

Industrial relations and social dialogue

# **Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Professional football sector**





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## Country codes

<b>AT</b>	Austria	<b>ES</b>	Spain	<b>LV</b>	Latvia
<b>BE</b>	Belgium	<b>FI</b>	Finland	<b>MT</b>	Malta
<b>BG</b>	Bulgaria	<b>FR</b>	France	<b>NL</b>	Netherlands
<b>CY</b>	Cyprus	<b>HR</b>	Croatia	<b>PL</b>	Poland
<b>CZ</b>	Czechia	<b>HU</b>	Hungary	<b>PT</b>	Portugal
<b>DE</b>	Germany	<b>IE</b>	Ireland	<b>RO</b>	Romania
<b>DK</b>	Denmark	<b>IT</b>	Italy	<b>SE</b>	Sweden
<b>EE</b>	Estonia	<b>LT</b>	Lithuania	<b>SI</b>	Slovenia
<b>EL</b>	Greece	<b>LU</b>	Luxembourg	<b>SK</b>	Slovakia

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## Introduction

The aim of this representativeness study is to identify the relevant national and supranational social partners (that is, the trade unions and employer organisations) in the professional football sector and to show how they relate to the sector's European-level organisations representing employees and employers.

The report is divided into three parts: an overview of the economic specificities of and the employment trends in the professional football sector; an analysis of the social partner organisations in all the 27 EU Member States; and an analysis of the relevant European organisations, in particular their membership composition and capacity to negotiate.

This section presents the objectives of the study along with a brief introduction to the chosen methodology. The context of this study is the European sectoral social dialogue committee (ESSDC) for the professional football sector, which was established in its current form in 2008.

### 0.1. Objectives of the study

Representativeness studies are conducted for four reasons.

- The European Commission aims to assess the representativeness of the social partner associations consulted under Article 154 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).
- Representativeness is a criterion to be eligible for setting up or participating in an ESSDC.
- Representativeness also means having the capacity to negotiate agreements that can be implemented by Council decision, as provided for by Article 155 of the TFEU.
- This study may also offer guidance for future capacity-building initiatives.

Representativeness is defined by the European Commission decision on the establishment of sectoral social dialogue committees promoting dialogue between the social partners at European level (European Commission, 1998). It includes the following requirements for an organisation to be recognised as a representative EU social partner organisation.

- The organisation must relate to specific sectors or categories and be organised at European level.
- It should represent organisations that are themselves an integral and recognised part of Member States' social partner structures, that have the capacity to negotiate agreements and that are representative of several Member States.
- It should have adequate structures to ensure its effective participation in the work of an ESSDC.

To accomplish its aims, this study first identifies the relevant national social partner organisations in the professional football sector before analysing the structure of the sector's relevant European organisations, in particular their membership composition. This involves clarifying the unit of analysis at both the national and European levels of interest representation. The study includes only organisations whose membership domain is classed as 'sector-related', or, more precisely, related to the activity of professional football, which is not a sector in the strict sense. In terms of territorial coverage, the study includes the 27 EU Member States.

## **0.2. Historical background on and current developments in European sectoral social dialogue in the professional football sector**

The International Federation of Professional Footballers' Associations (Fifpro) was established in 1965 by representatives of football players' associations from France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (Fifpro, undated). Over the years, Fifpro has grown into a global network, bringing together trade unions representing professional football players from all over the world. Within the EU, it has affiliated trade unions in 24 EU Member States. On the ESSDC for professional football, Fifpro represents the players, while European Leagues and the European Club Association (ECA) represent the players' employers. European Leagues was first created in 1997, as the Association of the European Union Premier Professional Football Leagues, later changing its name to European Professional Football Leagues (EPFL) and, in 2018, to European Leagues. ECA was established in 2008, when the first memorandum of understanding (MoU) between UEFA (football's European governing body) and ECA was signed; at that point, ECA replaced the G-14 and the European Club Forum as the representative body for clubs at European level.

In the field of industrial relations in professional football, the EU has agreed with the actors a significant degree of autonomy, allowing them to follow a self-governance model. The EU's competences related to football and sports in general are based on Article 6 and Article 165 of the TFEU. The European Commission staff working document of 2007 on the EU and sport lists in note 149 three EU-funded projects aimed at encouraging European social dialogue between social partners in the wider sports sector and four projects to be implemented by the social partners in professional football (European Commission, 2007). The titles of the first two and the fourth football-focused projects indicate that from 2002 the focus was on the establishment of social dialogue in the football sector in the EU. The third project was a 2004 study on professional football social partner organisations in the (then) candidate countries (Asser Institute, 2004).

In 2004, the European Commission contracted KU Leuven to carry out a full representativeness study on the professional football sector; the report was published in 2006 (KU Leuven, 2006). In December 2007, EPFL and Fifpro made a joint request for the establishment of an ESSDC, to which they received a positive reply in a letter from the Commission of 13 March 2008. With agreement on the rules and procedures governing the ESSDC reached on 14 May 2008, all was ready for the official launch of the professional football ESSDC on 1 July 2008 (European Commission, 2008). These early developments are well described by Colucci and Geeraert (2013). Those authors state that Fifpro, EPFL and UEFA had already agreed by 2006 on minimum requirements for a professional football player's contract, and they describe the implementation of this agreement as a suitable starting point for the professional football ESSDC. This resulted in the autonomous agreement of 19 April 2012, which is considered the main achievement of the ESSDC. UEFA is a signatory to this agreement as the governing authority for professional football in Europe. UEFA is not considered a social partner but is invited to chair the ESSDC.

Analysing these early years of the ESSDC, Richard Parrish (2011) sees two different perspectives, one approaching football purely as an economic activity, the other seeing it as a sport, as a cultural activity. Pierre and Buisine (2013) looked at the creation of the professional football ESSDC in the wider context of the efforts to establish European social dialogue for all sports, and in 2013 Eurofound published a representativeness study on sports and active leisure (Eurofound, 2013). Berndt Keller (2018), in an ETUI working paper, analyses the first 10 years of the professional football ESSDC in terms of how it functioned, its outcomes and their implementation. Unlike other ESSDCs, the professional football ESSDC is well researched from various perspectives. Articles analysing the ESSDC and the governance network of European football from 2013 and

2022 mention that UEFA established in 2007 the Professional Football Strategy Council (PFSC), on which Fifpro, ECA, EPFL and the national associations were represented (Geeraert et al, 2013; Meier et al, 2022). This PFSC still exists alongside the ESSDC. UEFA has clarified that the ESSDC focuses purely on labour relations and dispute resolution, while the PFSC has a wider scope.

UEFA has been reconsidering the composition of the PFSC and, as part of this process, it launched its Convention on the Future of European Football, which is intended to lead to much more diverse stakeholder representation (including of fans, agents, commercial partners and coaches) (UEFA, 2021, 2022). In 2023, UEFA is looking at how best to use this new forum and how to incorporate it into its statutes.

This is not the only recent development. ECA updated its statutes in March 2023. Furthermore, a new European organisation representing clubs was launched in April 2023: the Union of European Clubs (UEC). European Leagues held meetings of its Club Advisory Platform in 2019, 2021 and 2022 to discuss and address several topics related to the governance of European professional clubs and competitions. About 300 professional football clubs participated in these advisory platform meetings, and it was in this context that the UEC was created. To cover the period between the new organisation's launch in April 2023 and the first UEC General Assembly, which is planned for the end of 2023, an interim executive board has been established, with representatives of clubs from five EU Member States (Belgium, Croatia, Ireland, Latvia and Spain) (UEC, 2023). The UEC statutes were published in the Belgian official journal<sup>1</sup> in July 2023.

Not only are social partner organisations in the sector changing, but also within the ESSDC there are important developments taking place. The autonomous agreement of 2012 on minimum requirements for players' contracts, initially valid until 2019, has been extended to 2023, and is under renegotiation in 2023. The 2023 work plan sets out three work streams: implementation of the autonomous agreement, diversity and inclusion, and loan restrictions.

### 0.3. Definitions and methodology

The methodology applied is linked to the criteria identified in European Commission Decision 98/500/EC, including sector-relatedness (or relatedness to a 'category' of activities or workers), membership and organisational capacity. Each of these criteria will be defined in this section, starting with **category-relatedness** – that is, the demarcation of professional football, by agreement with the social partners and the European Commission. However, in contrast to representativeness studies on the social partners in other sectors of the economy, in which the sector is usually defined in terms of the European statistical classification of economic activities (NACE) system, in the case of professional football it was decided not to define the economic sector in this way (in terms of NACE) but to define the profession. Accordingly, this study targets the activities of professional football players, defined as those players who are registered with UEFA and/or earning more from playing than they invest in equipment, travel costs and everything they need to play.

This study thus covers all trade unions and employer organisations whose membership domains include professional football players or entities employing professional football players. Applying patterns of sector-relatedness is pointless in the case of professional football, since this study does not deal with a sector in terms of economic activities as such but a profession. What can be assessed, though, is whether an organisation organises only part of the profession (not all professional players or not all clubs employing professional players) or the whole profession (and sometimes also other professions and occupations related

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<sup>1</sup> <https://kbopub.economie.fgov.be/kbopub/zoeknummerform.html?lang=en&nummer=803.844.641&actionLu=Search>

to professional football or professions and occupations related to sporting activities other than football, for example).

**Membership** constitutes another important aspect of representativeness. This study looks at two levels of membership. First, the geographical coverage of the EU-level organisations (how many Member States an EU-level trade union/employer organisation has affiliates in) and, second, the organisational density of the national affiliates. An important aspect to be assessed is whether the EU-level bodies organise most or at least the most significant national-level organisations (significant in relation to their membership strength in the sector and their involvement in collective bargaining) or whether there are major gaps in their membership domains.

Membership of a social partner organisation requires regular payment of membership fees. However, some organisations are reluctant to inform third parties about such payments. Taking into account the limits of transparency, for the purpose of this study different membership statuses are not distinguished beyond highlighting the differences between associational members (non-profit organisations that are affiliated to a social partner organisation to represent their members) and company members (for-profit enterprises that are members of a social partner organisation) and between direct members and indirect members (through an affiliated organisation).

The **organisational capacity** of the European social partners is analysed in terms of their ability to commit themselves on behalf of their members and to conclude binding agreements or actions that can be implemented or monitored EU-wide through the support of their affiliates. To assess their capacity to negotiate, the actors, their objectives and the decision-making structures provided for in their statutes are considered, as are the outcomes, in terms of texts agreed, and the processes through which the organisations obtained mandates, support and approval from their member organisations in the negotiation process.

The involvement of social partners' members in national-level collective bargaining is important, as it shows that the affiliates are able to obtain a mandate to negotiate on behalf of their members (at least at national level, which could then also translate to a mandate to negotiate at EU level). Where a mandate for European negotiations is in place either implicitly or explicitly, this allows for such negotiations to take place, which could potentially result in binding agreements or the drafting of European autonomous agreements, which require implementation by social partners at national level in line with their respective practices and traditions. The capacity to act autonomously in this way among those represented on the ESSDC contributes significantly to the committee's effectiveness.

Finally, representativeness also depends upon organisations' structures and resources, their capacity to mobilise the active participation of their members and to address the different interests of member organisations, and their potential to act autonomously at European level. The internal structures within the European organisations that are responsible for preparing for ESSDC meetings and discussing social affairs linked to EU-level dialogue can increase efficiency and ensure that more organisations feel represented than those that participate directly in the meetings.

## 0.4. Data collection and quality control measures

### Data collection

Representativeness studies combine top-down and bottom-up approaches. The top-down approach includes all sector-related affiliates of the European associations European Leagues, ECA and Fifpro, while the bottom-

up approach looks at other organisations involved in collective bargaining in professional football in the EU Member States and their membership of European-level organisations.

Except where otherwise stated, this study draws on country reports provided by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents (NEC). Where precise quantitative data could not be obtained, estimates were provided rather than leaving a field blank.

Thus, quantitative data used in the report stem from three sources, namely:

- official statistics and representative survey studies
- administrative data, such as membership figures provided by the respective organisations (for example, to calculate density rates)
- estimates, expert opinions and assessments provided by Eurofound national correspondents or representatives of the respective organisations

Other sources include data and reports published by the European social partners, information available from Eurofound and the European Commission's social dialogue texts database.

## Quality assurance

To ensure the quality of the information gathered, several verification procedures and feedback loops were included in the process of drawing up this study. The methodology was presented to and discussed with all European social partners at a kick-off meeting on 14 September 2020.

First, combining the top-down and bottom-up approaches, information on the affiliates of the relevant EU-level social partners and other sector-related associations was collected from the reports prepared by the NEC, between September and December 2020. Subsequently, the Eurofound research team and the authors of this report checked the consistency of the national contributions and, if necessary, asked the national correspondents to revise them during the summer and autumn of 2021.

An overview of the national contributions was made available to the European social partners to allow their affiliates to double-check and comment on the information, between December 2021 and February 2022. As different social partner organisations were able to see the information reported by other organisations in the same country and, if necessary, comment on the credibility or accuracy of the information on other organisations representing a similar membership, this process involved an element of mutual control and recognition. Subsequently, this overview report was drafted in 2022.

In April 2023, draft versions of the overview report were shared with the recognised social partners at EU level – namely European Leagues, ECA and Fifpro – and with the European Commission and UEFA for feedback and comments. The final report, taking into account these comments, was evaluated and approved in June 2023 in a written procedure of the Eurofound Advisory Committee on Industrial Relations, which consists of representatives of both sides of industry, governments and the European Commission, in the presence of the European-level sectoral social partners identified in the report.

The verified and cross-checked data in this report are based on information first gathered by the Eurofound national correspondents at the beginning of 2021, which was completed and updated at the end of 2021. As social partners requested the incorporation of comments regarding recent changes in 2022 and 2023, this information is included in the report, although it is clearly stated that such information was provided directly by social partner organisations and has not been cross-checked.

## **0.5. Structure of the report**

The report consists of three main parts, beginning with a brief summary of the economic background and employment specificities of professional football. The report then analyses the relevant social partner organisations in all EU Member States. The third part of the analysis considers the representative associations at European level.

Finally, it is important to note the difference between the research and political aspects of this study. While providing data on the representativeness of the organisations under consideration, the report does not reach any definite conclusion on whether the representativeness of the European social partner organisations and their national affiliates is sufficient for participation in the European social dialogue. The actors and decision-makers in question can, however, using the information and analyses provided in this report, make further statements, proclamations or decisions, and develop an action plan for capacity building if necessary.

# 1. Economic background and employment specificities

## 1.1. Structure and governance relationships

There are four main types of (collective) actors in professional football. These are the national football associations, the national leagues, the football clubs and the trade unions or professional associations representing the interests of football players. Unlike in other economic sectors, the government and state authorities tend to play only a minor role in governing the legal and actual relationships between the main stakeholders. Rather, a complex system of interrelationships between the main stakeholders has been established – both horizontally and vertically.

According to Marston et al (2017, p. 11), ‘football ... maintains somewhat of a pyramid with three major levels: the NA [national association], the league and the clubs.’ Whereas the national football associations, which are affiliated to FIFA (football’s world governing body) and UEFA, are generally responsible for setting the rules of professional and amateur football at national level, the (top-tier) league is usually in charge of organising and managing the top-tier (and sometimes also the second-tier) championship in a country. Clubs, as more individual entities (often linked to companies or operating in tandem with companies), are directly related to players in that they employ/pay them.

The relationship between the national football association and the league varies from country to country; whereas in some countries the league organisationally forms an integral part of the national association, in other countries the league is organisationally separate from the national association but mandated by it to manage professional football. In the latter scenario, the league and the clubs have a greater degree of independence from the national association regarding the regulations concerning football players’ status and the broader contractual environment (Marston et al, 2017, p. 18).

The fourth collective actor in this governance structure of professional football is the players’ interest representation, in the form of either a trade union or any other form of association representing the collective interests of football players.

### National football associations

The national football association is usually the highest-order football organisation in a country, governing both the professional and the non-professional game, and affiliated to FIFA and UEFA. It sets the basic rules of the game. For this purpose, it has to guarantee that the FIFA and UEFA rules are applied. Moreover, the national association is often responsible for some or all of the following tasks: promoting and supervising the rules of the game in a country; representing national football structures in dealings with national authorities and international organisations (FIFA and UEFA); organising the participation of national teams (women and men, adults and under-age) in international championships; managing merchandising, licensing and refereeing; and administering and recording all footballers playing in national championships (professionals and non-professionals).

### National leagues

Organisation, management and decisions on professional football (often only played by men) are usually delegated to the leagues, which in some countries are affiliated to the national associations. The organisation of the first division (and sometimes of the second and even third divisions) of professional football often falls

within the purview of the leagues. Organising one or more country-wide divisions of football (albeit often only those for men) includes activities relating to the sport as such, as well as to administrative and commercial matters. In cooperation with their clubs (which are often but not always mandatorily affiliated to them), the leagues usually represent the employers' side in professional football. In coordination with the national associations, the leagues often issue rules governing the championships in the first division (and sometimes the second and third divisions) and frequently are in charge of some or all of the following tasks: health and safety (in particular during the COVID-19 crisis), media presence, and marketing and finances. In some countries, the leagues are in charge of (permanent) arbitration tribunals. Moreover, they are usually responsible for licensing and/or admission procedures, which are a prerequisite for clubs to participate in the championships, and for issuing general rules on stadiums (on admission of spectators and spectators' conduct, for example).

### **Football clubs**

The national leagues' members are the clubs of the first division (and sometimes lower-tier divisions) of men (and sometimes women) football players. These clubs may be for-profit or not-for-profit organisations; in the latter case, the clubs may have to set up and run a capital company that formally acts as employer of the football players in order to be licensed and/or admitted by the league. Insofar as the leagues act as representatives of the clubs – which are direct employers or run companies acting as employers – they are the employer organisations in the professional football sector, dealing with the trade unions and the authorities. In some countries, the leagues have gained the capacity to conclude collective agreements on behalf of the clubs and therefore act as relevant industrial relations actors. In some of these countries, the clubs themselves have a role as industrial relations actors, in that they conclude single-employer collective agreements complementary to the multi-employer agreements signed by the leagues.

### **Players' representatives/trade unions**

In almost all Member States, there are organisations representing the collective interests of professional football players. In not all of these countries, however, can these interest organisations be considered trade unions in the narrow sense. Where there are trade unions, they often form an integral part of the country's established trade union architecture under the umbrella of one of the existing confederations (or the only existing confederation). In some countries, these organisations representing the interests of footballers not only act on behalf of professional players but also organise and represent the interests of the non-professional/amateur branch of football. This is important, in particular, in countries where the demarcation lines between the professional and the non-professional segments tend to be blurred. Where football players' representatives are trade unions, they are often engaged in collective bargaining on behalf of professional players. They represent the players' collective interests not only to their clubs/immediate employers but frequently also to the leagues and national football associations. In some countries, organisations representing football players are set up for men and women players separately; in others, such organisations represent men football players only and women professionals are (virtually) non-existent or not represented by any organisation.

## **1.2. European professional football workforce**

Unlike other economic sectors, whose industrial relations actors are examined with regard to their sectoral representativeness, professional football cannot be captured in terms of a clear-cut definition under the NACE system. For the purpose of this study on professional football, the subject of interest is professional football players, defined as those players who are registered with UEFA and/or earning more from playing



than they invest in equipment, travel costs and everything they need to play. This certainly involves both men and women, but it excludes amateur footballers. Moreover, those carrying out professional activities closely related to those of professional football players – such as coaches, trainers, doctors, physiotherapists, sports managers, marketing personnel, HR staff and other backroom staff – do not fall within the scope of this study. Yet these professional groups are considered in this study insofar as they may constitute a relevant membership group of football-related organisations that represent collective interests. Moreover, the size of the workforce other than professional footballers in a club may indicate the importance of the club, since a club's strength in terms of sport-related competitiveness, but also financial and marketing capacity, correlates positively with the number of staff surrounding the professional football players (the number of players tends to be approximately similar in all professional clubs, while the number of non-playing staff varies significantly).

