Leaving your country to become a Professional Footballer

Think carefully before leaving your country in the hope of becoming a professional footballer. We will show you how to give yourself the best possible chance of success.
Are you really ready to try your hand abroad? Have you got everything planned? Have you considered all the consequences of this departure, this new life?

Africa is proud of its world-class footballers. Those of yesterday, of course (Magdy Abdelghani, Kalusha Bwalya, Didier Drogba, Michael Essien, Samuel Eto’o, Frédéric Kanouté, Salif Keïta, Geremi Njitap, Abedi Pele, George Weah, etc.), as well as those of today: Kalidou Koulibaly, Sadio Mané, Riyad Mahrez, Mohamed Salah, Karim Konaté, etc.

Not forgetting the emergence of women’s football, with players like Asisat Oshoala et Raissa Feudjio.

The list goes on and on, and reflects the talent and the achievements of the continent’s footballers, whose success is an inspiration to many young Africans.

Unfortunately, for every great success story there are many migrant players who see their dreams shattered, because they do not manage to join a professional club and have to abandon high-level sport.

As Samuel Eto’o put it: “We’re not examples, we’re exceptions!”

Those young people can find themselves facing great difficulties. Being alone in a foreign country, with no family and no network of acquaintances, they are totally vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

If their project abroad is not successful, they may find themselves with no income, no way of supporting themselves, no social security and no legal status.

Before leaving your country, have you prepared your project properly and foreseen the possible risks and challenges? This brochure gives you practical advice to assess whether you are well prepared to move far away from home and become a professional footballer.

Didier Drogba
In view of the action carried out here by his foundation, with which FIFPRO Africa associates itself all the more since it has been acting since its creation in 2007 to protect the footballers of our continent, especially young players, by relentlessly denouncing the trafficking – for that is what it is! – that they have been suffering, it is no surprise, after all, that Didier Drogba has been our honorary president since 2009.

For a footballer, moving to another country, under the best conditions, obviously, can be a sign of progress in both sporting and financial terms. But that is just the tip of the iceberg, since only a few are chosen. This is the case in Africa, as it is elsewhere. In Africa, where Asia is now presented as the new promised land by those who trade in the hopes and dreams of our young sisters and brothers.

Like us, the former Ivorian international is perfectly well aware of this. Like us, he encourages aspiring exiles to take the most basic precautions. Like us, he seeks to alert them, to educate them – including their parents – to give all of them the means to resist temptation, to avoid the traps.

Regarding our mission in aid of players, we are too often confronted, and not only in FIFPRO Africa, with the despair of those who have been tricked and are in distress, here or there... And we help them to recover their freedom, their dignity.

It is to limit this rampant migration and the devastation it causes, while taking account of all that population who dream of making football their career – even though taking it up professionally is unpredictable – that Didier agrees with us once again regarding the need to educate our footballers at the same time to make them accomplished women and men, aware and responsible citizens, so as to open the doors to an untroubled future for them, whatever their level of sporting success.

With the exception of “top players”, who have always delighted European clubs, mainly because their economic power remains unrivalled, we are entitled to think that all the others would choose to pursue their careers in their own countries if they were offered the conditions for a better life – and not only in material terms, moreover: if they were allowed to live their dream to the full, if their status were recognised throughout our continent, if we focused on educating them, training them.

In that case, yes, they would not take the path of an exile that often leads nowhere. We are firmly convinced of this!

Within FIFPRO Africa, with the active support of CAF and the help of our partners, particularly the ILO and the IOM, this is the future that we want to offer to African footballers, because it is the only way to ensure progress, success and social justice and because it will lead our continent to lasting achievement worthy of our passion for football.
Sport is regarded by hundreds of millions of people who practise it around the world as an important form of recreation, a passion and a way of promoting human health and wellbeing, but also peace and social cohesion.

Since the mid-twentieth century, professional sport has become a major industry generating billions of dollars and providing jobs for millions of people directly or indirectly linked to this sector.

For many young people around the world, particularly from low-income families, professional sport is a great opportunity for economic and social advancement. There are numerous role models, but few are chosen. Many, despite all their efforts, will not fulfil their dream because of lack of opportunity, strong competition or injury. This quest for success to turn a passion into a professional activity leads them to want to leave their country in the hope of becoming professional footballers abroad. This choice must be carefully considered and it is important to have all the necessary information before making it so as to avoid the crooks and the hazards that can swiftly turn a dream into a drama.

