian abuse, it is clear that they will also be receiving targeted messages via private channels / Direct Messages.
DAILY LIFE	Harassment in public spaces or during team duties.
MEDIA COVERAGE	Stereotypes reinforced in reporting, lack of representation and limited visibility.
DECISION-MAKING SPACES	Lack of Asian voices in leadership roles and key decision-making roles.



"My teammates didn't mean to hurt me—it was more like a joke, even from those I was close to. Because of that, I didn't report, though it still didn't feel right."



Signify's work has focused on Open Source social media channels / accounts (content that is visible and publicly available). Where specific players have been identified as being consistent targets of Anti-Asian abuse, it is clear that they will also be receiving targeted messages via private channels / Direct Messages (DM's).



THE IMPACT ON PLAYERS

The overlooked impact of anti-Asian racism in Football.

Racism doesn't always make headlines and can show up in very subtle but persistent ways, in the forms of microaggressions and discriminatory comments.

These everyday experiences, can seriously impact a player's sense of self-confidence, safety, and belonging, especially when recurring over long periods of time.

Microaggressions and all forms of racism can impact players' mental health, day-to-day experience as well as their professional career in multiple ways.

The following section focuses on highlighting some of the ways anti-Asian racism and microaggressions can impact a player, on and off the pitch.

"

"We've had members come to us unsure

whether what they're experiencing

is 'serious enough' to report. That

uncertainty is part of the harm."

"

"Fans would mock me, make eye

gestures, and laugh when I had the ball.

It wasn't just once—it was constant.

It made me feel like I didn't belong, no

matter how well I played."

THE MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT OF ANTI-ASIAN RACISM

This story is not a one-off. Players have told us that anti-Asian racism has made them feel:

- Feelings of isolation when no one intervenes when something racist is said, especially as players are likely to be the only or one of very few Asian players in their environment and won't have teammates who directly understand their experience
- Feelings of self-doubt and isolation not knowing how to respond to or report microaggressions.
- Feelings of helplessness, exhaustion and frustration
- Loss of confidence and motivation
- Withdrawal from teams or football altogether
- Concerned for family, friends and communities attending games
- Mental health issues including anxiety and stress
- Fear of repercussion and internalised pressure to hide identity, 'fit in' or stay silent

This psychological toll is often invisible.

THE PROFESSIONAL IMPACT

Racism limits opportunities and impacts a player's career. It can affect:

- Individual performance
- Team dynamics
- Selection and career progression
- Sponsorship and visibility
- Transfer or career decisions, wanting to change teams
- Leadership pathways and access to roles in football



HOW TO CHALLENGE ANTI-ASIAN RACISM IN FOOTBALL

Challenging anti-Asian racism in football: Everyone has a role to play.

Here's what you can do...



FOR THE PLAYERS

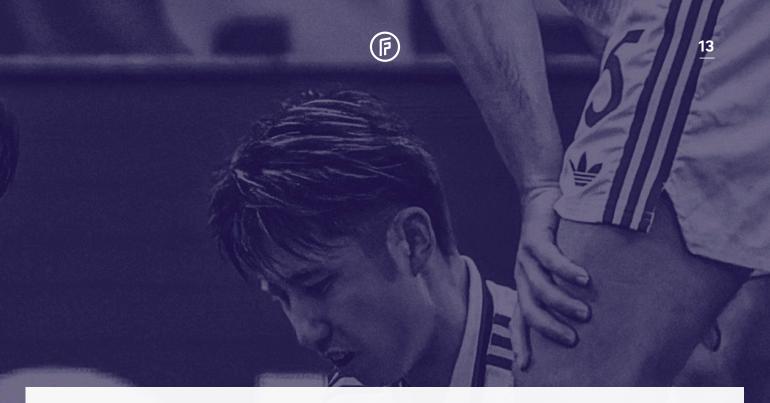


- Keep records of any incidents (what happened, where, when, who was involved)
- Speak to trusted staff/teammate/union rep if you are a victim or witness
- Speak up and share your story, if it is safe to do so
- Report incidents safely through your club, union or trusted contacts
- Follow up with the union, club or league if unresolved



FOR TEAMMATES AND STAFF

- ✓ Don't stay silent be an ally
- Call out racism when you witness it
- ✓ Check in privately with affected players
- Be an ally challenge casual comments and stereotypes in everyday conversations
- Support and participate in anti-racism education sessions



FOR PLAYER UNIONS

- Create safe spaces for affected players.
 Provide accessible, confidential channels for players to report concerns
- Conduct educational outreach during club visits to raise players' awareness and prevent racist behaviour, including education on microaggressions, or discriminatory comments and posts on social media
- Offer mental health and legal support services for players affected by racism, whether it occurs online or in stadiums
- Be proactive and run awareness campaigns for members and the industry
- Conduct surveys to collect data on incidents and identify patterns
- Push clubs, leagues and federations for change
- Ensure experiences of Anti-Asian racism are explicitly addressed in anti-discrimination policies
- Reach out to FIFPRO if you want to learn more about existing best practices

FOR CLUBS

- Understand anti-Asian racism and its impact on players, fans and broader communities
- Celebrate the diversity of your club and community, on and off the pitch
- Create clear and safe reporting mechanisms for players and staff
- Publicly back players who experience racism to show solidarity
- Deliver anti-discrimination training programmes that include tackling anti-Asian racism
- ✓ Act swiftly when incidents are reported
- Be conscious about how you communicate, not reinforcing biases and harmful stereotypes
- Include representation of Asian players in campaigns and opportunities to increase visibility
- Ensure safeguarding staff and player care staff are specifically trained to handle racism issues
- Ensure that all players are aware of their union's mental health and legal options so that affected players may reach out to them

- Amplify Asian voices in football including players, coaches, fans, experts
- Ensure diverse representation among journalists, pundits and editorial teams to enhance your ability to connect with players and their communities
- Use accurate language that respects identity and avoids exoticisation or tokenism
- Cover stories about Asian players and culture beyond stereotypes or novelty angles
- Challenge racist or biased narratives when you see them in coverage
- Share stories that celebrate the achievements and experiences of Asian communities in football authentically

> FOR

FOR SUPPORTERS

Thursday.

- Report incidents of racism immediately to stewards or via phone numbers displayed in the stadium. (Note time, location and details if it is unsafe to report immediately, taking photos or videos if possible)
- Report anonymously via third-party independent bodies such as Football Against Racism in Europe (Europe-wide), Kick It Out (England and Wales)
- Celebrate the diversity of your club and community, on and off the pitch
- Call out anti-Asian racism both in the stands and online where it is safe to do so
- Hold your clubs accountable by asking what they are doing to tackle anti-Asian racism
- Educate yourselves by engaging with campaigns in football
- Support groups who raise awareness about tackling racism
- Show support for players affected by anti-Asian racism
- Be mindful of language in chants avoid slogans or nicknames that perpetuate stereotypes





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FUTURE

RESPECT

PARTNERSHIP

PROFESSIONALISM

GOOD GOVERNANCE AND FAIR PLAY

Power to the players.