With regard to the players, it is important to note the difficulties involved in clearly distinguishing between professional footballers and non-professionals. These arise for a variety of reasons. First, in several countries at least a minority of professional footballers do not have a written contract of employment, although they have been acting as professional footballers for many years. Second, in several countries professional football players are in some cases or predominantly self-employed, often on the basis of contracts that do not clearly specify the applicable terms and conditions, such that the legal and/or de facto status of the player often remains unclear. Third, while in some cases – in formal terms – the status of the player as professional is clear, according to his or her employment contract with a club licensed by the league/authorities, this formal definition of professionalism raises some questions with regard to the exclusion of football players remunerated beyond the standard employment relationship model. For instance, in some countries, in the lower-tier divisions not covered by the licensing system established for the top divisions, various forms of remuneration exist outside the standard employment contract that is required for players in licensed clubs (such as expense allowances or payments below the minimum pay threshold that do not trigger compulsory taxation and/or insurance). In Austria, for example, in the men's leagues below the second division and in the top women's league, which are covered neither by the licensing system for professional clubs nor by a collective agreement, the players are often classified as amateurs although they are paid regularly. This is because, in Austria, classification in terms of the dichotomy between amateur and non-amateur (professional) in accordance with the Association Law (Vereinsgesetz) of 2002 is not congruent with classification in terms of the dichotomy between employee and non-employee in accordance with labour law. Therefore, while the peak national football association ÖFB classifies a player earning an expense allowance (plus some form of minor remuneration) as an amateur, the relevant trade union, VfB, tends to classify that player as an employee who should be offered a standard contract of employment as soon as he or she is paid for work. Similar classification issues occur in other Member States as well.

Given this vagueness in the definition of a professional football player and the different notions of professional football in different Member States, the numbers of professional players provided by Eurofound's national correspondents for their respective countries have to be treated very cautiously and are often not easily comparable. Nevertheless, due to the lack of official data provided by statistical institutions and authorities (such as Eurostat) at European level, the figures compiled by the NEC are used in this report; they mainly stem from national professional football associations, leagues and social partners. Table 1 shows the numbers of professional footballers, disaggregated by sex and age group, in each Member State, as far as data are available.

Table 1: Numbers of professional football players in all divisions/leagues, by sex and age group, EU27

Member State	Men		Women		Under-age (men and women)	Total
	Number of professional players	Number of divisions/ leagues with professional players	Number of professional players	Number of divisions/ leagues with professional players	Number of professional players	All professional players
AT	726	3	7	1	> 10	c. 743
BE	1,190	2	33	1	5	1,228
BG	782	2	0	0	Some	Minimum 782
CY	790–910	3	40–50	1	50–70 <sup>2</sup>	880–1,030
CZ	1,204	4	47	1	n.a.	Minimum 1,251
DE	c. 3,000	4	c. 930	3	n.a.	c. 3,930
DK	1,147	3	c. 115	2	Some	c. 1,262
EE	304	3	0	0	0	304
EL	1,200	3	0 <sup>3</sup>	0	0	1,200
ES	2,380	4	160–200	1	Some	c. 2,540–2,580
FI	672	3	74	2	Some	c. 746
FR	1,215	3	52	1	Some	c. 1,267
HR	460	2	0	0	0	460
HU	n.a. (> 300) <sup>4</sup>	2	c. 90	1	Some	n.a. (c. 390)
IE	c. 400	2	0	0	0	c. 400
IT	2,928	3	c. 50	1 <sup>5</sup>	n.a. <sup>6</sup>	Minimum 2,978
LT	172	2	12	1	2	186
LU	200	1	0	0	0	200
LV	c. 210	1–2	0	0	0	c. 210
MT	512	2–3	1	1	0	513
NL	1,100	2	Some	1	Some	Minimum 1,100
PL	1,587	3	25	1	Some	Minimum 1,612
PT	1,100	2	66	1	Some	Minimum 1,166
RO	2,675	4	150	2	Some	Minimum 2,825

<sup>2</sup> There are several reasons why the number recorded in Cyprus for professional players in youth leagues is high. Cyprus has a very high share of expatriate players (over 80%), as, until recently, the Cyprus Football Association accepted professional contracts offering a monthly salary of €150 (a new €940 minimum salary was introduced on 1 January 2023) and most clubs therefore registered young players, often coming from abroad, as professionals. In addition, in recent years, most of the new investors in the Cypriot league have invested in young players (again, mostly non-Cypriots).

<sup>3</sup> During the data collection process for this report, no professional women players in Greece were reported, but during the consultations on the final draft Fifpro indicated in June 2023 that its Greek affiliate had recently changed its statutes to enable it to represent women players; however, there are no data on the existence of women professional players in Greece.

<sup>4</sup> The national correspondent estimated over 300, but this figure has not been confirmed.

<sup>5</sup> There are women professional players at FC Internazionale Milano, ACF Fiorentina, AS Roma and UC Sampdoria.

<sup>6</sup> There are under-age professional players at FC Internazionale Milano, ACF Fiorentina, SS Lazio, Atalanta BC, AS Roma, UC Sampdoria and Udinese Calcio.

Member State	Men		Women		Under-age (men and women)	Total
	Number of professional players	Number of divisions/ leagues with professional players	Number of professional players	Number of divisions/ leagues with professional players	Number of professional players	All professional players
SE	> 835	2–3	> 261	2	Some	> 1,096
SI	376	3	0	0	0	376
SK	411	3	0	0	Some	Minimum 411
<b>27 MS</b>	<b>All Member States have men professional players Minimum 71 divisions (minimum 2.6 per Member State)</b>		<b>18 Member States have women professional players 24 divisions (0.9 per Member State)</b>		<b>4 Member States are confirmed to have under-age professional players; it is probable that 17 Member States do</b>	<b>c. 30,000</b>

**Notes:** ‘n.a.’, information not available. ‘Some’ indicates that there must be some women professional players and under-age professional football players in these countries, because Fifpro member unions reported having some members there (see Table 19 in Chapter 3); there is, however, no information on how many there are; ranges are given in cases where estimates were provided.

**Sources:** NEC, 2020/2021, and UEFA estimates (for Belgium and Finland)

Table 1 indicates that the number of professional football players – including men, women and under-age professional players – in the EU27 amounts to about 30,000. Given that for some countries and categories no figures for professional players are available (and for a few countries only estimates of minimum numbers were provided), an extrapolation suggests that there are more than 30,000 professional footballers in the EU27. Together with the United Kingdom (which is not covered by this report), the EU27 is likely to have close to 35,000 professional players – a number corresponding to the figure cited by the European Commission for 2005 (more than 34,000) (European Commission, undated).

Whereas the absolute numbers of men professional players in the Member States largely reflect the importance of the national leagues in terms of international competitiveness, the numbers of women professional players remain low in most Member States, where there even are any such players. More than 50 women players can be found only in Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden. For the Netherlands, where women’s professional football has a relatively long tradition, no data were provided on the number of players, but there is a women’s league with professional players. Women professional football players can thus be found in 18 Member States. In 9 Member States, there are no women professional footballers.

The figures for the numbers of professional football players in the youth leagues are relatively low (and the data are limited), which does not mean that there are no under-age professionals. Rather, almost all of these professionals are engaged in the adult professional leagues, although they have not yet reached the age of 18. It appears to be highly unusual to offer a professional employment contract to a player in the youth leagues. Such contracts obviously exist almost solely in the adult professional leagues, and it seems that, if a club licensed for a professional adult league plans to sign an under-age player, it keeps them on on a non-

professional basis until they are ready to play in that league. Football players under the age of 18 who are training in football academies are not paid regularly but may receive a small expense allowance or similar, so they cannot be considered professional players, although they may benefit from professional training and may be covered by comprehensive health and accident insurance during their training period.

### **1.3. Working conditions of professional football players**

The labour market in the small professional football sector is highly segmented and internationalised. With the 1995 Bosman ruling by the European Court of Justice, the right of professional football players to freedom of movement was confirmed; nationality-based quotas for club teams were thus abolished. This drastic legal intervention meant ‘a major transformation of traditional, rather rigid nation-specific transfer systems’ and ‘enforced their liberalisation and kicked off more cross-border mobility of players’ (Keller, 2016, pp. 26–27).

Although the Bosman ruling augmented the degree of freedom afforded the individual professional player, it also contributed to huge differences in professional players’ wages and salaries. The image of the football sector is dominated by those players earning the highest wages and salaries and those few clubs with the largest budgets. However, most professional players have to bear less favourable conditions. Differences in earnings exist at individual club/team level, where the majority of normal players are confronted with a limited number of excessively paid superstars with considerable market power. Moreover, major differences also exist between the small number of top clubs (in the top leagues) and all the other clubs (Keller, 2016, pp. 29–30).

Since European professional football is characterised by a high degree of heterogeneity in terms not only of pay but also of national framework regulations governing contractual issues and thus working conditions, the professional football ESSDC adopted, in April 2012, an autonomous agreement entitled ‘Agreement regarding the minimum requirements for standard player contracts in the professional football sector in the European Union and in the rest of the UEFA territory’ in order to harmonise and improve overall conditions for professional footballers.<sup>7</sup> This EU-level collective bargaining agreement was regarded as a milestone in upward convergence by both the European social partners and the European Commission; it sets out requirements for standard player contracts to be written and signed by both sides of industry. Moreover, it stipulates that these contracts should set out the club’s financial and other obligations to the player (salaries and other financial and non-financial benefits, medical and health insurance in case of accident and illness, payment of salary during incapacity, pension fund and so on) and the player’s obligations to the club (such as playing to one’s best ability, participating in training and match preparation, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, complying with the club’s instructions, attending commercial events, obeying club rules, notifying the club immediately in case of illness or accident, undergoing regular medical examinations and medical treatment, refraining from gambling on football). Moreover, the agreement also includes provisions on anti-doping measures, action against racism and disciplinary procedures.

However, the agreement addresses only minimum requirements to be considered when it comes to concluding players’ contracts; it has no bearing on most of the other issues affecting the football sector, such as huge inequalities between players, clubs and leagues, and between women and men. Moreover, it remains to be seen whether the agreement’s transposition to and implementation at national level will be

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<sup>7</sup> The text of the agreement can be found in the European Commission’s social dialogue texts database at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=521&langId=en&day=&month=&year=&sectorCode=SECT44&themeCode=&typeCode=&recipientCode=&mode=searchSubmit&subscribe=Search>

manageable. Thus far, as Fifpro has documented, the implementation process has been only a partial success (Fifpro, 2016).

In its *2016 Fifpro global employment report: Working conditions in professional football*, based on a comprehensive worldwide survey of men professional football players, Fifpro states that in Europe in 2016 32% of professional players earned less than USD 1,000 (around €900) net per month (Fifpro, 2016). Among those players earning less than USD 1,000, 40% had experienced delays in payment. Despite the signature of the collective agreement on contracts, intended to prevent such situations, 3% of professional players in Europe did not have a written contract. Informal employment appears to be a widespread problem, in particular in eastern Europe. Strikingly, in Slovenia 8% of players were lacking a written contract in 2016, and the corresponding figures were almost 7% in Bulgaria and Ireland. In the report, Fifpro also emphasises that having a written contract tends to positively correlate with higher educational qualifications among football players. Less qualified players without a written contract are thus often exposed to a double penalty. They may be deprived of good working conditions due to the lack of a written contract during their football career and, after their first career as a player, they may be disadvantaged again 'as their limited educational attainment will most probably be a hindrance for their transition into the ordinary labour market' (Fifpro, 2016, p. 31). In addition, Fifpro found that, even where there was a written contract in place, 11% of European players did not personally have a copy of their written contract. In Ireland, this percentage stood at about 18% in 2016. Having access to one's employment contract may be a critical requirement to enforce one's rights in the event of a legal dispute with the club/employer. In terms of the legal employment status of professional football players, 14% of European players had a so-called 'civil law contract' or were self-employed, rather than being equipped with a standard employment contract. These forms of contracts other than employment contracts are often associated with precariousness due to lack of employment protection and poor working conditions (Fifpro, 2016, p. 36).

In its *2021 Fifpro player workload monitoring: Annual workload report*, also based on a worldwide survey of men professional footballers, Fifpro notes the often excessive work overload experienced by professional players (Fifpro, 2021). This issue mainly affects the players in the top men's leagues, since the simultaneous engagement of clubs and players in national- and European-level championships often results in a rise in excessive back-to-back matches, with the workload issues arising from match congestion increasing the more successful a club/team is. Fifpro argues that such cumulative exposure to matches constitutes a risk to players' health, performance and career longevity. Moreover, extensive travel and reduced off-season, but also in-season, breaks are further risks to health and performance. The survey found that over the past three seasons 45% of off-season breaks had been shorter than 28 days, and 30% of in-season breaks had been shorter than 14 days, which is, according to Fifpro, too short for sufficient recovery.

Women players' working conditions and pay are unfavourable compared with men's. This is mainly because women's professional football attracts far less attention from the public than men's football and thus is financially far worse off. A survey among 22 members of the ECA Women's Football Committee during 2013/2014 found that, of their 22 clubs, 9 had fewer than five employees in the club dedicated to the women's section, and several relied heavily on support from volunteers for most of their day-to-day operations relating to women's football (ECA, 2014). Only three clubs allocated a budget higher than €1 million per season to the women's team. The most important source of revenue for a women's football team is the financial contributions from the club's men's section. Accordingly, the wages and salaries of women players tend to fall far short of those of their male counterparts. Those clubs allocating no more than €250,000 to the women's team per season paid an average monthly salary of €545, while in those clubs with a budget exceeding €250,000 the average monthly salary amounted to €1,515 (ECA, 2014).

These findings are largely corroborated by a briefing on the *2017 Fifpro global employment report: Working conditions in professional women's football* (Koukiadaki, 2017). Overall, it states, 'a professional football career for women is hard to sustain in the face of low pay, a lack of contractual support and commitments away from the pitch'. The most pressing issues for women professional footballers worldwide include low pay, in particular for those getting older; a lack of childcare support for players with children; issues with reconciling work and footballing commitments for players who are working alongside their football career; and a lack of contractual and agent support. Those EU27 Member States that pay the highest salaries are Germany and Sweden (England in the United Kingdom, not a Member State, also pays high salaries). The 2017 Fifpro report also highlights that only 53% of the women players surveyed had a written contract in place (Fifpro, 2017).

## 1.4. Clubs and companies in professional football

Table 2 details the numbers of football clubs with professional men and women football players, irrespective of the division in the country in question that they are engaged in, and the number of clubs in each country's men's first division, according to the information provided by the NEC. Although the figures may not be reliable in all cases (there is some uncertainty concerning the figures for Czechia and Romania), this table gives a tentative indication that there are more than 1,000 football clubs in the EU27 that employ men professional footballers and more than 100 clubs with women professional footballers. Since the football clubs contracting men and women professional players may in many cases be the same, in that a club runs both a men's and a women's section in parallel, the numbers of clubs with men and women players cannot be simply added together to give the total number of clubs with professional players.

Table 2: Number of football clubs in the men's top division and numbers of clubs with men and women professional players, EU27

Member State	Number of clubs in the men's first division	Number of clubs with men professional players	Number of clubs with women professional players
AT	12	At least 28	2–7
BE	25	26	5
BG	14	32	0
CY	12	48	9
CZ	16	69	2
DE	18	106	At least 26
DK	14	22	9
EE	10	24	0
EL	16	40	0
ES	20	172	16
FI	12	At least 12	4
FR	20	43	2
HR	10	At least 10	0
HU	12	32	At least 1
IE	10	20	0
IT	20	100	At least 4

Member State	Number of clubs in the men's first division	Number of clubs with men professional players	Number of clubs with women professional players
LT	8	20	At least 1
LU	14	16	0
LV	8	At least 10	0
MT	14	22	1
NL	18	At least 34	8
PL	18	53	1
PT	18	36	3
RO	14	187	29
SE	16	At least 32	26
SI	10	22	0
SK	12	26	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>At least 1,242</b>	<b>At least 149</b>

Sources: NEC, 2020/2021, and UEFA estimates (for Belgium)

## 1.5. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector

In March 2020, immediately after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe, the vast majority of football competitions and championships were suspended as part of the wide-ranging measures intended to curb the spread of the coronavirus. From 13 March onwards, UEFA club matches were postponed, irrespective of the championship format (including Champions League, Europa League and Youth League matches). Likewise, on 17 March 2020, the Euro 2020 tournament was postponed for a year, having initially been scheduled for 12 June to 12 July 2020. In addition, all competitions involving national teams were put on hold. All these measures impacted significantly not only on the players but also on supporters and particularly on all professional clubs, since they lost major sources of income (entrance fees, merchandising revenues and so on) (Degryse, 2021).

In response to the health crisis and its impact on professional football, the European sectoral social partners adopted two joint statements in 2020. At a meeting held on 17 March 2020, the social partners agreed upon the joint 'Resolution of the European football family on a coordinated response to the impact of the COVID-19 on competitions'. This resolution contained a decision to suspend football competitions at all levels until further notice and to postpone major competitions. Moreover, it was decided that working groups were to be established to coordinate scheduling matters and look at solutions for the resumption or conclusion of the season. Another working group was set up to assess the impact of the pandemic in terms of economic, financial and regulatory costs and to propose measures to cushion the pandemic's impact.

On 21 August 2020, a second joint text was adopted, 'International guidelines on player health under the "Emergency international match calendar – Period 2020 to 2023"'. The main purpose of this text was to coordinate sectoral stakeholders in order to protect players' health and well-being during the pandemic. Furthermore, the text aimed to help engage all parties in finding solutions to rescheduling competitions without overburdening players. At national level, football clubs and players were covered by the various government and social partner measures to financially support companies and employees in order to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic. In several countries, football clubs and their players made use of the various forms of short-time work schemes. Moreover, social partners, in cooperation with

governments, established risk prevention plans to be implemented by clubs in order to protect players, trainers and spectators as public gatherings and sporting events gradually resumed and returned to normal.



## 2. National level of interest representation

This chapter presents an overview of the national-level trade unions and employer organisations active in the professional football sector.

A total of 28 trade unions representing professional football players in 24 Member States and 29 employer organisations or leagues in 20 Member States were identified (Table 3). Trade unions and employer organisations or leagues are identified as social partner organisations in this study if they are involved in collective bargaining related to professional football (following the bottom-up approach) or if they are affiliated to one of the three recognised European social partner organisations, Fifpro, ECA and European Leagues (following the top-down approach).

However, there are a few specific cases of organisations that do not strictly fulfil these criteria and yet are considered social partner organisations for the purpose of this study. For instance, in the case of Germany's VDV, which is neither involved in collective bargaining nor directly affiliated to Fifpro, it was decided to include this trade union in the study since it is the only organisation representing the interests of professional players in Germany; moreover, the VDV statutes include reaching collective agreements as an organisational goal, and VDV has concluded a cooperation agreement with Fifpro Division Europe, despite not being a formal member. In the case of Lithuania's PFA, it was granted observer status by Fifpro in November 2022 and, as the only trade union representing professional footballers in the country, it has also been included in the study, in which it is counted as a Fifpro affiliate. On the employers' side, one such case is Hungary's MLSZ, which is the Hungarian Football Federation and as such neither an employer organisation nor a league. Nevertheless, it is an associate member of European Leagues and was involved in the drafting of a sample contract to be signed by clubs and individual players; therefore, this organisation has also been included in the study.

Table 3: Number of professional football-related organisations per Member State

Number of organisations	Member States with the relevant number of trade unions	Member States with the relevant number of employer organisations/leagues
0	EE, LU, LV	CY, EE, HR, IE, LU, MT, SI
1	AT, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, MT, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK	AT, BG, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, HU, LT, LV, PL, PT, RO, SK
2	NL, SE	BE, DK, NL
3	BE	FR, IT, SE
	<b>28 trade unions in 24 Member States</b>	<b>29 employer organisations and leagues in 20 Member States</b>

Source: NEC, 2020/2021

No trade union organising professional footballers can be found in Estonia, Latvia or Luxembourg. There is just one such trade union in the vast majority of countries, that is 21. The Netherlands and Sweden each have two trade unions and Belgium three. The fact that there is only one trade union representing football players in most Member States, and no more than three trade unions in any country, reflects the small size of the sector, with usually only a few hundred players per country and at most a few thousand workers per country.