This publication addresses the specific question of employment and working conditions for young footballers who wish to practise their sport professionally and are planning to do so by migrating to a club abroad.

As in any other line of work, professional players' contracts lay down conditions of employment between athletes and their employers to ensure adequate protections, compensation and termination rules.

The parties normally involved in negotiating sports contracts may include the player, their agent or players' association, the club and its federation. However, as FIFPRO has shown, too many players are still confronted with contractual problems and some of them do not have a written contract with their club, with adverse consequences, particularly for their social security, since it can deprive them of medical care coverage and sickness and injury benefits.

Living your dream also means defending your rights. That is why the International Labour Organization, together with FIFPRO and the Didier Drogba Foundation, has mobilised to promote decent employment for young professional footballers.

Read all the following advice carefully and have fun reading the comic strip, which presents situations you may be familiar with. And above all, talk about it to those around you!

My thanks to my colleagues in the ILO Sectoral Policy Department, Labour Migration Branch and Regional Office for Africa, without whom this publication would not have been possible.
The first thing you need to know is that it is perfectly possible to continue to progress and to be known and recognised if you pursue the start of your career in your national league. You will then have more chance of attracting or even being recruited by a club abroad.

But if you have made up your mind and think you have a chance of becoming a professional footballer abroad, then follow these suggestions.

First of all, consult your coach and discuss your project with your club officials and with former professional players. Listen to those who have acquired experience abroad or have considered doing so. They will be able to guide you and help you make the right choices. Leaving your country may not always be the best option.
Not all those who present themselves as agents really are. They say they want to help you, they encourage your dreams, and they don’t hesitate to lie, because they are actually trying to steal your money.

Your federation, and players’ organisations such as the International Federation of Professional Footballers, FIFPRO, can help you to tell the difference between a real agent and a fake.

Just because someone wants to be an agent doesn’t mean that they are. But do you know what an agent is?

They should not be confused with scouts, who work for a club and look for the best players for their employer, including the youngest ones.

They should also not be confused with coaches or sporting directors, who are also employed by their club.

Agents, also known as representatives or intermediaries, are people entrusted with the business affairs and interests of an individual, a group or a country, on whose behalf they act.

I’m what’s known as an “agent”. My role is to spot talented young footballers and sign them up with big clubs abroad.
HOW TO IDENTIFY FAKE AGENTS!

According to FIFPRO, here are certain signs that enable you to identify a fake agent ...

- THEY ASK YOU FOR MONEY UP FRONT
  Some agents ask for money to organise a trial with a club. If you are invited to try out or sign a contract, the club should, as a rule, cover all the expenses. Never pay an agent before you have signed with a club.

- THEY DO NOT OFFER YOU A WRITTEN CONTRACT
  Fake agents don’t want to have a written and signed contract with those they are trying to deceive. And if you are offered a written agreement, do not sign it without reading it carefully and taking legal advice. Your club, the federation or your national players’ union will be able to guide you on this.

- YOU’VE NEVER SEEN THEM IN PERSON
  Be especially wary if an agent doesn’t want to meet you face to face. Fake agents prefer to seek and find their victims through social media. It is very unlikely that you will receive an invitation for a trial or a genuine contract through social media. Only work with an agent you have seen with your own eyes and spoken to. Check them out with your club, the federation or your national players’ union to make sure they are trustworthy.

- THEIR OFFERS ARE TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE
  It is very unlikely that the best clubs will offer contracts or invitations for a trial to players who have never played professionally. If an agent shows you letters with logos of famous clubs or selfies with stars, you should check whether the agent is registered with the federation. Check whether the club that the agent says is interested knows you and knows that you are coming for a trial or to sign a contract, or ask whether the club knows the agent.

See FIFPro: Fake agents
www.fifpro.org
Are you old enough to become a professional footballer abroad? According to FIFA rules, neither academies nor clubs can recruit an international player that has not reached the age of 18. There are exceptions for players who already live in the country where the club is located, or if the parents are going to accompany the player for reasons not connected with football. You must be very careful with private academies that do not observe these rules.