Likewise, the number of employer organisations and leagues representing the football clubs is small, as there are only a few dozen clubs per country at most. Of the 27 Member States, 14 record just one employer

organisation/league, while Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands each have two such organisations, and France, Italy, and Sweden each have three. Seven countries lack any employer organisation or league acting as an employer organisation.

## 2.1. Professional football coverage, membership domains and organisational density of trade unions

Of the 28 trade unions active in professional football, 26 (according to the information available) organise men professional footballers in the first and second divisions (Table 4). Only four trade unions explicitly indicated that they do not organise professional players in the lower divisions of men's football. These are HUNS of Croatia, PFA of Lithuania, and Unionen and Spelarföreningen of Sweden. All other unions also organise men professional players in the lower-tier divisions, where such players exist. A total of 18 trade unions from 17 countries also organise women professional players. In a few countries, women's professional football does not exist; however, trade unions in Austria (VdF), Belgium (ABVV-FGTB BBTK-SETCa and ACVLB-CGSLB) and Sweden (Unionen) explicitly do not organise women professional players, although they exist in those countries. In Sweden, however, women professional players' interests are represented by another trade union (Spelarföreningen). In Greece, the trade union PSAPP has recently amended its statutes and can now represent women players; however, the available data do not indicate that there are any women professional players in Greece. Under-age professional players are organised by 17 trade unions in 16 Member States; 11 trade unions in 10 Member States do not organise these young players. Seven trade unions in seven countries (Austria's VdF, Belgium's ACV-CSC United Athletes<sup>8</sup> Germany's VDV, Hungary's HLSZ, Romania's AFAN, Slovenia's SPINS and Sweden's Unionen) organise not only professional footballers but also coaches. ACV-CSC United Athletes of Belgium, VDV of Germany and Unionen of Sweden also organise other club staff and even referees.

What can be seen from Table 4 is that at least 15 of the 28 trade unions represent all professional football players in their respective countries, irrespective of the players' sex, their age or the division in which they play. When disregarding the non-representation of under-age players (who are numerically insignificant in many countries), only seven trade unions do not represent all professional football players in their country (for ABVV-FGTB BBTK-SETCa and ACVLB-CGSLB, no information is available). Hence, except for under-age players, the vast majority of trade unions represent all professional footballers in their respective countries.

Table 4: Trade union coverage of professional football, EU27

MS	Divisions (men)	Divisions (women)	Trade union	Men			Women	Under-age professionals	Other employee groups in football*
				1st division	2nd division	Lower divisions	1st and 2nd divisions		
AT	3	1	VdF	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
BE	2	1	ACV-CSC United Athletes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

<sup>8</sup> ACV-CSC United Athletes used to be called ACV-CSC Sporta. Its name changed in 2021.

## Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Professional football sector

MS	Divisions (men)	Divisions (women)	Trade union	Men			Women	Under-age professionals	Other employee groups in football*
				1st division	2nd division	Lower divisions	1st and 2nd divisions		
BE	2	1	ABVV-FGTB BBTK-SETCa <sup>9</sup>	No	No	n/a	No	No	No
BE	2	1	ACVLB-CGSLB <sup>9</sup>	No	No	n/a	No	No	Yes
BG	2	0	ABF	Yes	Yes	n/a	n/a	Yes	No
CY	3	1	PASP	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
CZ	4	1	ČAFH	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
DE	4	3	VDV	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
DK	3	2	SPF	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
EE	3	0	No trade union						
EL	3	0	PSAPP	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a <sup>10</sup>	No	No
ES	4	1	AFE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
FI	3	2	JPY	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
FR	3	1	UNFP	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
HR	2	0	HUNS	Yes	Yes	No	n/a	No	No
HU	2	1	HLSZ	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
IE	2	0	PFAI	Yes	Yes	n/a	n/a	No	No
IT	3	1	AIC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes <sup>11</sup>	No	No
LT	2	1	PFA	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
LU	1	0	No trade union						
LV	1–2	0	No trade union						
MT	2–3	1	MFPA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
NL	2	1	VVCS	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes	No
NL	2	1	ProProf	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes	No
PL	3	1	PZP	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
PT	2	1	SJPF	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
RO	4	2	AFAN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

<sup>9</sup> According to the information provided by Fifpro, ABVV-FGTB BBTK-SETCa and ACVLB-CGSLB have no members among professional players, since they organise players in the lower divisions, many of whom have other main jobs besides football (and may be members of other sectoral unions). According to the Fifpro member ACV-CSC United Athletes, if any football player (regardless of the division they play in) has to address any football-related issues, they join ACV-CSC United Athletes, as this trade union has an agreement with the other unions under which professional sports players are exclusively represented by ACV-CSC United Athletes. ABVV-FGTB BBTK-SETCa and ACVLB-CGSLB represent some of the non-playing staff in professional football (trainers/coaches, management staff, etc.).

<sup>10</sup> Fifpro indicated in June 2023 that the Greek trade union PSAPP had recently changed its statutes to enable it to represent women players; however, there are no data on the existence of women professional players in Greece.

<sup>11</sup> Fifpro indicated in June 2023 that, starting from the 2022/2023 season, women footballers in Italy can be represented by AIC, as the status of the Serie A women's league changed from amateur to fully professional.

MS	Divisions (men)	Divisions (women)	Trade union	Men			Women	Under-age professionals	Other employee groups in football*
				1st division	2nd division	Lower divisions	1st and 2nd divisions		
SE	2–3	2	Unionen	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
SE	2–3	2	Spelarförbundet	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
SI	3	0	SPINS	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	No	Yes
SK	3	0	UFP	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	No

**Notes:** \* This refers to coaches, referees, management staff, medical staff, etc. n/a, not applicable, because there are no professional footballers at this level or in this segment of football.

**Source:** NEC, 2020/2021

Next, the membership strength of the trade unions in terms of both absolute numbers and organisational density in professional football<sup>12</sup> is assessed. Table 5 shows the data provided by the NEC. The trade union membership numbers were taken directly from the NEC's national reports; density figures were calculated on the basis of the numbers of professional players per division and league provided by the NEC, which were aggregated in order to obtain an approximate number of total professional players per Member State (see Table 1). These aggregate figures are of a tentative nature and should be treated cautiously; nevertheless, they enable the provision of a rough indication of the relative strength of the trade unions in professional football. Density figures could be calculated only for 21 of the 28 trade unions, either because no membership numbers were provided or because the total number of professional football players could not be calculated due to missing data. Overall, the density rates for those trade unions for which they could be calculated are particularly high. Of the 21 trade unions with available data, 15 have density rates of over 50%. The two Swedish unions together have almost 100% of the country's professional footballers as members, and 11 trade unions in Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia have density rates of 80% or more. There are two reasons for the extraordinarily high density of trade unions among professional football players. First, most of the trade unions are tailor-made for this particular group of workers or have established sections within a larger union structure that are tailor-made for professional footballers within their very particular labour market, such that the so-called 'small-size effect' becomes important (Olson, 1965). Second, against the background of a high degree of informality, often unclear situations regarding employment contracts, a high degree of inequality in terms of pay and conditions, and the experiences of young players being exposed to the obscurities of the professional football labour market, the often highly specialised trade unions have been quite successful in approaching and recruiting the football-playing workforce – all the more so since they have often reached collective agreements guaranteeing, or at least drafted model contracts stipulating, minimum standards of employment.

<sup>12</sup> Measured as the number of professional football players who are trade union members as a share of the country's total number of professional players.

Table 5: Trade unions' membership strength and organisational density

MS	Trade union	Members among professional footballers*	Density in professional football**	Relative importance***
AT	VdF	650	c. 87%	1
BE	ACV-CSC United Athletes	850	69%	1 or 2
BE	ABVV-FGTB BBTK-SETCa	n.a.	n.a.	1 or 2
BE	ACVLB-CGSLB	n.a.	n.a.	3
BG	ABF	743	c. 95%	1
CY	PASP	780	> 89%	1
CZ	ČAFH	602	c. 48%	1
DE	VDV	> 1,400	c. 36%	1
DK	SPF	706	c. 56%	1
EL	PSAPP	1,200	100%	1
ES	AFE	n.a.	n.a.	1
FI	JPY	1,100 <sup>13</sup>	n.a.	1
FR	UNFP	1,170	c. 92%	1
HR	HUNS	220	48%	1
HU	HLSZ	> 1,000 <sup>13</sup>	n.a.	1
IE	PFAI	413 <sup>13</sup>	n.a.	1
IT	AIC	2,504	c. 84%	1
LT	PFA	180	97%	1
MT	MFPA	300	58%	1
NL	VVCS	900	c. 82%	1
NL	ProProf	c. 450	c. 41%	2
PL	PZP	n.a.	n.a.	1
PT	SJPF	n.a.	15–20% <sup>14</sup>	1
RO	AFAN	2,295	c. 81%	1
SE	Unionen	550	c. 50%	2
SE	Spelarförningen	600	c. 55%	1
SI	SPINS	350	93%	1
SK	UFP	330	c. 80%	1

**Notes:** \* All professional football players in a country who are trade union members, including men, women and under-age professional players. \*\* Number of trade union members as a percentage of the country's total number of professional players. \*\*\* 1 = most important in terms of membership, 2 = second most important, 3 = third most important. n.a., information not available.

**Source:** NEC, 2021

<sup>13</sup> As the number provided by the trade union is higher than the total number of players reported in the country, it is most probably an overestimation, so no reliable figure for density can be provided.

<sup>14</sup> Density calculated based on data provided by the NEC; according to Fifpro, the organisational density of SJPF is around 50% for men professional players in the first and second divisions, between 20% and 30% for men professional players in the third and fourth divisions, and 10% for women professional players.

Membership strength also depends on the groups of the workforce on which the trade unions have a particular focus. Table 6 looks at several categories, namely sex, the divisions within the multi-tier systems of professional football and age category. Broadly, it appears that, in countries with a highly developed system of women’s professional football, trade unions consider it reasonable to include women players in their membership domain and to focus the membership strategy also on women players, while in countries where women’s professional football is mostly absent such a strategy may be pointless and trade unions tend to focus on men. In terms of sex, 7 trade unions (in Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Lithuania, Romania and Sweden) out of 25 unions for which information is available focus their membership strategy equally on men and women, while the rest of the trade unions prioritise men professional footballers when it comes to collective interest representation – including in those countries where there are some women professional football players. Of 25 trade unions for which information is available, 15 do not target their membership strategy according to division, such that strategies are largely focused on the first and the lower divisions equally, either in the men’s leagues alone or – where there is a separate women’s league with professional players – in both the men’s and the women’s leagues. Nine trade unions mainly focus on the first division or on the first and second divisions, while Hungary’s HLSZ focuses on the second (men’s) division, rather than the first. In terms of age category, almost all trade unions target mainly adult players rather than under-age professional players, with the notable exceptions of ABF of Bulgaria, HUNS of Croatia and SPF of Denmark, which focus on both adult and under-age footballers.

Table 6: Trade unions’ membership focus among professional football players

Member State	Trade union	Membership focus in terms of ...		
		Divisions	Sex	Age category
AT	VdF	All men’s divisions	Men	Adults
BE	ACV-CSC United Athletes	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
BE	ABVV-FGTB BBTK-SETCa	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
BE	ACVLB-CGSLB	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
BG	ABF	All men’s divisions	Men	Adults and under-age
CY	PASP	1st men’s division	Men	Adults
CZ	ČAFH	All men’s divisions	Men	Adults
DE	VDV	All men’s divisions	Men	Adults
DK	SPF	All men’s and women’s divisions	Men and women	Adults and under-aged
EL	PSAPP	All men’s divisions	Men	Adults
ES	AFE	All men’s divisions	Men	Adults
FI	JPY	All men’s divisions	Men and women	Adults
FR	UNFP	All men’s and women’s divisions	Men and women	n.a.
HR	HUNS	All men’s divisions	Men	Adults and under-age
HU	HLSZ	2nd men’s division	Men	Adults
IE	PFAI	All men’s divisions	Men	Adults

Member State	Trade union	Membership focus in terms of ...		
		Divisions	Sex	Age category
IT	AIC	All men's and women's divisions <sup>15</sup>	Men and women <sup>15</sup>	Adults
LT	PFA	1st men's and women's divisions	Men and women	Adults
MT	MFPA	1st men's division	Men	Adults
NL	VVCS	1st men's division	Men	Adults
NL	ProProf	All men's divisions	Men	Adults
PL	PZP	All men's divisions	Men	Adults
PT	SJPF	1st men's division	Men	Adults
RO	AFAN	All men's divisions	Men and women	Adults
SE	Unionen	1st and 2nd men's divisions	Men	Adults
SE	Spelarföreningen	1st and 2nd men's and women's divisions	Men and women	Adults
SI	SPINS	1st men's division	Men	Adults
SK	UFP	1st and 2nd men's divisions	Men	Adults

**Notes:** All divisions means all those divisions in which at least one professional football player is engaged. The age threshold for a player to be considered under-age may vary between Member States. n.a., information not available.

Source: NEC, 2021

## 2.2. Trade union involvement in collective bargaining

In the previous section, the trade unions' membership domains and membership strength in professional football were considered. In this section, their involvement in collective bargaining is analysed. Table 7 indicates if trade unions are involved in single- and/or multi-employer bargaining related to professional football. Single-employer bargaining covers only the workers employed by a specific club/employer, while multi-employer bargaining covers all employees of the member companies/clubs of employer organisations/leagues covered by the agreement. Table 7 also includes information on the collective bargaining coverage of different employee groups.

Almost half of the 28 trade unions organising professional football players are involved in collective bargaining on behalf of professional players. The 12 trade unions in question can be found in 10 countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. The other 16 trade unions, in Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia are not strictly speaking involved in either single-employer or multi-employer bargaining.<sup>16</sup> However, some of these trade unions engage in the development of framework or model contracts that both sides of industry and/or the authorities recommend be used when a new

<sup>15</sup> Fifpro indicated in June 2023 that, starting from the 2022/2023 season, women footballers in Italy can be represented by AIC, as the status of the Serie A women's league changed from amateur to fully professional.

<sup>16</sup> It is noteworthy that in some Member States collective bargaining is not an option, because professional players are considered self-employed.

employment relationship starts. In Slovenia, for example, the trade union has been involved in the development of standard contracts, the use of which is mandatory; the player can choose between an employment contract and a self-employment contract, with most of the content being identical. The main differences relate to payment of taxes and social security.

**Table 7: Trade unions' collective bargaining involvement and collective bargaining coverage by employee group**

MS	Trade union	Collective bargaining involvement	Coverage of professional men, 1st division	Coverage of professional men, other divisions	Coverage of professional women, any division	Coverage of under-age professional players	Coverage of other employees
AT	VdF	MEB	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
BE	ACV-CSC United Athletes	MEB and SEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
BE	ABVV-FGTB BBTk-SETCa	No	No	n/a	No	No	No
BE	ACVLB-CGSLB	No	No	n/a	No	No	No
BG	ABF	MEB	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
CY	PASP	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
CZ	ČAFH	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
DE	VDV	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
DK	SPF	MEB	Yes	Yes	Yes <sup>17</sup>	Yes	No
EL	PSAPP	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ES	AFE	MEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
FI	JPY	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
FR	UNFP	MEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	n.a.	No
HR	HUNS	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
HU	HLSZ	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
IE	PFAI	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
IT	AIC	MEB	Yes	Yes	Yes <sup>18</sup>	No	No
LT	PFA	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
MT	MFPA	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
NL	VVCS	MEB and SEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
NL	ProProf	MEB and SEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
PL	PZP	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
PT	SJPF	MEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

<sup>17</sup> SPF is involved in collective bargaining covering women professional football players, although there is no employer organisation involved in this. SPF's counterpart in collective bargaining for women professional football is currently the Danish Football Association (DBU). At the time of finalisation of this report, Kvindedivisionsforeningen (the league organisation for women's clubs) was engaged in ongoing negotiations with the DBU to gain responsibility for collective bargaining/bargaining power.

<sup>18</sup> Fifpro indicated in June 2023 that, starting from the 2022/2023 season, women footballers in Italy can be represented by AIC, as the status of the Serie A women's league changed from amateur to fully professional.



MS	Trade union	Collective bargaining involvement	Coverage of professional men, 1st division	Coverage of professional men, other divisions	Coverage of professional women, any division	Coverage of under-age professional players	Coverage of other employees
RO	AFAN	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
SE	Unionen	MEB	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
SE	Spelarföreningen	MEB	No	No	Yes <sup>19</sup>	No	No
SI	SPINS	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
SK	UFP	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

**Notes:** MEB, multi-employer bargaining; n/a, not applicable; n.a., information not available; SEB, single-employer bargaining.

**Source:** NEC, 2021

All trade unions engaged in collective bargaining related to professional football have concluded multi-employer agreements. One trade union in Belgium and two in the Netherlands are also involved in complementary single-employer bargaining. In Belgium, ACV-CSC United Athletes has concluded – in addition to the sectoral multi-employer collective agreement stipulating guaranteed minimum wages – single-employer agreements covering individual clubs and regulating other employment conditions. In the Netherlands, the sectoral multi-employer collective agreement covers only men football players, but the trade unions have managed to conclude single-employer collective agreements on behalf of women players in a few individual clubs.

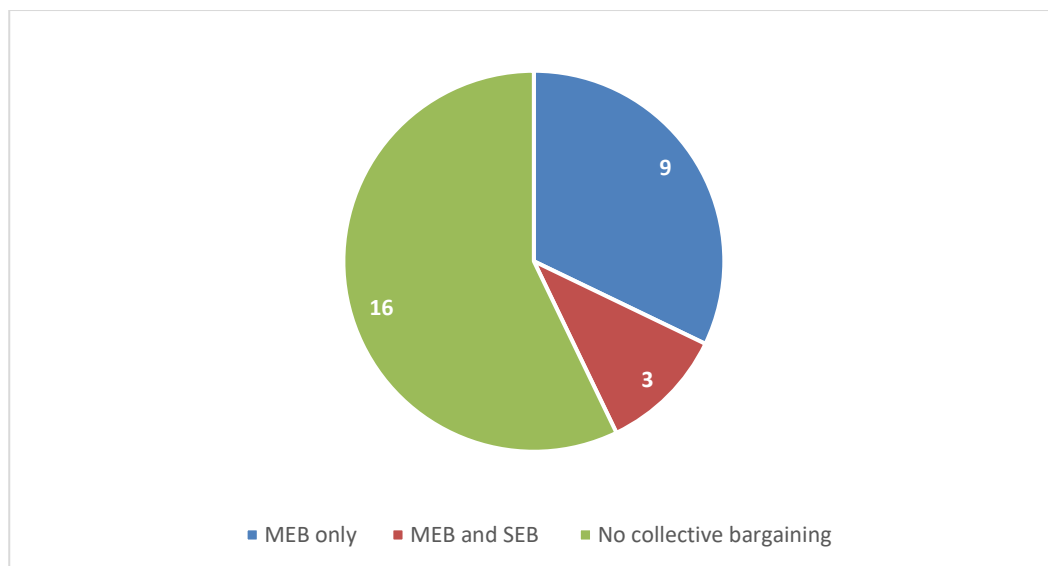
All but one of the trade unions involved in collective bargaining conclude agreements on behalf of men footballers in the first division and below. Spelarföreningen of Sweden, however, in the spirit of division of labour, concludes collective agreements only on behalf of women professional footballers, while Unionen does so exclusively on behalf of men, even though Spelarföreningen organises and represents both men and women professional players. The collective bargaining agreement covering women professional football players was terminated in December 2022; future negotiations are expected to take place with Unionen or Spelarföreningen on the trade union side.<sup>20</sup> In addition to the latter union, eight other unions in seven countries also conduct bargaining activities on behalf of women players, all combining bargaining on behalf of women with that on behalf of men. Six trade unions in five Member States have concluded collective agreements covering under-age players, and collective agreements signed by ACV-CSC United Athletes also cover employees other than professional football players who work in the professional football business (such as coaches and other club staff).

Figure 1 shows the numbers of trade unions involved in forms of collective bargaining related to professional football. More than half of the trade unions (16) do not engage in collective bargaining activities at all, while 9 unions are involved in multi-employer bargaining only and 3 in both single-employer and multi-employer bargaining. None of the trade unions is involved only in single-employer bargaining.

<sup>19</sup> The collective bargaining agreement for women's football in Sweden was terminated in December 2022. No new agreement was concluded because the employer organisation no longer recognises Spelarföreningen as the social partner. Instead, it has requested that Unionen negotiate the agreement for women's football, as it does for men's (Spelarföreningen, 2023). The women players indicated that they preferred to be represented by Spelarföreningen in the negotiations (Aftonbladet, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> Fifpro reports that Swedish women professional football players have expressed their wish to be represented only by Spelarföreningen, of which they are members (Aftonbladet, 2023).

Figure 1: Involvement of trade unions in forms of collective bargaining (number of trade unions)



**Notes:** n = 28. MEB, multi-employer bargaining; SEB, single-employer bargaining.

**Source:** NEC, 2021

### 2.3. Professional football coverage, membership domains and organisational density of employer organisations/football leagues

This section offers a brief description of the business structure of professional football and the types of employer organisations in the sector. As can be seen from Table 8, the vast majority of the 29 employer organisations identified in professional football are football leagues. In fact, 23 of these organisations are football leagues, which represent the clubs in the highest divisions of professional football. The leagues are usually in charge of organising and administering professional football competitions. Moreover, they collaborate closely with the national football association (affiliated to UEFA) on the selection of players for the national football team. They are also key organisations from an economic point of view, since they manage the television rights to broadcast the championships and are responsible for the fair distribution of the proceeds from these rights among the professional clubs. In the context of industrial relations, it is important to note that the leagues, in cooperation with the clubs, usually represent the employers' side of professional football and thus act as employer organisations on behalf of the professional clubs. In Denmark, the role of employer organisation is shared between the league (DL) and the national football association (DBU), which is a very specific associational configuration of interest representation, since in no other country but Hungary does the national football association act as an employer organisation. In Hungary, the national football association (MLSZ), rather than the league, acts as the only relevant employer organisation in professional football. In all other Member States with an industrial relations actor on the employers' side (in seven countries, namely Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia, there is none), it is the leagues that represent the interests of the clubs as employers to the trade unions and the state. However, in some countries this is not exclusively the task of the league. There are employer organisations that engage in industrial relations matters along with the leagues in France, the Netherlands and Sweden. Moreover, in Sweden there is a league (EFD) that represents exclusively the interests of professional clubs in women's football. All the other leagues exclusively or primarily represent the clubs in men's football.

As a general rule, a professional club must be affiliated to the national league as a prerequisite for being licensed to participate in the relevant division's competition. Table 8 shows the number of clubs affiliated to each league. In the case of the French employer organisations that coexist with the league, UCPF and Ligue 1, the membership of the clubs is voluntary. Affiliation to Arbetsgivaralliansen of Sweden is also voluntary; the organisation has a very high density rate. In the Netherlands, membership of FBO is voluntary only in principle. The organisation's high density rate is explained by the fact that, legally, clubs that are not members of FBO cannot sign more than three temporary contracts. Table 8 indicates that the most important employer organisations/leagues, in terms of membership, are present in industrial relations in professional football.

**Table 8: Structure of employer representation in professional football – leagues as employer organisations, EU27**

MS	No. of men's clubs	No. of women's clubs	Employer organisation/league	Type of employer and coverage in terms of divisions	Club/ company members	Relative importance*
AT	≥ 28	2–7	ÖFBL	League, divs 1 and 2 (men)	26 clubs	1
BE	25	5	Pro League	League, divs 1 and 2	25 clubs	2
BE	26	5	Nationale Voetballiga	League, div. 2 (men and women)	n.a.	1
BG	32	0	BPFL	League, divs 1 and 2 (men)	32 clubs	1
CY	48	9	No employer organisation			
CZ	69	2	LFA	League, divs 1 and 2 (men)	32 clubs	1
DE	106	≥ 26	DFL	League, divs 1 and 2 (men)	36 clubs	1
DK	22	9	DL	League, divs 1–3 (men)	52 clubs <sup>21</sup>	1
DK	22	9	DBU	Football association <sup>22</sup>	1,586 clubs and companies	1
EE	24	0	No employer organisation			
EL	40	0	Super League Ellada	League, div. 1 (men)	14 clubs	1
ES	172	16	LNFP	League, divs 1 and 2 (men)	42 clubs	1
FI	≥ 12	4	FFL	League, div. 1 (men)	12 clubs	1
FR	43	2	UCPF	Employer organisation, some of divs 1–3	22 clubs	2
FR	43	2	Ligue 1	Employer organisation, some of divs 1 and 2	17 clubs	3
FR	43	2	LFP	League, divs 1 and 2 (men)	40 clubs	1
HR	≥ 10	0	No employer organisation			
HU	32	≥ 1	MLSZ	Football association, divs 1–3 (men) and div. 1 (women)	36 clubs <sup>21</sup>	1
IE	20	0	No employer organisation			
IT	100	≥ 4	LNPA	League, div. 1 (men) and div. 1 (women)	20 clubs	1

<sup>21</sup> The total number of member clubs is higher than the total number of men's and women's professional clubs in this case because amateur players' clubs are also among the organisation's members.

<sup>22</sup> In Denmark, DL is a league playing the role of an employer organisation and DBU is an organisation representing not just clubs; therefore, both organisations are ranked 1.

## Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Professional football sector

MS	No. of men's clubs	No. of women's clubs	Employer organisation/league	Type of employer and coverage in terms of divisions	Club/company members	Relative importance*
IT	100	≥ 4	LNPB	League, div. 2	20 clubs	3
IT	100	≥ 4	Legapro	League, div. 3	60 clubs	2
LT	20	≥ 1	A Lyga	League, div. 1 (men)	6 clubs	1
LU	16	0	No employer organisation			
LV	≥ 10	0	LFV	League, div. 1 (men)	10 clubs	1
MT	22	1	No employer organisation			
NL	≥ 34	8	Eredivisie	League, div. 1	18 clubs	2
NL	≥ 34	8	FBO <sup>23</sup>	Employer organisation, divs 1 and 2 (men) and div. 1 (women)	34 clubs	1
PL	53	1	Ekstraklasa	League, div. 1 (men)	16 clubs	1
PT	36	3	Liga Portugal	League, divs 1 and 2 (men) and div. 1 (women)	34 clubs	1
RO	187	29	LPF	League, div. 1 (men)	16 clubs	1
SE	≥ 32	26	SEF	League, divs 1 and 2 (men)	32 clubs	1
SE	≥ 32	26	Arbetsgivaralliansen	Employer organisation, divs 1 and 2	32 clubs	1
SE	≥ 32	26	EFD	League, divs 1 and 2 (women)	32 clubs	3
SI	22	0	No employer organisation			
SK	26	0	ULK	League, div. 1 (men)	12 clubs	1

**Notes:** \* 1 = most important in terms of membership, 2 = second most important, 3 = third most important. 'n.a.', information not available.

**Source:** NEC, 2021

Table 9 indicates that of the 29 employer organisations/leagues there are 4 that do not represent clubs in the first division of men's professional football – that is, Nationale Voetballiga of Belgium (which organises clubs in the men's second division and the women's professional divisions), LNPB and Legapro of Italy (which organise clubs in the men's second and third divisions, respectively) and EFD of Sweden (which organises women's professional football clubs). Eleven employer organisations/leagues do not represent clubs in the second division of men's professional football, and only four organisations/leagues represent clubs in the third or lower divisions (in many countries, there are no professional players in these lower divisions). Eight employer organisations/leagues in seven countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden) organise and represent clubs active in women's professional football. Finally, 19 employer organisations/leagues in 13 countries represent clubs engaging under-age professional players.

<sup>23</sup> Membership of FBO is voluntary. However, the organisation's very high density rate is explained by the fact that, unless they are FBO members, sports clubs cannot sign more than three temporary contracts (according to Dutch legislation). The professional football collective bargaining agreement makes an exception to this rule for football clubs, as they would not be able to function with only three temporary contracts, but FBO membership remains very high among football clubs.

Table 9: Employer organisations'/leagues' coverage of professional football, EU27

MS	Divisions (men)	Divisions (women)	Employer organisation/league	Members employ professional footballers in ...				Members employ under-age professionals
				Men's 1st division	Men's 2nd division	Men's lower divisions	Women's 1st/2nd divisions	
AT	3	1	ÖFBL	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
BE	2	1	Pro League	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes
BE	2	1	Nationale Voetballiga	No	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes
BG	2	0	BPFL	Yes	Yes	n/a	n/a	No
CY	3	1	No employer organisation					
CZ	4	1	LFA	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
DE	4	3	DFL	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
DK	3	2	DL	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
DK	3	2	DBU	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
EE	3	0	No employer organisation					
EL	3	0	Super League Ellada	Yes	No	No	n.a.	Yes
ES	4	1	LNFP	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
FI	3	2	FFL	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
FR	3	1	UCPF	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
FR	3	1	Ligue 1	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
FR	3	1	LFP	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
HR	2	0	No employer organisation					
HU	2	1	MLSZ	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes
IE	2	0	No employer organisation					
IT	3	1	LNPA	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
IT	3	1	LNPB	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
IT	3	1	Legapro	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
LT	2	1	A Lyga	Yes	No	n.a.	No	No
LU	1	0	No employer organisation					
LV	1-2	0	LFV	Yes	No	n.a.	n/a	No
MT	2-3	1	No employer organisation					
NL	2	1	Eredivisie	Yes	No	n/a	No	Yes
NL	2	1	FBO	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes
PL	3	1	Ekstraklasa	Yes	No	No	No	No
PT	2	1	Liga Portugal	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
RO	4	2	LPF	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
SE	2-3	2	SEF	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
SE	2-3	2	Arbetsgivaralliansen	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes

MS	Divisions (men)	Divisions (women)	Employer organisation/league	Members employ professional footballers in ...				Members employ under-age professionals
				Men's 1st division	Men's 2nd division	Men's lower divisions	Women's 1st/2nd divisions	
SE	2-3	2	EFD	No	No	No	Yes	No
SI	3	0	No employer organisation					
SK	3	0	ULK	Yes	No	No	n/a	Yes

**Notes:** *n.a.*, information not available; *n/a*, not applicable because, there are no professional footballers at this level or in this segment of football.

**Source:** NEC, 2020/2021

Next, the membership strength of the employer organisations/football leagues in terms of both numbers of member clubs and organisational density (measured as the number of professional footballers employed by member clubs as a proportion of the total number of professional footballers in the country) is assessed. Table 10 shows the data provided by the NEC; no a posteriori calculations have been carried out. As for the trade unions, the density rates for the leagues tend to be high. Of the 19 employer organisations/leagues with available data, 9 have density rates of over 50%. The three employer organisations and leagues in France have density rates that add up to far more than 100%, which results from the multiple memberships of the clubs (such that players may be counted twice or three times). A similar situation would be observable for Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden if data for all organisations were available. By contrast, in Italy the membership domains of the three different leagues do not overlap, such that the density rates add up to 100%. In some countries, namely Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary and the Netherlands, there are organisations/leagues that cover the entire professional football segment of the country in question, such that they represent 100% of the professional football workforce.

**Table 10: Employer organisations'/leagues' membership strength and organisational density**

Member State	Employer organisation/league	Number of member clubs/companies	Density in professional football*	Relative importance**
AT	ÖFBL	26 clubs	90%	1
BE	Pro League	25 clubs	n.a.	2
BE	Nationale Voetballiga	n.a.	n.a.	1
BG	BPFL	32 clubs	100%	1
CZ	LFA	32 clubs	n.a.	1
DE	DFL	36 clubs	40%	1
DK	DL	52 clubs	n.a.***	1
DK	DBU	1,586 clubs and companies	100%	1
EL	Super League Ellada	14 clubs	44%	1
ES	LNFP	42 clubs	40%	1
FI	FFL	12 clubs	n.a.	1
FR	UCPF	22 clubs	48%	2

Member State	Employer organisation/league	Number of member clubs/companies	Density in professional football*	Relative importance**
FR	Ligue 1	17 clubs	40%	3
FR	LFP	40 clubs	92%	1
HU	MLSZ	36 clubs	100%	1
IT	LNPA	20 clubs	44%	1
IT	LNPB	20 clubs	19%	3
IT	Legapro	60 clubs	37%	2
LT	A Lyga	6 clubs	> 50%	1
LV	LFV	10 clubs	> 90%	1
NL	Eredivisie	18 clubs	n.a.	2
NL	FBO	34 clubs	100%	1
PL	Ekstraklasa	16 clubs	30%	1
PT	Liga Portugal	34 clubs	n.a.***	1
RO	LPF	16 clubs	< 50%	1
SE	SEF	32 clubs	n.a.***	1
SE	Arbetsgivaralliansen	32 clubs	n.a.***	1
SE	EFD	32 clubs	n.a.****	3
SK	ULK	12 clubs	70%	1

**Notes:** \* Number of professional footballers employed by member clubs as a proportion of the country's total number of professional players. \*\* 1 = most important in terms of membership, 2 = second most important, 3 = third most important. \*\*\* most probably 100% of men professional football players; \*\*\*\* most probably 100% of women professional football players. n.a., information not available.

Source: NEC, 2021

## 2.4. Employer organisations'/football leagues' involvement in collective bargaining

This section examines the involvement of employer organisations/football leagues in collective bargaining related to professional football. A total of 16 organisations covering 10 Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden) have conducted bargaining; 13 have not. Moreover, seven countries do not have an employer organisation/league as defined for the purpose of this study.

As Table 11 shows, single-employer bargaining is almost completely absent among the employer organisations/leagues; only FBO of the Netherlands conducts this form of bargaining, in combination with multi-employer bargaining. This means that all 16 organisations that engage in bargaining do so in the form of multi-employer bargaining and that 15 organisations engage only in multi-employer bargaining. Of the employer organisations/leagues, 10 conduct bargaining on behalf of professional footballers active in the men's first division and the other (lower-level) men's divisions. Collective bargaining targeting professional footballers in the women's divisions is carried out by six organisations in five countries (Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden). Finally, six organisations on the employers' side, in four countries

(Belgium, Denmark, France and Portugal), engage in collective bargaining covering club personnel other than professional football players.

**Table 11: Employer organisations'/football leagues' collective bargaining involvement and collective bargaining coverage in terms of employee groups**

MS	Employer organisation/ league	Collective bargaining involvement	Coverage of professional men, 1st division	Coverage of professional men, other divisions	Coverage of professional women, any division	Coverage of under-age professional players	Coverage of other employees
AT	ÖFBL	MEB	Yes	Yes	No	Yes*	No
BE	Pro League	MEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes
BE	Nationale Voetballiga	MEB	No	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes
BG	BPFL	MEB	Yes	Yes	n/a	No	No
CZ	LFA	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	No	n/a
DE	DFL	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yes*	n/a
DK	DL	MEB	Yes	Yes	No <sup>24</sup>	Yes*	No
DK	DBU	MEB	No	No	No	Yes*	Yes
EL	Super League Ellada	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yes*	n/a
ES	LNFP	MEB	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
FI	FFL	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yes*	n/a
FR	UCPF	MEB	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
FR	Ligue 1	MEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
FR	LFP	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yes*	n/a
HU	MLSZ	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yes*	n/a
IT	LNPA	MEB	Yes	No	No	Yes*	No
IT	LNPB	MEB	No	Yes	No	Yes*	No
IT	Legapro	MEB	No	Yes	No	Yes*	No
LT	A Lyga	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	No	n/a
LV	LFV	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	No	n/a
NL	Eredivisie	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yes*	n/a
NL	FBO	MEB and SEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*	No
PL	Ekstraklasa	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	No	n/a
PT	Liga Portugal	MEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
RO	LPF	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
SE	SEF	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
SE	Arbetsgivar-alliansen	MEB	Yes	Yes	No	Yes*	No

<sup>24</sup> The Danish trade union SPF is involved in collective bargaining covering women football players, although there is no employer organisation involved in this. As mentioned in note 20, SPF indicated that it is involved in collective bargaining with DBU. This information was not provided by DBU when the data were collected for this report.



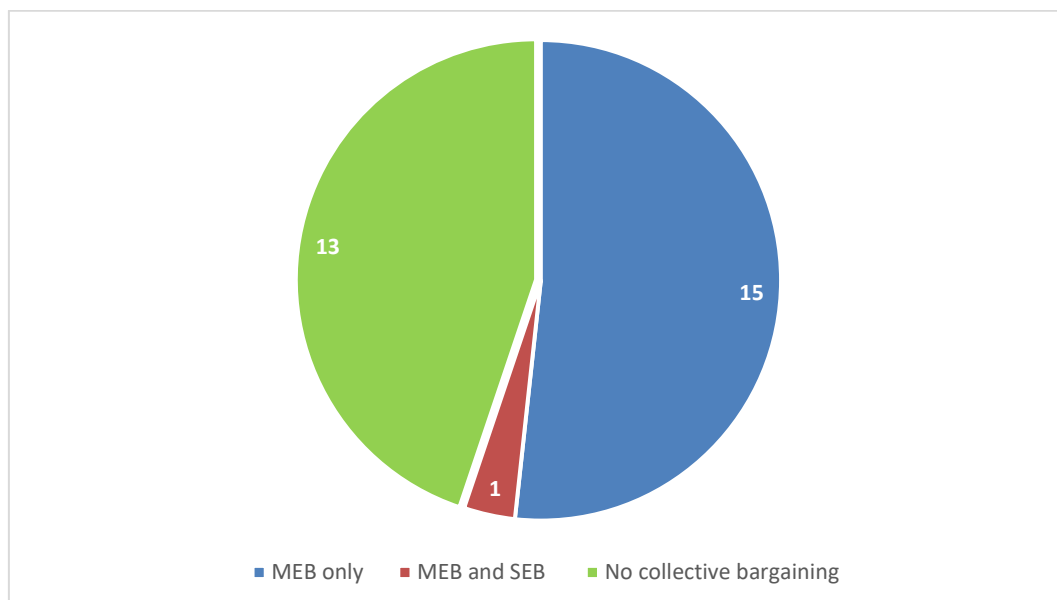
MS	Employer organisation/ league	Collective bargaining involvement	Coverage of professional men, 1st division	Coverage of professional men, other divisions	Coverage of professional women, any division	Coverage of under-age professional players	Coverage of other employees
SE	EFD	MEB	No	No	Yes <sup>25</sup>	No	No
SK	ULK	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yes*	n/a

**Notes:** \* The under-age players playing in the leagues covered by the organisation in question are organised. MEB, multi-employer bargaining; n/a, not applicable; n.a., information not available; SEB, single-employer bargaining.

**Source:** NEC, 2021

Figure 2 shows the numbers of employer organisations/football leagues involved in forms of collective bargaining related to professional football. Of a total of 29 organisations, 13 do not engage in collective bargaining activities at all,<sup>26</sup> while 15 organisations are involved exclusively in multi-employer bargaining and just 1 is involved in both single-employer and multi-employer bargaining. As is the case on the trade union side, none of the employer organisations/leagues is involved only in single-employer bargaining.

**Figure 2: Involvement of employer organisations/leagues in forms of collective bargaining (number of organisations)**



**Notes:** n = 29. MEB, multi-employer bargaining; SEB, single-employer bargaining.

**Source:** NEC, 2021

## 2.5. Collective bargaining patterns and social dialogue practices

As outlined previously, the representativeness of the national social partner organisations is important for the implementation of any agreements made by European-level organisations at national, regional and local

<sup>25</sup> As mentioned previously, the collective bargaining agreement for women's football in Sweden was terminated in December 2022. No new agreement was concluded because the employer organisation no longer recognises Spelarförbundet as the social partner. Instead, it has requested that Unionen negotiate the agreement for women's football, as it does for men's (Spelarförbundet, 2023).