Do you have the necessary documents: passport, identity card, visa, work permit? You should never leave your country in an irregular manner, as this can get you into big trouble (arrest, imprisonment / detention, deportation, abuse, exploitation, forced labour, etc.) and cause you to lose any chance of joining a professional club abroad.

Before signing a contract, it is imperative that you seek the guidance and opinion of a legal adviser or a representative of your national players' union.

Remember that the contract should clearly indicate:

- Your name
- The name of your employer
- The address of the club or academy
- Your salary
- Your social security rights (healthcare, sickness, unemployment, pension, occupational accident, invalidity, maternity, etc.)
- Working and training hours, as well as training location
- How overtime is calculated
- Holiday and weekly rest entitlement
- Expenses and deductions, for example for accommodation
- Your duties to your club
- How and for what reasons your employment contract can be terminated
- What recourse you have in the event of disputes and which jurisdiction you can use.

If you decide to join a football academy or a club abroad, make sure you’ve thought carefully about the following points ...
Have you made enquiries with the academy or club about what happens if you are injured? Are your medical expenses covered? Are you entitled to proper social security (invalidity, occupational accident, etc.)? Are you insured by the academy or the club for accident, injury or illness? Is there a personal insurance scheme in the country that covers the risks associated with practising professional sport? If you are a woman player, what happens if you are pregnant?

Have you got a repatriation plan? Sometimes life as a footballer abroad is difficult, especially when you are isolated in a country you don’t know and where you don’t know anyone. Have you asked the academy or club what would happen if you decided to terminate your contract or if the club terminated it?

As soon as you arrive in the country, it is essential to:

- Contact and register with your own country’s embassy or consulate to inform them that you are living in the country. Embassies, and more particularly consulates, perform a role as protectors and defenders of their nationals and the latter’s property, whether they are resident or just visiting the host country. The consulate therefore provides a service of administrative assistance to its nationals. These contacts could be useful if you encounter problems during your stay.

- Notify your family of your address and phone number.

- Take out medical insurance, covering the risks associated with playing professional sport, if it is not offered by the academy or club.

- Join the country’s footballers’ union or association, or consult FIFPRO.
Never leave your passport with an employer or an agent or with anyone else. Don’t forget to make a photocopy of your passport, residence permit, work permit and useful numbers and keep the originals in a safe place.

It is imperative that you ask for a copy of your employment contract after signing it and that you keep it safe. It is even advisable to send it to your family or to your national players’ union.

If you have a problem, you can contact:

- The embassy or consulate of your country
- The footballers’ union or sports association of your country or the country where you are now playing, or FIFPRO.

You should know that in most countries every foreign employee has the same human rights as the citizens of the country. Even if you are in an irregular situation, you are protected by employment law when you are a professional. This includes the following rights:

- The right to keep your papers (passport, residence permit, work permit, contract)
- Paid holidays and rest periods
- To be paid at least every month
- To leave the training site
- To be paid for overtime
- A period of paid sickness/accident leave/maternity/paternity leave
- To play football in safe conditions (respect for the rules of the game and protection against Covid-19 and other health risks, discrimination, harassment, abuse, etc.)
- Social security coverage.

Let’s meet at the ground tomorrow and talk it over!
Have you thought about other life paths, still in the world of sport and football?

Sport is your passion and becoming a professional footballer is your dream. But before going abroad, you must realise that becoming a professional footballer is limited to a small number of people, whereas those aspiring to do so are very numerous all over the world.

Nowadays, clubs have the means to detect young talent, whether playing in Africa or elsewhere, and few players escape their network.

If it is not possible, in the end, for you to become a professional footballer, you can still live your passion for sport and football through other jobs directly related to it. You can have a great career in sport without becoming a professional footballer. Think carefully before you leave school, training or your country to play football.

It’s always better to have an education under your belt and a steady job than to bet everything on a risky project that is not under your control.