<sup>26</sup> The main reason for the relatively large share of organisations not involved in collective bargaining is that professional football has evolved from a hobby sport over time and has incrementally come to constitute a business, such that the evolution of the social partners and the industrial relations structure has taken place later than in other businesses and traditional industries.

levels. The relevance of European sectoral social dialogue tends to increase with the ability of the national affiliates of the European organisations to regulate employment terms and influence national public policies affecting the sector (Perin and Léonard, 2011).

A cross-national comparative analysis shows a generally positive correlation between the bargaining role of the social partners and their involvement in public policy (Traxler, 2004). This trend is also evident in the analysis of professional football organisations' involvement in bipartite and tripartite bodies dealing with sector-specific public policies presented in the following section. Multi-employer bargaining tends to be attributed greater importance than single-employer bargaining, primarily because of the macroeconomic impact of collective agreements reached through this form of bargaining. An exception to this rule is single-employer agreements with very large companies, which may come to serve as the industry standard.

The coverage of different types of collective bargaining in professional football is summarised in Table 12. A comparatively high share (57%) of trade unions in professional football are not involved in collective bargaining. Among the 28 trade unions, 12 (43%) are involved in multi-employer bargaining. Of those, 9 (32%) participate only in multi-employer bargaining, while 3 (11%) are involved in both multi-employer and single-employer bargaining. There is no trade union exclusively engaged in single-employer bargaining.

Among the 29 employer organisations/leagues in professional football, 16 (55%) are involved in any form of collective bargaining. As in the case of the trade unions, all of them engage in multi-employer bargaining, either in the form of multi-employer bargaining only (15 organisations, 52%) or in combination with single-employer bargaining (1 organisation, 3%). No employer organisation participates in single-employer bargaining only.

**Table 12: Collective bargaining in professional football in the EU (number and % of organisations)**

	Trade unions					Employer organisations/football leagues				
<b>No collective bargaining</b>	16 (57%)				28 (100%)	13 (45%)				29 (100%)
<b>MEB only</b>	9 (32%)	12 (43%)	9 (32%)	12 (43%)		15 (52%)	16 (55%)	15 (52%)	16 (55%)	
<b>Both SEB and MEB</b>	3 (11%)		3 (11%)			1 (3%)		1 (3%)		
<b>SEB only</b>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)				0 (0%)	0 (0%)			

**Note:** Percentages are rounded.

**Source:** NEC, 2021

Table 13 includes information on collective bargaining practices on a country-by-country basis, illustrating the different national collective bargaining patterns in professional football. In 17 Member States, no collective bargaining takes place at all, reflecting the specificities of the professional football business. These specificities include the small size of the sector and in particular of the core workforce of professional footballers, the business structure of professional football and the dynamic development of both clubs that were once small and the football labour market. Moreover, the often unclear contractual and employer-worker relationships stemming from the sports and leisure aspect of the business, as well as the lack of a tradition of industrial relations in professional football, have been obstacles to establishing collective bargaining in several countries thus far, as the NEC reported. In 10 Member States, multi-employer bargaining takes place and is the only or – as in Belgium and the Netherlands – by far the most prevalent

form of bargaining. In those countries where collective bargaining is carried out, the coverage tends to be exceptionally high, with coverage rates close to 100% (Table 14). This is because, due to the small size of the profession, the multi-employer bargaining that has been established is likely to cover all or the vast majority of professional clubs and players, at least the men.

**Table 13: Type of collective bargaining by Member State**

Type of collective bargaining	Member States
Multi-employer bargaining only	AT, BG, DK, ES, FR, IT, PT, SE
Single-employer bargaining and multi-employer bargaining*	BE, NL
Single-employer bargaining only	–
No collective bargaining	CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, PL, RO, SI, SK

**Note:** \* Multi-employer bargaining is the prevalent type of bargaining in Belgium and the Netherlands, although single-employer bargaining does take place.

**Source:** NEC, 2021

**Table 14: Coverage of collective bargaining by Member State**

Type of collective bargaining	Collective bargaining coverage				Information not available
	95–100%	90–94%	65–69%	0%	
MEB	BG, DK, FR, IT, PT, SE	AT			ES
MEB and SEB			BE		NL
No collective bargaining				CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, PL, RO, SI, SK	

**Source:** NEC, 2021

## 2.6. Participation in public policy

Involvement in public policymaking is another important indicator of the relevance of national social partner organisations in professional football. In many Member States, in particular in the Nordic and central and western European countries, social partners' participation in policymaking procedures is long and well established. In other countries, in particular among the central and eastern European economies, such involvement is still less well developed or has emerged more recently. Participation in public policy occurs mainly in two ways: first, through consultation of social partners by the other side of industry and/or the authorities and, second, through social partner involvement in bipartite or tripartite bodies in which sector-related topics are dealt with.

### Consultation practices

Table 15 provides an overview of the involvement of trade unions in consultation practices related to working conditions or employment issues in professional football initiated by individual employers (clubs), leagues and the government. Of the 28 trade unions, 23 are consulted by individual employers, at least 22 by the

football leagues and 18 by government. All football-related trade unions are consulted by either the employers' side (including the leagues) or the government, or both.

Table 15: Consultation of trade unions by employers, leagues and the government

Member State	Trade union	Consultation by ...		
		Employers	Leagues	Government
AT	VdF	Yes	Yes	Yes
BE	ACV-CSC United Athletes	Yes	Yes	Yes
BE	ABVV-FGTB BBTk-SETCa	Yes	Yes	Yes
BE	ACVLB-CGSLB	Yes	Yes	Yes
BG	ABF	Yes	Yes	No
CY	PASP	No	Yes	No
CZ	ČAFH	No	Yes	No
DE	VDV	Yes	Yes	Yes
DK	SPF	Yes	Yes	No
EE	No trade union			
EL	PSAPP	Yes	Yes	Yes
ES	AFE	Yes	Yes	Yes
FI	JPY	Yes	n.a.	Yes
FR	UNFP	Yes	n.a.	Yes
HR	HUNS	Yes	No	No
HU	HLSZ	Yes	No	No
IE	PFAI	Yes	Yes	Yes
IT	AIC	Yes	Yes	Yes
LT	PFA	Yes	Yes	Yes
LU	No trade union			
LV	No trade union			
MT	MFPA	Yes	Yes	No
NL	VVCS	Yes	Yes	Yes
NL	ProProf	Yes	Yes	Yes
PL	PZP	No	Yes	Yes
PT	SJPF	Yes	Yes	Yes
RO	AFAN	Yes	Yes	Yes
SE	Unionen	Yes	No	Yes
SE	Spelarföreningen	No	Yes	No
SI	SPINS	Yes	No	No
SK	UFP	No	Yes	No

Note: n.a., information not available.

Source: NEC, 2021

On the employers' side, employer organisations and leagues are consulted by the trade unions and government similarly frequently. At least 22 of the 29 employer organisations and leagues are consulted by trade unions, and at least 19 of them are consulted by the government (Table 16). There are four organisations that are not consulted at all, either by trade unions or the government, namely LFA of Czechia, Eredivisie of the Netherlands, ULK of Slovakia and Arbetsgivaralliansen of Sweden. For Sweden's EFD, information on consultation practices is not available.

Table 16: Consultation of employer organisations/leagues by trade unions and the government

Member State	Employer organisation/league	Consultation by trade unions	Consultation by government
AT	ÖFBL	Yes	Yes
BE	Pro League	Yes	Yes
BE	Nationale Voetballiga	Yes	Yes
BG	BPFL	Yes	No
CY	No employer organisation		
CZ	LFA	No	No
DE	DFL	Yes	Yes
DK	DL	Yes	Yes
DK	DBU	Yes	Yes
EE	No employer organisation		
EL	Super League Ellada	Yes	No
ES	LNFP	Yes	No
FI	FFL	Yes	Yes
FR	UCPF	Yes	Yes
FR	Ligue 1	Yes	Yes
FR	LFP	No	Yes
HR	No employer organisation		
HU	MLSZ	Yes	Yes
IE	No employer organisation		
IT	LNPA	Yes	Yes
IT	LNPB	Yes	Yes
IT	Legapro	Yes	Yes
LT	A Lyga	No	Yes
LU	No employer organisation		
LV	LFV	Yes	No
MT	No employer organisation		
NL	Eredivisie	No	No
NL	FBO	Yes	No
PL	Ekstraklasa	Yes	Yes
PT	Liga Portugal	Yes	Yes

Member State	Employer organisation/league	Consultation by trade unions	Consultation by government
RO	LPF	Yes	Yes
SE	SEF	Yes	Yes
SE	Arbetsgivaralliansen	No	No
SE	EFD	n.a.	n.a.
SI	No employer organisation		
SK	ULK	No	No

**Note:** *n.a.*, information not available.

**Source:** NEC, 2021

Table 17 shows that in 15 Member States (Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden) at least one of the football trade unions is consulted by the government. By contrast, in nine countries with at least one trade union none of them was consulted, while in three Member States (Estonia, Latvia and Luxembourg) there is no active trade union for professional footballers. On the employers' side, at least one of the national employer organisations or leagues is consulted by the government in 13 countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Sweden). In seven countries (Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Latvia, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Spain), the existing employer organisations or leagues are not consulted, while in the remaining seven countries no employer organisation or league that could be consulted exists.

**Table 17: Consultation of trade unions and employer organisations/leagues by the government by Member State**

	Trade union consulted	No trade union consulted
<b>Employer organisation/league consulted</b>	AT, BE, DE, FI, FR, IT, LT, PL, PT, RO, SE	DK, HU
<b>No employer organisation/league consulted</b>	EL, ES, IE (no employer organisation), NL	BG, CY (no employer organisation), CZ, EE (no trade union and no employer organisation), HR (no employer organisation), LU (no trade union and no employer organisation), LV (no trade union), MT (no employer organisation), SI (no employer organisation), SK

**Source:** NEC, 2021

## Tripartite and bipartite bodies of participation

Participation by social partners in tripartite and/or bipartite bodies dealing with public policy matters related to professional football implies some kind of mutual recognition. In particular, for Member States without established practices of multi-employer bargaining such involvement can be a way for social partners to gain mutual recognition as representative counterparts. Table 18 shows the trade unions and employer organisations/leagues that participate in such structures. In total, 17 tripartite or bipartite bodies in 9 countries could be identified; only those bodies that are clearly related to the sector and not cross-sectoral in nature have been included in this table.

Table 18: Tripartite and bipartite social dialogue bodies dealing with issues related to professional football

MS	Social dialogue body	Bipartite/ tripartite	Scope/field of activity	Origin: agreement/ statutory	Trade unions participating	EO/leagues participating
AT	None					
BE	Social Fund for Sports	Bipartite	Social fund	Statutory	ACV-CSC United Athletes, ACLVB-CGSLB, ABVV-FGTB BBTK-SETCa	Nationale Voetballiga, Pro League
BG	Standing Working Group for Social Dialogue	Bipartite	Employment, wages, social benefits, other sector-related issues	Agreement	ABF	BPFL as an employer organisation; the Bulgarian Football Union participates as the organisation responsible for overall policy related to football
CY	None					
CZ	None					
DE	DFB-VDV-Versorgungswerk	Bipartite	Insurance and pensions	Agreement	VDV	No, but the business association DFB is involved
DE	Professional Football Taskforce	Tripartite	Competition and finance, social responsibility, supporting the development of women's football, ethical considerations, fans' and economic interests	Agreement	VDV	No, but the business associations DFB and DFL are involved
DK	None					
EE	None					
EL	None					
ES	No formal bodies					
FI	Urheilun eettisten asioiden neuvottelukunta	Tripartite	Match fixing/ manipulation	Agreement	JPY	No employer organisation is represented, but the national football association FAF is

## Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Professional football sector

MS	Social dialogue body	Bipartite/tripartite	Scope/field of activity	Origin: agreement/statutory	Trade unions participating	EO/leagues participating
FR	Commission nationale paritaire de la convention collective nationale des métiers du football	Bipartite	Avoiding union disputes, approving training centres	Agreement	UNFP, Unecatef <sup>27</sup>	UCPF, Ligue 1
FR	Commission nationale paritaire emploi, formation, reconversion du football professionnel	Bipartite	Definition and implementation of the means to carry out social policy in the football sector	Agreement	UNFP, Unecatef	UCPF, Ligue 1
FR	Commission juridique	Bipartite	Resolution of legal disputes	Agreement	UNFP, Unecatef, SNAAF <sup>28</sup>	UCPF, Ligue 1
FR	Commissions nationales paritaires d'appel	Bipartite	Resolution of legal disputes (appeal)	Agreement	UNFP, Unecatef	UCPF, Ligue 1
FR	Caisse de prévoyance des joueurs professionnels	Bipartite	Bonus to be paid to professional players on retirement	Agreement	UNFP	UCPF, Ligue 1
FR	Fédération française de football	Bipartite	Organisation of the football sector	Agreement	UNFP	UCPF, Ligue 1
HR	None					
HU	None					
IE	None					
IT	None					
LT	None					
LU	None					
LV	None					
MT	None					
NL	FBO and trade unions	Bipartite	All areas of activity	Agreement	VVCS, ProProf	FBO
NL	FBO, trade unions, the Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB) and government	Tripartite	All areas of activity	Agreement	VVCS, ProProf	FBO
PL	Social Dialogue Committee of the Polish Football	Bipartite	Developing framework standards for	Agreement	PZP	No employer organisations, but Ekstraklasa,

<sup>27</sup> Unecatef organises coaches and technical staff.

<sup>28</sup> SNAAF organises administrative staff in French football.



Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Professional football sector

MS	Social dialogue body	Bipartite/tripartite	Scope/field of activity	Origin: agreement/statutory	Trade unions participating	EO/leagues participating
	Association – Working Conditions		footballers' contracts, implementation of the autonomous agreement of 19 April 2012			some clubs (from Ekstraklasa and the first division) and the Polish Football Association are represented
PT	Comissão de Diálogo Social (Social Dialogue Committee)	Bipartite	Professional football	Agreement	SJPF, ANTF, AFAP <sup>29</sup>	Liga Portugal
PT	Conselho Nacional de Desporto (National Sports Council)	Tripartite	All sporting disciplines	Statutory	SJPF	No employer organisation, but the Portuguese Football Federation participates
RO	None					
SE	No formal bodies					
SI	Commission for Professional Football	Tripartite	Social dialogue, working conditions, competition, etc.	Agreement	SPINS	No employer organisation, but the Football Association of Slovenia is represented
SK	None					

Source: NEC, 2021

<sup>29</sup> ANTF organises coaches, and AFAP is the Portuguese Association of Football Referees.

### 3. European level of interest representation

This chapter presents detailed data on the representativeness of the three recognised European-level social partner organisations in professional football: the International Federation of Professional Footballers' Associations – Division Europe (Fifpro Europe) on the employees' side and European Leagues and the European Club Association (ECA) on the employers' side. Each of these is listed by the European Commission as a social partner organisation to be consulted under Article 154 of the TFEU.

The bottom-up approach identified all relevant national organisations, which were discussed in Chapter 2; here, the top-down approach is combined with the bottom-up approach to assess the representativeness of the European social partners through their national member organisations and the role that those organisations play in their national industrial relations landscapes.

The representativeness of the European-level social partners is assessed in three ways. First, the membership domains in professional football and the membership strengths of Fifpro, European Leagues and ECA are examined, based on their statutes and the collective coverage of their national affiliates. Second, the European social partners' capacity to negotiate on behalf of their members is analysed. This is done by assessing their ability to commit themselves on behalf of their members and to conclude binding agreements or actions that can be implemented or monitored EU-wide. This capacity to negotiate is contingent on the involvement of their affiliates in collective bargaining at national level, which ensures not only that they can provide an effective mandate for discussion and negotiation at European level but also that they are in a position to implement European-level agreements. Third, the limits of the representativeness of social partners involved in the ESSDC for professional football are analysed by comparing their representativeness with those of other European associations related to professional football and national organisations not represented by Fifpro, European Leagues and ECA.

UEFA is not considered in detail in this study. This is because UEFA is not a recognised European-level social partner, although the organisation has an important role as chair of the ESSDC and is the core European football governing body. UEFA provides the regulatory framework for European football, for example with regard to club licensing, and also acts as a competition organiser, in particular for national teams.

Fifpro has 23 trade unions from 23 Member States affiliated to it, including an observer member from Lithuania. In Germany, there is a professional football trade union that is not affiliated to Fifpro but has a cooperation agreement with it. In the other three Member States – Estonia, Latvia and Luxembourg – there is no trade union organising professional football players, and therefore it is not possible for Fifpro to have an affiliated union in those countries. Section 3.1 shows that only 5 of the 28 national trade unions organising professional football players are not affiliated to Fifpro, including the German union with which there is a cooperation agreement.

There are 29 employer organisations and leagues in 20 Member States altogether, and 23 of them in 19 Member States are affiliated to European Leagues. ECA represents clubs from all EU Member States. Because European Leagues does not have affiliated organisations in all EU countries, but only in 19 (see Section 3.2), in 8 countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia) the interests of ECA members are represented at European level exclusively through ECA.

### 3.1. Representativeness of Fifpro

Fifpro aims to improve the working and playing conditions of professional footballers. According to Article 4 of the statutes of Fifpro Europe, the association 'is open to Unions of Professional Footballers in Europe'. Hence, through its national affiliates, Fifpro Europe organises and represents European professional football players and thus is a trade union federation organising a particular occupation rather than a sector of the economy. Article 4 of the statutes also stipulates that only one member organisation per country will be admitted, such that multiple memberships per country are ruled out. According to its own definition of its membership domain, Fifpro represents the entire professional football-playing workforce, including men, women and under-age professional football players. Its members cover almost the entire men's football segment.

Of the 28 trade unions considered in this study, 23 are members of Fifpro. Of these, Lithuania's PFA is an observer member rather than a full member with all the rights and obligations of full membership. Table 19 indicates that of the 24 countries in which a trade union organising professional football players was identified, Fifpro has a member in 23. In Germany, the only trade union representing footballers (VDV) is not affiliated, but there is a cooperation agreement between the trade union and Fifpro. In Estonia, Latvia and Luxembourg, there is no active trade union organising professional players.

All the affiliated trade unions in the 23 countries covered represent men professional football players. Of the 17 Member States in which there are women professional players and a Fifpro affiliate, the women players are organised by the national Fifpro member union in 16. While in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Ireland, Slovakia and Slovenia no women professional players are recorded, in Austria there are women professional players, who are, however, not organised by the national Fifpro affiliate. According to a representative of the Austrian union VfF, the union would be open to representing women, but none of the very few women professional players active in Austria has applied for membership thus far. In Greece, the trade union PSAPP has recently changed its statutes to enable it to represent women players; however, there are no data on the existence of women professional players in the country.

Professional under-age football players are organised by 15 Fifpro affiliates, whereas 8 affiliates do not offer membership to under-age players. Only a minority of trade unions affiliated to Fifpro organise employees who work in professional football but are not professional players, such as other club staff and coaches, namely VfF of Austria, ACV-CSC United Athletes of Belgium, HLSZ of Hungary, AFAN of Romania and SPINS of Slovenia.