Here are some professions related to sport:
- Maintenance and management of sports facilities
- Sports coach
- Instructor or guide in sports tourism
- Sports journalist or announcer
- Jobs in sports business
- Sports medicine and physiotherapy
- Physical and sports education teacher

Ask your club, federation, school or youth employment agency about existing vocational training and support programmes so that you can develop your skills and ensure your employability in a profession you feel passionate about.
Like the other continental divisions of FIFPRO, the International Federation of Professional Footballers, which now includes some 70 member unions and associations worldwide, FIFPRO Africa was created in 2007, and its mission, like that of its parent body, is to work for the benefit of professional players through a constructive dialogue with all the stakeholders (CAF, federations, leagues, clubs), by advocating a fairer kind of football, based on respecting the rules, contracts and human beings to achieve untroubled and successful careers, by making diversity and inclusion the foundations of a lasting change for greater social justice, encouraging access to education and training, enhancing the image of players and their commitment to the benefit of society.

Rejecting from the outset all fanaticism and condemning all forms of exclusion, FIFPRO Africa is non-political, but engaged on a daily basis through its twelve member associations and unions (1) and thanks to its relations with some ten other national players’ associations throughout the continent.

Its president since 2017 has been Gérard Njitap, from Cameroon, who, like many other African top players, past and present, has decided to place himself at the service of the continent’s footballers and, through them, at the service of African professional football, which, despite economic difficulties, the culpable deviations of some and the critical lack of infrastructure, continues, in spite of everything, to make progress...

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All you need to know, all you gotta do...

Drawings: Gbich! Editions
Script: Frédéric Lapeyre
All right. Let's stop... It's getting late.

The others must be already waiting for us.

I've got to stop by at home before following you to the party.

You'll join us there directly!

Ok. We had a customer come in this morning with his car broken down. My uncle asked me to have a look at the engine before leaving.

You've always got your hands in the grease. You'll never become a professional like that, man!

I know. But it's not my fault! Right now I've got priorities.

Stop bickering. It gets to be a pain in the end.

We're not bickering. I'm just trying to make him understand that he should concentrate a bit more on football... Rather than putting mechanics first.

That won't get him anywhere.

Tell that to the players who've never had a chance to turn pro...

At least he's clever and brave.

He still doesn't understand that it's football that will make him rich. Do you know any rich and famous mechanics?

You're exaggerating. Give him a break.

I'm doing it for his own good. We're all dreaming of becoming professional footballers. That's why we train here every day...

... I'm ready to do anything to succeed.
It's nearly one o'clock in the morning. I've got to go home.

**Happy Birthday**

Yes. Me too.

Ok. Let's go!

You'll see, when we're champions, we'll be able to buy our parents nice houses.

**Next Day**

Excuse me. You play really well. I've been watching you here for a few days and I think I've got a proposition for you.

If you'd like to give me 5 minutes, I'll explain what it's about.

If you're known as an "agent". My role is to spot talented young footballers and sign them up with big clubs abroad.

Watching you play I can see your potential straight away. I could easily get you into the first team at a big club.

It's a win-win situation.

I'll look after all the formalities. But you'll have to make it worth my while. I'll take 2 million for each of you. What do you say?
I think it’s a great opportunity. This is our chance, guys!

I’m not so sure. I’ve got to talk to my uncle about it.

Me too. I’m going to discuss it with my family first.

I don’t care what my family says. I’ve absolutely got to take this chance.

Let’s meet at the ground tomorrow and talk it over!

Ok!!!

I think you should take your coach’s advice. He’s in the best position to advise you about this!

This is your chance! We’ll get the whole neighbourhood to chip in and help you leave.

The whole thing sounds a bit fishy to me. Talk about it to your coach!

My parents have managed to raise the money we have to give the agent. I’m seeing him tomorrow. I’ve got to leave!

Be careful, there are a lot of crooks out there! Tell him to meet me at the national players’ union. We’ll check and see if he’s a real agent or a fake!

Let’s not listen to him! Our coach is jealous. He probably wants to keep this kind of opportunity for his favourites!
Take this file. It's got your passport, your visa and your contract. The address of the club is on the contract. I've arranged everything.

Thanks, boss!

When you arrive, a chauffeur will be there to drive you straight to your new club!

This contract is going to change my life.

ARRIVAL AT THE DESTINATION

Where's the driver my agent was talking about? Isn't he here?

Damn! I've been waiting for 2 hours and nobody's come to fetch me... I'm going to phone...

What did you say? Who have you signed a contract with? Ah, Ah... Aaaaah!!!

But my dear boy, that's not how it works.
I'm sorry, but I think you've been tricked by a con man.

The coach was right. I've been had. He was a fake agent. What's going to become of me here?