Table 19: Fifpro affiliates' membership domains

Member State	Trade union	Members among professional football players			Other employees, including coaches
		Men, 1st and 2nd divisions	Women, 1st and 2nd divisions	Under-age players	
AT	VdF	Yes	No*	Yes	Yes
BE	ACV-CSC United Athletes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
BG	ABF	Yes	n/a	Yes	No
CY	PASP	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
CZ	ČAFH	Yes	Yes	No	No
DE	VDV not affiliated, but there is a cooperation agreement				
DK	SPF	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

## Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Professional football sector

Member State	Trade union	Members among professional football players			Other employees, including coaches
		Men, 1st and 2nd divisions	Women, 1st and 2nd divisions	Under-age players	
EE	No trade union				
EL	PSAPP	Yes	n/a <sup>30</sup>	No	No
ES	AFE	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
FI	JPY	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
FR	UNFP	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
HR	HUNS	Yes	n/a	No	No
HU	HLSZ	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
IE	PFAI	Yes	n/a	No	No
IT	AIC	Yes	Yes <sup>31</sup>	No	No
LT	PFA**	Yes	Yes	No	No
LU	No trade union				
LV	No trade union				
MT	MFPA	Yes	Yes	No	No
NL	VVCS	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
PL	PZP	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
PT	SJPF	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
RO	AFAN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
SE	Spelarförningen	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
SI	SPINS	Yes	n/a	No	Yes
SK	UFP	Yes	n/a	Yes	No
<b>23 out of 27 EU Member States</b>	<b>23 trade unions affiliated to Fifpro</b>	<b>All Fifpro members represent men professional footballers in the 1st and 2nd divisions</b>	<b>All Fifpro members but 1 (VdF of AT) represent women professional footballers in the 1st and 2nd divisions, where they exist</b>	<b>All Fifpro members but 8 represent under-age professional footballers</b>	<b>5 Fifpro members represent employees working in professional football who are not footballers</b>

**Notes:** \* There have been no applications for membership from women players thus far. \*\* PFA is an observer member rather than full member and therefore shaded blue. n/a = not applicable (because there are no women professional players in the country). Green shading indicates a positive response from a full Fifpro member union. Where women or under-age professional football players are reported to exist but are not organised by the Fifpro member union, the text is coloured red.

Source: NEC, 2021

<sup>30</sup> Fifpro indicated in June 2023 that the Greek trade union PSAPP had recently changed its statutes to enable it to represent women players; however, there are no data on the existence of women professional players in Greece.

<sup>31</sup> Fifpro indicated in June 2023 that, starting from the 2022/2023 season, women footballers in Italy can be represented by AIC, as the status of the Serie A women's league changed from amateur to fully professional.

Table 20 shows that almost all the Fifpro members organise and represent players in all the leagues and divisions in which clubs employing men professional players are engaged in their respective countries. This holds true for all countries with Fifpro affiliates but Sweden, where the Fifpro member Spelarförbundet represents only men professional players in the first and second divisions, although there are also some professional players in the third division.

With regard to women's professional football, the situation is similar, as, in those countries where women's professional football exists (18 countries), the Fifpro member (if there is one) tends to organise women players in all the leagues and divisions in which they are engaged. The only exception in this respect is Austria. There, the Fifpro member VdF does not organise and represent the very few women professional players active in the country. In Italy, the Fifpro member AIC has been able to represent women professional players since the beginning of the 2022/2023 season, when the status of the women's Serie A league changed from amateur to fully professional.

Overall, it can be concluded that – apart from in the four countries (Estonia, Germany, Latvia and Luxembourg) without Fifpro affiliates – there are hardly any leagues and divisions engaging professional football players in the EU for which Fifpro has no representation through its national member organisations. This holds true despite the fact that the main focus of some Fifpro members is on the first division of men's professional football (namely in Cyprus, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal and Slovenia; see Table 6).

**Table 20: Fifpro affiliates' representativeness in terms of leagues/divisions and players of men's and women's professional football, by Member State**

MS	Number of divisions with professional players (men)	Number of divisions with professional players (women)	Existence of Fifpro affiliate	Affiliates' coverage in terms of divisions (men)	Percentage of players covered (men)	Affiliates' coverage in terms of divisions (women)	Percentage of players covered (women)
AT	3	1	Yes	Divs 1–3	100%	None	0%
BE	2	1	Yes	Divs 1 and 2	n.a.*	Div. 1	n.a.*
BG	2	0	Yes	Divs 1 and 2	100%	n/a	n/a
CY	3	1	Yes	Divs 1–3	100%	Div. 1	100%
CZ	4	1	Yes	Divs 1–4	100%	Div. 1	100%
DE	4	3	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
DK	3	2	Yes	Divs 1–3	100%	Divs 1 and 2	100%
EE	3	0	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
EL	3	0 <sup>32</sup>	Yes	Divs 1–3	100%	n/a	n/a
ES	4	1	Yes	Divs 1–4	100%	Div. 1	100%
FI	3	2	Yes	Divs 1–3	n.a.*	Divs 1 and 2	n.a.*
FR	3	1	Yes	Divs 1–3	100%	Div. 1	100%
HR	2	0	Yes	Divs 1 and 2	100%	n/a	n/a
HU	2	1	Yes	Divs 1 and 2	100%	Div. 1	n.a.*
IE	2	0	Yes	Divs 1 and 2	100%	n/a	n/a

<sup>32</sup> Fifpro indicated in June 2023 that the Greek trade union PSAPP had recently changed its statutes to enable it to represent women players; however, there are no data on the existence of women professional players in Greece.

MS	Number of divisions with professional players (men)	Number of divisions with professional players (women)	Existence of Fifpro affiliate	Affiliates' coverage in terms of divisions (men)	Percentage of players covered (men)	Affiliates' coverage in terms of divisions (women)	Percentage of players covered (women)
IT	3	1	Yes	Divs 1–3	100%	Div. 1 <sup>33</sup>	n/a
LT	2	1	Yes	Divs 1 and 2	100%	Div. 1	n.a.*
LU	1	0	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
LV	1–2	0	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
MT	2–3	1	Yes	Divs 1–3	100%	Div. 1	100%
NL	2	1	Yes	Divs 1 and 2	100%	Div. 1	100%
PL	3	1	Yes	Divs 1–3	100%	Div. 1	100%
PT	2	1	Yes	Divs 1 and 2	100%	Div. 1	100%
RO	4	2	Yes	Divs 1–4	100%	Divs 1 and 2	100%
SE	2–3	2	Yes	Divs 1 and 2	67%	Divs 1 and 2	100%
SI	3	0	Yes	Divs 1–3	100%	n/a	n/a
SK	3	0	Yes	Divs 1–3	100%	n/a	n/a

**Notes:** In countries where the number of (men's) divisions is not completely clear and indicated by a range of numbers, the most probable number is in bold and was taken as the basis for further calculations. \* Most probably 100%. n/a = not applicable; n.a. = information not available. Green shading indicates coverage of the category in question by a full member of Fifpro. Coverage by the observer member from Lithuania is indicated by blue shading.

**Source:** NEC, 2020/2021

In terms of membership strength, Table 21 shows that all 23 Fifpro affiliates in an EU Member State are the country's most important trade union representing professional football players. Table 21 also indicates that in those countries for which data are available the Fifpro member union tends to represent most of a country's professional players. In 11 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia), the Fifpro affiliate organises approximately 80% or more of the country's professional players. In all other countries with available data (Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Malta and Sweden) except Portugal, the national Fifpro affiliate represents between around half and around three-quarters of professional players.

**Table 21: Fifpro affiliates' organisational density and relative importance**

Member State	Trade union	Density in professional football*	Relative importance**
AT	VdF	c. 87%	1
BE	ACV-CSC United Athletes	69%	1
BG	ABF	c. 95%	1
CY	PASP	> 89%	1
CZ	ČAFH	c. 48%	1

<sup>33</sup> Fifpro indicated in June 2023 that, starting from the 2022/2023 season, women footballers in Italy can be represented by AIC, as the status of the Serie A women's league changed from amateur to fully professional.

Member State	Trade union	Density in professional football*	Relative importance**
DK	SPF	c. 56%	1
EL	PSAPP	100%	1
ES	AFE	n.a.	1
FI	JPY	n.a.	1
FR	UNFP	c. 92%	1
HR	HUNS	48%	1
HU	HLSZ	n.a.	1
IE	PFAI	n.a.	1
IT	AIC	c. 84%	1
LT	PFA	97%	1
MT	MFPA	58%	1
NL	VVCS	c. 82%	1
PL	PZP	n.a.	1
PT	SJPF	15–20% <sup>34</sup>	1
RO	AFAN	c. 81%	1
SE	Spelarföreningen	55%	1
SI	SPINS	93%	1
SK	UFP	c. 80%	1
<b>23 out of 27 Member States</b>	<b>23 trade unions affiliated to Fifpro</b>	<b>Density in professional football ranges from 15% to 100%</b>	<b>All Fifpro members are the country's most important trade union representing professional footballers</b>

**Notes:** \* Number of trade union members as a share of the country's total number of professional players; \*\* 1 = most important in terms of membership. The observer member from Lithuania is shaded blue.

**Source:** NEC, 2021

However, Table 22 indicates that less than half of the Fifpro members are involved in collective bargaining targeting professional football players; in all cases, the bargaining is either exclusively multi-employer bargaining or a combination of multi-employer and single-employer bargaining. Of the 23 Fifpro members, 13 are not involved in collective bargaining, reflecting the difficulties involved in establishing collective employment regulations through autonomous social partner activities in professional football in a number of Member States. Nevertheless, each of the Fifpro members is consulted by employers, leagues or the government, and in several cases by all of them. Consultation by employers and leagues is more frequent than consultation by government. Table 22 also shows that about one-third of the Fifpro affiliates participate in bipartite social dialogue bodies dealing with sector-specific matters, whereas only about one-fifth of them participate in tripartite bodies. The Fifpro members in five countries (Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Greece and

<sup>34</sup> Density calculated based on data provided by the NEC; according to Fifpro, the organisational density of SJPF is around 50% for men professional players in the first and second divisions, between 20% and 30% for men professional players in the third and fourth divisions, and 10% for women professional players.

Malta) can be classed as interest organisations resembling professional associations, while all the other Fifpro members consider themselves trade unions.



Table 22: Fifpro affiliates' involvement in collective bargaining and consultation procedures, status and affiliation at national level

MS	Trade union	CB involvement	Consultation by ...			Participation in social dialogue bodies		Type of organisation	National affiliation*
			Employers	League	Government	Bipartite	Tripartite		
AT	VdF	MEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	TU	ÖGB
BE	ACV-CSC United Athletes	MEB and SEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	TU	ACV-CSC
BG	ABF	MEB	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	TU	None
CY	PASP	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	PA	None
CZ	ČAFH	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	PA	None
DK	SPF	MEB	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	TU	FH
EL	PSAPP	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	PA	None
ES	AFE	MEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	No formal bodies		TU	None
FI	JPY	No	Yes	n.a.	Yes	No	Yes	TU	(SAK)
FR	UNFP	MEB	Yes	n.a.	Yes	Yes	No	TU	None
HR	HUNS	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	PA	None
HU	HLSZ	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	TU	None
IE	PFAI	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	TU	(ICTU)
IT	AIC	MEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	TU	None
LT	PFA	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	TU	None
MT	MFPA	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	PA	None
NL	VVCS	MEB and SEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	TU	FNV
PL	PZP	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	TU	None
PT	SJPF	MEB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	TU	None
RO	AFAN	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	TU	BNS

Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Professional football sector

MS	Trade union	CB involvement	Consultation by ...			Participation in social dialogue bodies		Type of organisation	National affiliation*
			Employers	League	Government	Bipartite	Tripartite		
SE	Spelar-föreningen	MEB	No	Yes	No	No formal bodies		TU	None
SI	SPINS	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	TU	ZSSS
SK	UFP	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	TU	None
<b>23 MS</b>	<b>23 trade unions affiliated to Fifpro</b>	<b>10 Fifpro members involved in CB</b>	<b>18 Fifpro members consulted by employers</b>	<b>At least 18 Fifpro members consulted by leagues</b>	<b>13 Fifpro members consulted by government</b>	<b>6 Fifpro members participating in bipartite social dialogue</b>	<b>4 Fifpro members participating in tripartite social dialogue</b>	<b>18 TUs, 5 PAs</b>	<b>8 national affiliations</b>

**Notes:** \* Affiliation to national cross-sectoral trade union federation; affiliation in brackets means indirect membership through a higher- or lower-order unit. CB, collective bargaining; MEB, multi-employer bargaining; n.a., information not available; PA, professional association; SEB, single-employer bargaining; TU, trade union. Green shading indicates a positive response from a full member of Fifpro, while blue shading is used for the observer member from Lithuania.

Source: NEC, 2021

### 3.2. Representativeness of European Leagues

European Leagues is the voice of the professional football leagues across Europe on all product market- and labour market-related matters. European Leagues indirectly (through the national leagues affiliated to it) represents the vast majority of club football employers on the ESSDC for professional football. European Leagues defines its mission as enhancing and protecting the national competitions run by the domestic leagues. Article 3 of its statutes stipulates that members 'are organisations running professional football league competitions at domestic level (leagues) and any other group of clubs (unions or associations of clubs), situated in Europe and recognised by the respective National Association'. Article 4 differentiates between three membership statuses, one for ordinary members, one for associate members and one for development members. Ordinary members are professional football leagues running top-tier divisions and those operating non-top-tier divisions, 'as long as they are constituted as a separate legal entity and meet the financial requirements established'. Associate members are associations or unions of clubs or professional leagues that do not meet the above criteria. Development members are leagues or associations or unions of clubs recognised by the relevant national association that have not acquired ordinary or associate membership; they are invited by the European Leagues to become development members.

Of the 29 employer organisations and leagues from 20 Member States identified for the purpose of this study, 23 from 19 countries are affiliated to European Leagues. Multiple memberships exist in France, Italy and the Netherlands, whereas in all other countries with a European League affiliate only one member can be found. This is the case in Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden. All the affiliates of European Leagues listed in Table 23 but Hungary's MLSZ are ordinary members; MLSZ is an associate member. Bulgaria's league, BPFL, is not affiliated to European Leagues and thus not included in Table 23; for seven countries (Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia), no employer organisation or league either affiliated to European Leagues or involved in collective bargaining was identified.

Of the 23 European Leagues affiliates, 20 are football leagues, mostly organising the men's professional football first division, and often also the second division. Only DL of Denmark organises the three top-tier divisions of the country. In Italy, there are three leagues organising the first, second and third divisions of men's professional football, all affiliated to European Leagues. In France, along with the league LFP, which organises the first and the second divisions, an employer organisation (UCPF) exists; membership is voluntary and it organises some of the clubs in the first, second and third divisions; this employer organisation is affiliated to European Leagues along with LFP. A similar situation can be observed in the Netherlands, where an employer organisation representing clubs in the first and second divisions and affiliated to European Leagues coexists with the league organising the first division. In Hungary, the national football association, MLSZ, is affiliated to European Leagues as an associate member instead of a league.

Generally, the clubs in the divisions represented by the leagues affiliated to European Leagues do not employ all the professional football players in a country. Whereas all the member clubs of the leagues affiliated to European Leagues employ men professional players, only very few of them employ women professional players. European Leagues does not represent women's leagues in the EU. Four organisations affiliated to European Leagues – namely Pro League of Belgium, MLSZ of Hungary, FBO of the Netherlands and Liga Portugal of Portugal – organise competitions for clubs employing women professional players. However, there is no league affiliated to European Leagues that organises competitions in divisions that are exclusively for women. By contrast, most of the affiliates of European Leagues have club members that employ under-age professional players and – of course – staff other than professional players.

Table 23: European Leagues affiliates' membership domains

MS	EO/league	Type of employer and coverage in terms of men's divisions	Number of member clubs	Members employ ...			
				Men players	Women players	Under-age players	Other employees
AT	ÖFBL	League, divs 1 and 2	26	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
BE	Pro League	League, divs. 1 and 2	25	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
CZ	LFA	League, divs 1 and 2	32	Yes	No	No	No
DE	DFL	League, divs 1 and 2	36	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
DK	DL	League, divs 1–3	52	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
EL	Super League Ellada	League, div. 1	14	Yes	n.a.	Yes	No
ES	LNFP	League, divs 1 and 2	42	Yes	No	No	Yes
FI	FFL	League, div. 1	12	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
FR	UCPF	EO, some of divs 1–3	22	Yes	No	No	Yes
FR	LFP	League, divs 1 and 2	40	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
HU	MLSZ*	Football association	36	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
IT	LNPA	League, div. 1	20	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
IT	LNPB	League, div. 2	20	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
IT	Legapro	League, div. 3	60	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
LT	A Lyga	League, div. 1	6	Yes	No	No	Yes
LV	LFV	League, div. 1	10	Yes	No	No	Yes
NL	Eredivisie	League, div. 1	18	Yes	No	Yes	No
NL	FBO	EO, divs 1 and 2	34	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PL	Ekstraklasa	League, div. 1	16	Yes	No	No	No
PT	Liga Portugal	League, divs 1 and 2	34	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
RO	LPF	League, div. 1	16	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
SE	SEF	League, divs 1 and 2	32	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
SK	ULK	League, div. 1	12	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>19 MS</b>	<b>23 European Leagues members</b>	<b>20 leagues, 2 employer organisations, 1 football association</b>	<b>615 clubs represented by European Leagues out of at least 1,242</b>	<b>All 23 European Leagues members represent men professional players</b>	<b>4 European Leagues members represent women professional players</b>	<b>16 European Leagues members represent under-age professional players</b>	<b>19 European Leagues members represent employees other than professional players</b>

Notes: \* Associate member of European Leagues. EO, employer organisation; n.a., information not available.

Source: NEC, 2020/2021

Table 24 shows that all European Leagues affiliates organise and represent the first division of men's professional football, often in combination with the second division and in a few cases the third division. In countries with multiple memberships, the European Leagues members together organise the highest-tier divisions. They thus organise those parts of professional football where most professional football players can be found. Even in those countries where the European Leagues affiliates' coverage in terms of divisions is 50% or lower, they tend to organise the higher-tier divisions, where the rate of professionalism is highest. In at least 9 Member States, the European Leagues affiliates' coverage in terms of clubs employing men professional football players is higher than 90%. In these countries, the clubs with professional players are concentrated in the highest divisions, which are covered by the national European Leagues affiliates. Where the coverage in terms of clubs employing professionals is relatively low, individual professional players can be found in a number of clubs in lower-level divisions that are not organised and represented by the national league affiliated to European Leagues.

**Table 24: European Leagues affiliates' representativeness in terms of leagues/divisions and football clubs in men's professional football, by Member State**

MS	Number of divisions with professional players (men)	Number of clubs with professional players (men)	Number of European Leagues affiliates	Affiliates' coverage in terms of divisions (men)	Percentage of divisions covered (men)	Affiliates' coverage in terms of clubs (men)	Percentage of clubs covered (men)
AT	3	At least 28	1	Divs 1 and 2	67%	26	c. 93%
BE	2	25	1	Divs. 1 and 2	n.a.	25	96%
BG	2	32	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
CY	3	48	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
CZ	4	69	1	Divs 1 and 2	50%	32	46%
DE	4	106	1	Divs 1 and 2	50%	36	34%
DK	3	22**	1	Divs 1–3	100%	52	n.a.
EE	3	24	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
EL	3	40	1	Div. 1	33%	14	35%
ES	4	172	1	Divs 1 and 2	50%	42	24%
FI	3	At least 12	1	Div. 1	33%	12	c. 100%
FR	3	43	2	Divs 1–3*	100%*	40*	93%*
HR	2	At least 10	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
HU	2	32**	1	n.a.	50%***	36***	n.a.
IE	2	20	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
IT	3	100	3	Divs 1–3*	100%*	100*	100%*
LT	2	20	1	Div. 1	50%	6	30%
LU	1	16	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
LV	1–2	At least 10	1	Div. 1	50%	10	c. 100%
MT	2–3	22	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
NL	2	At least 34	2	Divs 1 and 2*	100%*	34*	c. 100%*

MS	Number of divisions with professional players (men)	Number of clubs with professional players (men)	Number of European Leagues affiliates	Affiliates' coverage in terms of divisions (men)	Percentage of divisions covered (men)	Affiliates' coverage in terms of clubs (men)	Percentage of clubs covered (men)
PL	3	53	1	Div. 1	33%	16	30%
PT	2	36	1	Divs 1 and 2	100%	34	94%
RO	4	187****	1	Div. 1	25%	16	n.a.
SE	<b>2–3</b>	At least 32	1	Divs 1 and 2	67%	32	c. 100%
SI	3	22	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
SK	3	26	1	Div. 1	33%	12	46%

**Notes:** In countries where the number of (men's) divisions is not completely clear and indicated by a range of numbers, the most probable number is in bold and was taken as the basis for further calculations. \* Cumulative coverage by all affiliates. \*\* Number of clubs with men professional football players is obviously underestimated. \*\*\* According to information provided by the NEC. \*\*\*\* Number of clubs with men professional football players appears to be unreliable. n.a., information not available; n/a, not applicable.

**Source:** NEC, 2020/2021

Whereas a European League affiliate represents the top-tier league(s) in men's professional football in all Member States in which a member of European Leagues exists, the representativeness of European Leagues affiliates in the women's section of professional football falls far short of their representativeness in men's professional football. Table 25 shows the only four countries in which European Leagues members claim to represent or actually represent not only men's but also women's professional football. However, the data collected for the women's section of professional football indicate that there is limited information available. What can be seen from Table 25 is that in the Netherlands one of the two European Leagues members and in Belgium the only European Leagues member represent the first division of women's football in these two countries, which are the only divisions in which women professional football players are engaged. In Belgium, however, it is not clear whether there is more than one division with women professional players, such that the European Leagues member's coverage in terms of divisions remains uncertain. In Hungary, the European Leagues member is a football association rather than a league, and it claims to represent both men's and women's professional football, as a matter of principle; however, thus far no women's league with professional football players has been established in the country.

Table 25: European Leagues affiliates' representativeness in terms of leagues/divisions and football clubs in women's professional football, by Member State

MS	Number of divisions with professional players (women)	Number of clubs with professional players (women)	Number of European Leagues affiliates	Affiliates' coverage in terms of divisions (women)	Percentage of divisions covered (women)	Affiliates' coverage in terms of clubs (women)	Percentage of clubs covered (women)
BE	1	5	1	Div. 1	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
HU	1	At least 1	1	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
NL	1	8	2*	Div. 1	100%	n.a.	n.a.
PT	1	3	1	Div. 1	100%	n.a.	n.a.

**Notes:** \* In the Netherlands, only FBO, not Eredivisie, claims to represent women professional football players. n.a., information not available.

**Source:** NEC, 2020/2021

Table 26 shows that in all countries but Belgium the affiliates of European Leagues include the most important employer organisations and leagues representing professional football clubs at national level. In Belgium, Pro League represents the clubs of the men's first division, which are the strongest and most successful clubs in the country; Nationale Voetballiga organises the lower divisions, representing a larger number of clubs employing a larger number of professional football players than those of the first division alone.

Table 26 also shows the density of the European Leagues affiliates in terms of professional footballers represented by member clubs (as a share of a country's total number of professional football players). According to the available data, density tends to vary widely depending on the comprehensiveness of the leagues' and employer organisations' membership domains: where an organisation covers only one or two divisions, and professional players can also be found in lower divisions, density tends to be relatively low. Where the first (and second) division(s) account(s) for virtually all professional players, density tends to be very high, with rates at 90% or higher (Austria's ÖFBL, France's LFP, Hungary's MLSZ, Latvia's LFV and the Netherlands' FBO).

Less than half of the employer organisations and leagues affiliated to European Leagues are involved in collective bargaining related to professional football. France and the Netherlands each has as an affiliate an employer organisation involved in collective bargaining that coexists with a league that is not involved in collective bargaining.

Table 26: European Leagues affiliates' organisational density, relative importance and involvement in collective bargaining

MS	Employer organisation/league	Density in professional football*	Relative importance**	Collective bargaining involvement
AT	ÖFBL	90%	1	MEB
BE	Pro League	n.a.	2	MEB
CZ	LFA	n.a.	1	No
DE	DFL	40%	1	No
DK	DL	n.a.***	1	MEB

MS	Employer organisation/league	Density in professional football*	Relative importance**	Collective bargaining involvement
EL	Super League Ellada	44%	1	No
ES	LNFP	40%	1	MEB
FI	FFL	n.a.	1	No
FR	UCPF	48%	2	MEB
FR	LFP	92%	1	No
HU	MLSZ	100%	1	No
IT	LNPA	44%	1	MEB
IT	LNPB	19%	3	MEB
IT	Legapro	37%	2	MEB
LT	A Lyga	> 50%	1	No
LV	LFV	> 90%	1	No
NL	Eredivisie	n.a.	2	No
NL	FBO	100%	1	MEB and SEB
PL	Ekstraklasa	30%	1	No
PT	Liga Portugal	n.a.***	1	MEB
RO	LPF	< 50%	1	No
SE	SEF	n.a.***	1	No
SK	ULK	70%	1	No
<b>19 MS</b>	<b>23 European Leagues members</b>	<b>Density between 19% and 100%</b>	<b>European Leagues members are the most important employers in 18 out of 19 MS</b>	<b>10 European Leagues members in 8 MS are involved in collective bargaining</b>

**Notes:** \* Number of professional footballers employed by member clubs as a share of the country's total number of professional players. \*\* 1 = most important in terms of membership, 2 = second most important, 3 = third most important. \*\*\* Most probably 100% of men professional football players. MEB, multi-employer bargaining; n.a., information not available; SEB, single-employer bargaining.

Source: NEC, 2021

### 3.3. Representativeness of ECA

ECA was established in 2008 and is based in Nyon, Switzerland. Its mission is, ultimately, to protect and develop European club football. Article 2 of the ECA statutes of 2023 lists the objectives of the organisation. One of its principal objectives is to promote football governance models that truly reflect the key role of the clubs ('placing clubs at the heart of football'). ECA aims to act to strengthen each of the clubs for the benefit of all (including through the services that it provides to the clubs) and to ensure that club football is recognised by decision-makers as the most direct link to the fans and their communities. Article 2C of the ECA statutes states as one of the organisation's objectives to 'represent the interests of the clubs as employers in Europe, ... including in the social dialogue process, and to act as a social partner where appropriate'.



A fundamental aspect of the representativeness of ECA stems from the mutual recognition between UEFA and ECA, and between FIFA and ECA, as set out in two separate MoUs.<sup>35</sup> The MoU between UEFA and ECA, which dates from 2019, expires in July 2024, but a process aimed at renewing it is ongoing.<sup>36</sup> The 2019 MoU between UEFA and ECA stipulates that UEFA recognises ECA ‘as an established employers’ organisation in European club football and the sole body representing the interests of club football at European level’.<sup>37</sup> This is also mentioned in the 2023 ECA statutes in Article 2B. Moreover, ECA has two representatives on the UEFA Executive Committee and sixteen on the UEFA Club Competitions Committee. Finally, there are also other contractual relations between UEFA and ECA, as the parties are in the process of finalising the creation of a joint venture to manage commercial rights to the UEFA club competitions from 2024.

In assessing the membership strength of ECA, six factors must be taken into consideration. First, a change in the statutes: the 2023 version of ECA’s statutes introduced certain changes from the 2020 version with regard to the clubs entitled to membership. Second, between the 2020 list of affiliated clubs provided by ECA and another list provided in May 2023, the number of reported affiliated clubs had increased. Third, not all but a sample of the ECA member clubs provided information to the NEC. In this regard, ECA underlines that all the clubs on its list of member clubs are indisputably and legally ECA members. Fourth, there are the changing roles that members are entitled to play in or in relation to the ECA’s three main decision-making bodies, namely the ECA General Assembly, the ECA Board and the ECA consultative bodies. This is linked to the reforms introduced in the 2023 statutes, which granted more rights in the governance of ECA both to ordinary members and associated members. The fifth factor to be considered is the difference between ordinary members and associated members and, beyond the members, the presence of the ECA’s wider network. Finally, it should be borne in mind that there is continual change in the membership of ECA, because of its meritocratic basis.

In Article 3 of the 2020 version of the ECA statutes, it was specified that membership was open to ‘male football clubs affiliated to a UEFA member association’, but ‘male’ was dropped in the 2023 version of the statutes. ECA membership is meritocratic (Article 4) and based on the payment of membership fees (Article 44). Clubs from the top men’s and top women’s divisions of the UEFA member associations may be eligible to obtain ordinary membership, based on the UEFA individual club coefficient ranking. The number of clubs eligible to qualify from the men’s rankings for ordinary membership varies from between 1 and 5 per national football association. For the women’s rankings, there is no limit per country, and the top 40 clubs are eligible for ordinary membership regardless of country. In conclusion, for each country, for men’s and women’s football taken together, there is a minimum of one ordinary member and no fixed maximum, although in reality the likely maximum is around eight ordinary members per country.

In addition to clubs that have ordinary membership of ECA, there are associated member clubs. Associated membership is open to the ECA’s founding members and to clubs in the top men’s and/or women’s divisions that, based on their ranking, do not qualify as ordinary members. Membership, be it ordinary or associate, is thus available only to clubs in the top men’s and women’s divisions and not to clubs in the second or third divisions, where professional football players work in all Member States except Luxembourg (see Table 1 in

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<sup>35</sup> The MoU between FIFA and ECA was renewed in March 2023 and is valid until the end of 2030. The 2019 UEFA MoU is valid until 31 July 2024.

<sup>36</sup> On 20 September 2022, UEFA and ECA signed a letter of intent to establish the framework for a renewal of the ECA–UEFA MoU, with the new MoU to last until 2030. This letter of intent sets out the main agreed principles that will be reflected in the renewed MoU, including UEFA’s recognition of ECA as the sole body representing the interests of club football at European level. At the beginning of 2023, UEFA and ECA were in the process of finalising the renewal of the MoU (which, as mentioned, will be valid until 2030). It is expected to be finalised in the second half of 2023.

<sup>37</sup> With regard to the use of the term ‘sole body’, ECA points out that, as employers of professional football players, clubs not affiliated to ECA can also be represented in the ESSDC, through European Leagues.

Section 1.2). Therefore, the 2023 version of the ECA statutes establishes in Article 2J an ECA club network, enabling other football clubs to engage with ECA and its members and allowing them to benefit from ECA's services and support.

In November 2020, ECA provided a list of 136 member clubs in the EU27. The updated list from 2023 includes 62 ordinary members and 72 associate members, together making up 134 member clubs in the men's top divisions. Altogether, there are 391 clubs in the men's top divisions in the EU27, of which 134 (34%) are either ordinary members (16%) or associate members (18%). The wider network includes another 52 clubs. The 134 member clubs and the 52 additional clubs in the ECA network are together 186 professional football clubs. As a proportion of all the 1,242 clubs with men professional football players, the 62 ordinary members correspond to 5%, the 72 associate members to 6%, and together they make up 11% of all 1,242 clubs with men professional players. When the clubs that are part of the ECA network are included, ECA reaches 15% of the 1,242 clubs with men professional football players in the EU (see Table 2 in Section 1.4).

Table 27 shows, for each of the Member States, the number of clubs in the men's first division, in the column shaded yellow. The next column indicates the number of member clubs on the list provided by ECA in November 2020. The green column indicates the number of clubs that provided information for this study during the data collection conducted by the NEC (and confirmed their membership in the process). Member clubs from all Member States except Italy and Romania provided information for this study. The blue column indicates the number of clubs from which participants signed the attendance list at the September 2022 ECA General Assembly. In the three columns to the right of the table are the numbers of clubs that are ordinary members, associate members and included in the ECA network. This information was provided by ECA in May 2023, but not checked or confirmed by the NEC.

The NEC collected information from 76 ECA member clubs. ECA additionally provided a list of the signatures of participants from ordinary member clubs in its September 2022 General Assembly meeting, which can be considered a functional equivalent to a membership list. The list of 83 clubs that sent delegates who signed this attendance list does not, however, match the list of member clubs provided by ECA in November 2020 or the list of ordinary members that ECA provided in 2023. Since ECA membership is contingent on success in competitions during the most recent season, the membership composition of ECA changes to some extent each year.

**Table 27: Number of clubs in the men's first division and number of clubs affiliated to ECA, by Member State**

Member State	Number of clubs in men's first division	Membership, ECA list 2020	Member clubs providing information for this study in 2021–2022	Clubs at the ECA General Assembly, 2022	Ordinary members, ECA list 2023	Associated members, ECA list 2023	Clubs in network, ECA list 2023
AT	12	4	2	5	3	2	2
BE	25	5	1	3	3	3	4
BG	14	4	3	3	2	2	2
CY	12	5	5	3	3	2	1
CZ	16	6	2	4	3	3	2
DE	18	10	4	9	5	6	3
DK	14	6	3	3	3	3	2

Member State	Number of clubs in men's first division	Membership, ECA list 2020	Member clubs providing information for this study in 2021–2022	Clubs at the ECA General Assembly, 2022	Ordinary members, ECA list 2023	Associated members, ECA list 2023	Clubs in network, ECA list 2023
EE	10	3	3	1	1	2	1
EL	16	6	5	4	2	4	1
ES	20	8	5	8	5	1	4
FI	12	3	2	3	1	2	2
FR	20	9	5	6	4	5	3
HR	10	3	3	3	2	1	1
HU	12	4	4	2	1	3	3
IE	10	4	4	0	1	3	1
IT	20	10	0	4	6	3	2
LT	8	3	3	0	1	2	1
LU	14	3	1	1	1	2	1
LV	8	4	2	1	1	1	1
MT	14	2	2	2	1	1	2
NL	18	8	2	5	3	5	2
PL	18	5	1	3	2	3	4
PT	18	5	4	2	3	2	2
RO	14	3	0	0	1	1	2
SE	16	5	2	3	2	3	2
SI	10	3	3	1	1	2	1
SK	12	5	5	4	1	5	0
<b>EU27</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>52</b>
					<b>62 + 72 = 134</b>		<b>134 + 52 = 186</b>

Sources: NEC, 2020/2021, and ECA, 2023

Of the 136 clubs on the list provided by ECA in November 2020, 76 (56%) cooperated in this study and provided information on the numbers of men, women and under-age professional football players they employ. Table 28 provides information on those 76 clubs, from all Member States except Italy and Romania. None of the member clubs in those two countries that were included on the 2020 list responded to requests from the NEC to answer a set of questions about their workforce, their collective bargaining involvement and their affiliations to national and international organisations; in all the other countries, at least one of the ECA members on the list replied to the questions for this study. Following consultation of ECA on the draft report, it provided data on the workforce and collective bargaining involvement of member clubs in Italy and Romania as well as several other clubs, in Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, the Netherlands and Poland. Since comprehensive information on the club was provided only by 76 ECA affiliates to the NEC, only these 76 football clubs are included in Table 28. The information on the other ECA member clubs, which was provided by ECA and not cross-checked by the NEC, is included in Table 39 in Annex 2.

Table 28 shows that the number of professional men and women football players varies widely across clubs, from 13 (FK Jelgava of Latvia) to 146 (Athletic Club of Spain). It is not clear in all instances whether the sometimes very high numbers of under-age players shown in the table actually include only professional footballers (in some cases, it can be assumed that the figures provided include all young players training in a club's academy, irrespective of the existence of an employment contract).

The vast majority of ECA member clubs have no women professional players. Women professional football players were reported in the following countries in which ECA has a member club: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden. For the French clubs in Table 28, either the clubs have no women players or information is not available. In those member clubs where women players are documented, their male counterparts tend to outnumber them by far. Considerable numbers of women professional players (at least 10) were reported by 14 ECA member clubs in 7 countries. At least 20 women professional players are employed by SK Slavia Praha of Czechia; FC Bayern München and VfL Wolfsburg of Germany; AFC Ajax of the Netherlands; SL Benfica, SC Braga and Sporting Clube de Portugal of Portugal; Real Madrid, Athletic Club, FC Barcelona, Sevilla FC and Atlético de Madrid of Spain; and Malmö FF of Sweden.

As indicated above, the numbers of under-age players shown in Table 28 should be viewed with caution, since the definition of a professional under-age player applied by the clubs appears to vary widely, even in the same country.

The numbers of workers other than professional football players employed by ECA members vary more widely than those of players, reflecting the considerable differences between the clubs in terms of size, scope of business activities and financial capacity. Whereas some ECA member clubs in Lithuania and Slovenia employ only a handful of workers who are not professional footballers, big clubs such as Paris Saint-Germain of France, FC Bayern München, Borussia Dortmund and FC Schalke 04 of Germany, SL Benfica of Portugal, and Real Madrid, FC Barcelona and Atlético de Madrid of Spain have several hundreds of employees – and, in the case of FC Bayern München and FC Barcelona, even as many as 1,000 or more.

With regard to the ECA member clubs' membership domains in professional football, the core business area of all the clubs is professional football and its marketing. Yet most of the clubs listed in Table 28 indicated that they did not engage in activities outside professional football. This is presumably because most clubs consider marketing and merchandising activities related to their core activity – that is, professional football – to be an integral part of that activity, while some other clubs do not take that view. Therefore, this question remains open; the extent to which ECA member clubs engage in activities outside football can hardly be discerned from the answers given by the clubs and shown in Table 28.

Among the 76 ECA member clubs that provided information and are listed in Table 28, there are 15 directly involved in collective bargaining. This is in all cases single-employer bargaining, targeting either professional football players (in which case it is complementary to multi-employer bargaining covering professional players, as in the case of the clubs in Belgium and the Netherlands) or staff other than professional footballers (in addition to multi-employer arrangements covering only professional players and no other parts of the clubs' workforce).