AND THAT'S HOW I BECAME A DOWN-AND-OUT IN THAT BIG FOREIGN CITY.

I ENDED UP GETTING A LITTLE UNDECLARED JOB ...

...BUT I HAD NO PAPERS AND THE INEVITABLE HAPPENED

I was deported after a year and here I am back with you!
In my case, things went pretty well...

I WORKED VERY HARD IN MY UNCLE’S WORKSHOP...

BUT I ALSO TRAINED HARD ...

AND THEN ONE DAY, I GOT MY REWARD

You’ve been selected for the national youth team!

MY FAMILY WAS SO PROUD OF ME...

... THE CROWD IN THE STADIUM WAS GOING WILD AT MY MATCH!

WOOOOOH!!!!

GOOOOAL....

Your perseverance paid off!
...Yes, he's the best player in my team.

I'm the president of a big foreign club and we want to sign him for our youth team.

We did it!!! You're going to play for a big club next year!!! You see, you should always trust your coach!

Uncle!!! Uncle!!! I've just signed to become a professional abroad!

My boy... I knew this day would come. You've worked so hard! I'm proud of you! Sniff! Sniff!

Yeah! You've been lucky. In fact... you deserve it! You worked hard to achieve this result.

Yes. He never gave up. He always believed in himself and he always listened to others!

And what about you?... How did things go then?
Last year I was playing a match with the school team in a tournament organised by the United Nations to promote women's sport.

I EXCELLED MYSELF

AND SCORED THREE GOALS IN THAT MATCH...

WOWHHOOhH!

GOOOAAAL...

TWO PEOPLE WHO WERE IN THE CROWD CAME UP TO ME. THERE WAS A REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE MINISTRY.

I represent the Ministry of Youth Development. We are interested in you!

You are a credit to women's sport!

I am the South African ambassador...

...I wanted to congratulate you personally on the quality of your play.

You could come and study with us and play in the university team. We have great facilities, you'll see!

Yes, Yes! I think I'll pass my exams with distinction this year!

Aaaah! That's perfect!
I encourage you to apply for a scholarship to study at a South African university. That would enable you to join a women’s football team!

Really? That would be fantastic!

Think about it, miss.

Dad, Mum... I’ve been accepted!!

Well done, dear! You make us proud!

TWO MONTHS LATER, I RECEIVED AN EMAIL TELLING ME THAT I’D BEEN ACCEPTED FOR THE NEXT ACADEMIC YEAR AT A PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITY!

And there you are... That’s my story!

Wowww! You’ve done really well.
In the end, each of us followed a very different route.

I pursued a dream which turned into a nightmare!

Yes... you could say that!

You were ripped off!

And you two... You stayed put. But you've pursued your dreams successfully.

I know now that living your dream is not without its dangers when you're not properly prepared. In the end, you were right! I travelled for nothing. I lost money. And I wasted time!

It's not too late for you. But you must learn from your mistakes!

Yes, you'll simply have to redouble your efforts and be very persistent.

That's a good idea!

My experience will not be wasted. I'm going to use it to raise awareness among young people who want to leave at any cost!

And you know what? From now on I'll consult the national players' union before making a decision!

At least you won't have gone through all that for nothing!
The Didier Drogba Foundation was created in 2007 on the initiative of its president, Didier Drogba. Its general objective is to support local, sub-regional and international economic development initiatives with the aim of helping to improve the living conditions of populations in general, but more specifically of grassroots populations suffering disadvantage and/or discrimination. [www.didierdrogbafoundation.org](http://www.didierdrogbafoundation.org)

The International Federation of Professional Footballers, FIFPRO, is the only recognised organisation defending the rights and interests of professional footballers worldwide. It comprises more than 70 member countries, including 11 in Africa, and has continental divisions. Since 2017 the president of FIFPRO Africa has been Geremie Njitap, from Cameroon. Didier Drogba, for his part, has been honorary president since 2009. [www.fifpro.org](http://www.fifpro.org)

The International Labour Organization, the only “tripartite” UN agency, brings together government, employer and worker representatives to establish international standards, formulate policies and design programmes aimed at promoting decent work for all the men and women in the world. Among its objectives, the ILO supports the fight against exploitation of young people in migration and in the world of sport. [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)