Table 28: Membership domains and strengths of ECA affiliate clubs that provided information for this study

MS	Club	Number of ...					Activities outside football**	CB involvement***
		Prof. footballers (men and women)	Men prof. players	Women prof. players	Under-age players	Other workers*		
AT	SK Rapid Wien	48	48	0	14	231	Yes	No
AT	FK Austria Wien	51	50	1	0	145	Yes	No
BE	Club Brugge	53	53	0	13	118	Yes	Yes
BG	PFC Ludogorets	47	47	0	0	127	No	No
BG	PFC Botev	30	30	0	0	n.a.	No	No
BG	Levski Sofia	33	33	0	0	80	Yes	No
CY	Omonia	30	30	0	5	70	No	No
CY	Anorthosis	25	25	0	3	36	No	No
CY	Apoel FC	34	34	0	5	61	No	No
CY	AEK	30	30	0	5	46	Yes	No
CY	Apollon	26	26	0	n.a.	n.a.	No	No
CZ	SK Slavia Praha****	106	84	22	338	256	Yes	Yes
CZ	FK Teplice	44	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	81	No	No
DE	FC Bayern München	78	45	33	76	1,000	Yes	No
DE	Borussia Dortmund	29	29	0	55	855	Yes	No
DE	FC Schalke 04	31	31	0	69	753	Yes	No
DE	VfL Wolfsburg	77	52	25	94	325	No	No
DK	FC Copenhagen	60	60	0	35	120	Yes	Yes
DK	FC Midtjylland	52	52	0	36	50	No	Yes
DK	FC Nordsjaelland	39	28	11	47	75	Yes	Yes
EE	FC Flora	22	22	0	0	28	No	No
EE	Nomme Kalju FC	21	21	0	4	20	No	No
EE	FC Levadia	c. 22	c. 22	0	n.a.	c. 28	No	No
EL	PAE Olympiakos	43	43	0	15	140	No	No
EL	PAOK FC	52	52	0	10	165	No	No
EL	Panathinaikos FC	41	41	0	0	82	No	No
EL	AEK PAE	35	35	0	0	77	No	No
EL	Atromitos FC	28	28	0	0	17	No	No
ES	Real Madrid	145	120	25	47	630	Yes	Yes
ES	Athletic Club	146	104	42	47	196	No	No
ES	FC Barcelona	73	49	24	1	1,209	Yes	Yes
ES	Sevilla FC	98	75	23	45	491	Yes	Yes
ES	Atlético de Madrid	108	65	43	25	717	No	Yes

## Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Professional football sector

MS	Club	Number of ...					Activities outside football**	CB involvement***
		Prof. footballers (men and women)	Men prof. players	Women prof. players	Under-age players	Other workers*		
FI	SJK Seinäjoki	35	35	0	0	20	Yes	No
FI	FC Inter Turku	20	20	0	0	12	No	No
FR	FC Girondin de Bordeaux	29	29	0	0	194	No	Yes
FR	Lille Olympique SC	29	29	0	0	n.a.	No	No
FR	Olympique Marseille	34	34	n.a.	n.a.	131	No	Yes
FR	Paris Saint-Germain	28	28	n.a.	16	562	Yes	Yes
FR	Olympique Lyon	25	25	n.a.	n.a.	171	Yes	Yes
HR	HNK Hajduk Split	125	125	0	80	> 86	No	No
HR	HNK Rijeka	34	34	0	30	> 19	No	No
HR	GNK Dinamo	58	58	0	0	160	No	No
HU	Debreceni VSC	46	46	0	6	65	No	No
HU	MOL Fehérvár FC	26	26	0	n.a.	128	No	No
HU	Budapest Honvéd	40	40	0	28	114	No	No
HU	Ferencvárosi TC	30	30	0	n.a.	207	Yes	No
IE	St Patrick's Athletic	27	27	0	0	n.a.	No	No
IE	Cork City FC	30	30	0	0	n.a.	No	No
IE	Dundalk FC	28	28	0	0	n.a.	No	No
IE	Shamrock Rovers FC	21	21	0	0	n.a.	No	No
LT	FK Sūduva	15	15	0	0	6	No	No
LT	FK Žalgiris	26	26	0	0	8	No	No
LT	FK Riteriai	20	20	0	0	7	No	No
LU	F91 Dudelange	22	22	0	0	6	No	No
LV	FK Jelgava	13	13	0	0	44	No	No
LV	FK Liepāja	35	35	0	1	11	No	No
MT	Valletta FC	22	22	0	0	9	No	No
MT	Birkirkara FC	17	16	1	0	11	No	No
NL	AFC Ajax	84	61	23	15	400	No	Yes
NL	FC Utrecht	65	65	0	10	105	No	Yes
PL	Legia Warszawa	91	91	0	27	84	Yes	No
PT	SL Benfica	146	124	22	22	739	Yes	No
PT	SC Braga	107	87	20	7	178	Yes	No
PT	CS Marítimo	84	78	6	0	35	Yes	No

MS	Club	Number of ...					Activities outside football**	CB involvement***
		Prof. footballers (men and women)	Men prof. players	Women prof. players	Under-age players	Other workers*		
PT	Sporting Clube de Portugal	135	111	24	23	295	Yes	No
SE	Djurgårdens IF	30	25	5	0	70	Yes	No
SE	Malmö FF	50–55	30–35	20	10–15	70	No	No
SI	NK Domžale	44	44	0	16	80	No	No
SI	ŠD NK Olimpija Ljubljana	40	40	0	8	8	No	No
SI	ŠD NK Maribor	30	30	0	n.a.	9	No	No
SK	AS Trenčín	30	30	0	14	24	Yes	No
SK	MFK Ružomberok	25	25	0	5	23	No	No
SK	MŠK Žilina	37	37	0	11	40	Yes	No
SK	Slovan Bratislava	42	42	0	4	90	Yes	No
SK	FC Spartak Trnava	28	28	0	0	14	No	No
<b>25 of 27 MS</b>	<b>76 ECA member clubs that provided information to NEC</b>	<b>Number of prof. footballers ranges from 13 to 146</b>	<b>13 to 125 men prof. players</b>	<b>0 to 43 (women prof. players)</b>	<b>0 to 338 under-age prof. players</b>	<b>6 to 1,209 other workers</b>	<b>27 clubs engaged in activities outside prof. football</b>	<b>15 clubs involved in CB</b>

**Notes:** \* Workers employed by the club other than professional football players, such as medical staff, managers, coaches, etc. \*\* Activities such as merchandising, event management, hospitality, etc. \*\*\* Direct collective bargaining involvement (exclusively single-employer bargaining). \*\*\*\* The membership information provided by SK Slavia Praha to the Eurofound national correspondent in 2021 was updated by ECA in June 2023. CB, collective bargaining; n.a., information not available.

**Source:** NEC, 2021

While several clubs enjoy multiple representation opportunities at European level – through ECA (direct membership), European Leagues (indirect affiliation through membership of the national football league affiliated to the organisation) and their national association – this is not true of all clubs affiliated to ECA. This is because European Leagues does not have affiliated national leagues in all Member States but only in 19 (see Section 3.2). In eight countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia), the interests of ECA members are represented at European level exclusively through ECA and the clubs' own national associations.

Since the ECA statutes link ordinary and associate membership with performance/participation, inevitably some clubs in the top divisions of their leagues that are not involved in European club competitions are not affiliated to ECA. Clubs in other (non-top) divisions with professional football players are also not entitled to ordinary or associate membership of ECA. They can, however, become part of the ECA network of clubs, as explained above.

In April 2021, 12 elite European clubs from Italy, Spain and England announced a breakaway from UEFA and ECA to start a separate elite competition called the Super League. Employees of the 12 clubs involved all left

their positions at UEFA and ECA, including Juventus FC chairman Andrea Agnelli, who tendered his resignation as chairman of ECA and member of the UEFA Executive Committee. However, after major fan protests, especially in England, 9 of the 12 clubs that had proposed the Super League reversed their position within two days and later regained their ECA membership. The exceptions were Real Madrid and FC Barcelona of Spain and Juventus FC of Italy, which decided to remain out (still hoping to rekindle the project). Since April 2021, ECA has no longer represented these three tradition-steeped clubs.

### 3.4. Representativeness of Fifpro, European Leagues and ECA

This section will look at the representativeness of the three European organisations representing professional football players and their employers. In total, 28 trade unions could be identified for the purpose of this study. At least one trade union is present in 24 countries; only in Estonia, Latvia and Luxembourg could no trade union be found. Of the 28 trade unions, 23 (82%) are affiliated to Fifpro, and of the 12 trade unions that are involved in collective bargaining, 10 (83%) are members of Fifpro. Fifpro has members in 23 Member States, which means that in each of these countries there is exactly one member trade union (since multiple memberships are not permitted under the Fifpro statutes). Less than half of the Fifpro affiliates (10 out of 23) are involved in collective bargaining covering professional football.

On the employers' side, this study identified 29 employer organisations and leagues in professional football in 20 Member States. Of these organisations, 16 are involved in collective bargaining covering professional football in 10 countries. Of the 29 employer organisations and leagues, 23 (79%) are affiliated to European Leagues, and organisations affiliated to European Leagues can be found in 19 Member States. Less than half (10 out of 23) of the employer organisations and leagues affiliated to European Leagues are involved in collective bargaining. Of those employer organisations and leagues engaging in collective bargaining, 63% are members of European Leagues.

There are employer organisations/leagues in 20 Member States, and for 18 Member States European Leagues has an organisation that is a full member. The Hungarian league is an associate member, and the Bulgarian league is not affiliated to European Leagues. Table 23 in Section 3.2 shows that 615 clubs are represented through European Leagues – about half of all the 1,242 clubs with professional football players.

Table 29: Proportion of clubs with professional players represented by organisations affiliated to European Leagues, by Member State

Proportion of clubs represented	Member States	
All or almost all clubs are represented	11	AT, BE, , DK, FI, FR, HU, IT, LV, NL, PT, SE
Half to one-third of clubs are represented	4	CZ, DE, EL, SK
Less than one-third of clubs are represented	4	ES, LT, PL, RO
No employer organisation or league affiliated to European Leagues	1	BG
No employer organisation or league	7	CY, EE, HR, IE, LU, MT, SI

**Notes:** Colour coding: red text has been used for Bulgaria because the Bulgarian league is not affiliated to European Leagues; green text has been used for Hungary because the Hungarian league is an associate member; for all other Member States, the employer organisation or league is a full member. Purple text has been used for Member States in which there is no employer organisation or league.

**Sources:** NEC, 2020/2021, and UEFA estimates (for Belgium)



There are around 1,400 professional football clubs (men and women) in the EU, and 391 in the men's first divisions in the 27 Member States. Table 27 shows that there are 136 clubs in the men's first divisions in all Member States that are affiliated to ECA, and Table 28 provides details on the 76 clubs that provided information for the purpose of this representativeness study.<sup>38</sup> Because membership of ECA is decided on a meritocratic basis, it can fluctuate somewhat from year to year.

Of the 136 ECA member clubs, 76 (56%) provided information to the NEC during the data collection process. Only a minority of them (15 out of 76) in six countries are involved in club-level collective bargaining, usually complementary to multi-employer bargaining affecting professional football in the country. However, the actual numbers of clubs affiliated to ECA are assumed to be significantly higher than 76, since according to the ECA statutes up to five clubs per country are eligible for ordinary membership based on the UEFA club coefficient ranking; moreover, an unspecified number of additional clubs can qualify as associate members if certain requirements are fulfilled.

Table 30 summarises the membership structures of Fifpro, European Leagues and ECA, the numbers of organisations involved in collective bargaining and the numbers of Member States in which these organisations are located.

Table 30: Membership structures of Fifpro, European Leagues and ECA, EU27

	Organisations	Member States with organisations	Organisations involved in collective bargaining	Member States with organisations involved in collective bargaining
<b>Trade unions organising professional players (number)</b>	28	24 No trade unions in EE, LU and LV	12	10
<b>Affiliates of Fifpro (number)</b>	23	22 full members plus observer member from LT DE is not represented	10	10
<b>Share of Fifpro affiliates/countries with affiliates (%)</b>	82%	96%	83%	100%
<b>Employer organisations/ leagues organising professional football clubs (number)</b>	29	20 No employer organisations/ leagues in CY, EE, HR, IE, LU, MT or SI	16	10
<b>Affiliates of European Leagues (number)</b>	23	19 BG is not represented	10	8
<b>Share of European Leagues affiliates/countries with affiliates (%)</b>	79%	95%	63%	80%

<sup>38</sup> Table 39 on the other ECA member clubs can be found in Annex 2 to this report.

	Organisations	Member States with organisations	Organisations involved in collective bargaining	Member States with organisations involved in collective bargaining
<b>Men's professional football clubs (number)</b>	c. 1,250	27	n.a.	n.a.
<b>ECA affiliates that provided information in the scope of this study</b>	76	25 None in IT or RO	15	6

**Note:** *n.a.*, information not available.

**Sources:** *NEC, 2021, and authors' own calculations*

Table 31 provides details of the most important trade unions and employer organisations/leagues on a country-by-country basis, demonstrating the importance of Fifpro and European Leagues members in terms of coverage of professional footballers and involvement in collective bargaining.

Each of the 23 Fifpro members is the most important trade union representing professional football players in its country. With regard to the Fifpro members' coverage in terms of different categories of professional players (men, women, under-age players), more than half of them (14 out of 23) represent all professional players in their respective countries, including men, women and under-age professional players, where they exist in the country in question. In Austria, the trade union affiliated to Fifpro, VfB, organises only men players, although there are a few women professional players in the country. Some of the Fifpro trade unions (HUNS in Croatia, ČAFH in Czechia, PSAPP in Greece, PFAI in Ireland, AIC in Italy, PFA in Lithuania, MFPA in Malta, SPINs in Slovenia) represent no under-age players, although there may be some professional players aged under 18.

On the employers' side, in 18 countries the most representative employer organisation or league is a member of European Leagues. Only in Belgium and Bulgaria are the most important leagues (representing the divisions accounting for the majority of professional players) not affiliated to European Leagues. In Belgium, Pro League, which organises the men's and women's first divisions, is affiliated to European Leagues, but it is less representative than Nationale Voetballiga (which organises all the lower divisions of men's and women's football) in terms of the absolute number of professional players represented. By contrast, in Bulgaria only one league (BPFL) exists, but this organisation is not affiliated to European Leagues. In seven countries (Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia), no employer organisation or league qualifying for inclusion in this study could be found. In 7 out of the 18 countries where the most representative employer organisation or league is a European Leagues member, these organisations cover (almost) all the countries' divisions that have professional players; in the other 11 countries, the affiliates of European Leagues cover only some of those divisions, although usually a significant part of them. In most cases, the leagues and organisations affiliated to European Leagues organise only the top level or levels of the national championships, although there are also professional players in the lower levels of football (as in Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden), or the European Leagues affiliates organise only men's leagues, although there are also professional women's leagues (as in the Nordic countries, Czechia, France, Germany and Spain).

Table 31: Most representative national-level social partners in each Member State, showing the importance of Fifpro and European Leagues

MS	Most representative trade union	Coverage*	Involved in collective bargaining	Member of Fifpro	Most representative employer organisation/ league	Type of organisation and coverage	Involved in collective bargaining	Member of European Leagues
AT	VdF	Men and under-age	MEB	Yes	ÖFBL	League, divisions 1 and 2 (men)	MEB	Yes
BE	ACV-CSC United Athletes	All	MEB and SEB	Yes	Nationale Voetballiga	League, division 2 (men and women)	MEB	No
BG	ABF	All	MEB	Yes	BPFL	<b>League, divisions 1 and 2 (men)</b>	MEB	No
CY	PASP	All	No	Yes	None			
CZ	ČAFH	Men and women	No	Yes	LFA	League, divisions 1 and 2 (men)	No	Yes
DE	VDV	All	No	No	DFL	League, divisions 1 and 2 (men)	No	Yes
DK	SPF	All	MEB	Yes	DL	League, divisions 1–3 (men)	MEB	Yes
EE	None				None			
EL	PSAPP	Men and women	No	Yes	Super League Ellada	League, division 1 (men)	No	Yes
ES	AFE	All	MEB	Yes	LNFP	League, divisions 1 and 2 (men)	MEB	Yes
FI	JPY	All	No	Yes	FFL	League, division 1 (men)	No	Yes
FR	UNFP	All	MEB	Yes	LFP	League, divisions 1 and 2 (men)	No	Yes
HR	HUNS	All	No	Yes	None			

## Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Professional football sector

MS	Most representative trade union	Coverage*	Involved in collective bargaining	Member of Fifpro	Most representative employer organisation/ league	Type of organisation and coverage	Involved in collective bargaining	Member of European Leagues
HU	HLSZ	All	No	Yes	MLSZ	Football association, divisions 1–3 (men) and division 1 (women)	No	Yes (associate member)
IE	PFAI	Men and women	No	Yes	None			
IT	AIC	Men and women	MEB	Yes	LNPA	League, division 1 (men) and division 1 (women)	MEB	Yes
LT	PFA	Men and women	No	Yes (observer member)	A Lyga	League, division 1 (men)	No	Yes
LU	None				None			
LV	None				LFV	League, division 1 (men)	No	Yes
MT	MFPA	Men and women	No	Yes	None			
NL	VVCS	All	MEB and SEB	Yes	FBO	Employer organisation, divisions 1 and 2 (men) and division 1 (women)	MEB and SEB	Yes
PL	PZP	All	No	Yes	Ekstraklasa	League, division 1 (men)	No	Yes

Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Professional football sector

MS	Most representative trade union	Coverage*	Involved in collective bargaining	Member of Fifpro	Most representative employer organisation/ league	Type of organisation and coverage	Involved in collective bargaining	Member of European Leagues
PT	SJPF	All	MEB	Yes	Liga Portugal	<b>League, divisions 1 and 2 (men) and division 1 (women)</b>	MEB	Yes
RO	AFAN	All	No	Yes	LPF	League, division 1 (men)	No	Yes
SE	Spelarföreningen	All except men in lower divisions	MEB	Yes	SEF	League, divisions 1 and 2 (men)	No	Yes
SI	SPINS	Men and women	No	Yes	None			
SK	UFP	All	No	Yes	ULK	League, division 1 (men)	No	Yes

**Notes:** \* All = organises all professional players that exist in the country (including men, women and under-age players). MEB, multi-employer bargaining; SEB, single-employer bargaining. Organisations in bold are those covering (almost) all professional football in a country.

**Source:** NEC, 2021

### 3.5. Other European trade unions and employer organisations

While 23 of the 28 trade unions representing professional football players are affiliated to Fifpro, only two trade unions (ACV-CSC United Athletes of Belgium and UNFP of France) could be identified that are affiliated to a European organisation other than Fifpro. Both trade unions are directly affiliated to EU Athletes as well as Fifpro. In Slovenia, the Fifpro member SPINS is affiliated at national level to the all-athletes trade union SSS, which is an EU Athletes member. EU Athletes is a leading multi-sport federation of athlete and player associations (that is sports trade unions) in Europe, representing more than 25,000 elite athletes. EU Athletes forms part of the World Players Association, which is the professional sports unit of UNI Global Union. EU Athletes has members in 13 EU Member States (Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden) and organises athletes in a wide range of team sports: basketball, handball, volleyball, rugby, ice hockey, futsal, Gaelic games and football. As an organisation giving a collective voice to European athletes, with a representational domain extending beyond professional football, EU Athletes may potentially compete with Fifpro with regard to professional football, since EU Athletes considers itself an integral part of the labour movement and is a recognised stakeholder in the wider European sport sector, although not a recognised EU-level social partner. However, there is cooperation between EU Athletes and Fifpro Division Europe and, as part of this, Joachim Walltin, General Secretary of Fifpro Division Europe, is currently on the board of EU Athletes, representing Fifpro. EU Athletes has a long-standing cooperation arrangement with the European Association of Sports Employers. Together, they have issued several joint opinions, and they have also requested the establishment of an ESSDC for sports. A trial has, however, not been successful.

Turning to the employer organisations and leagues, in 13 countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden) the European Leagues member (or, in the case of France, Italy and the Netherlands, one of the European Leagues members) is simultaneously also affiliated to the World Leagues Forum. This organisation represents the national football leagues at world level, with the aim of having a say in matters concerning professional football worldwide, such as governance, the rules of the game, the integrity of the game, the schedules of international competitions, employment relations and transfer regulations (including the role of agents and intermediaries). The World Leagues Forum, however, does not organise its own competitions. Even though the World Leagues Forum deals with the same issues as or similar issues to European Leagues, it does not compete with the latter for members, as the focus of the World Leagues Forum is the world level, while European Leagues' focus is the European level, and – as numerous multiple memberships indicate – affiliation to one of these organisations does not rule out membership of the other.

Arbetsgivaralliansen (which is an employer organisation rather than a league) of Sweden is affiliated to SGI Europe, representing enterprises providing services of general interest. No affiliations to other European employer organisations were reported.

On the employers' side, a new organisation was created in 2022–2023. The Union of European Clubs (UEC) has established statutes but did not wish to disclose its list of affiliated clubs. To cover the period between its launch in April 2023 and the first UEC General Assembly, which is planned for the end of 2023, an interim executive board has been established, with representatives of clubs from five EU Member States (Belgium,

Croatia, Ireland, Latvia and Spain) (UEC, 2023). The UEC statutes were published in the Belgian official journal<sup>39</sup> in July 2023.

### 3.6. Capacity to negotiate of Fifpro, European Leagues and ECA

Within the professional football ESSDC, six texts have been agreed. The 2012 autonomous agreement on minimum requirements for player contracts is the key achievement. This agreement expired in 2019 and negotiations are under way with the aim of agreeing on a new version in 2023.

Table 32: Texts agreed in the ESSDC for the professional football sector

Date	Title of the joint text (type of text)
<b>21 August 2020</b>	‘International guidelines on player health under the “Emergency International Match Calendar – Period 2020 to 2023”’ (health and safety guidelines)
<b>17 March 2020</b>	‘Resolution of the European football family on a coordinated response to the impact of the COVID-19 on competitions’ (joint opinion)
<b>17 November 2017</b>	‘Resolution on intermediaries/agents’ (joint opinion)
<b>19 April 2012</b>	‘Agreement regarding the minimum requirements for standard player contracts in the professional football sector in the European Union and the rest of the UEFA territory’ (autonomous agreement)
<b>27 October 2008</b>	‘Professional football – Addendum to the rules of procedure’ (procedural text)
<b>1 July 2008</b>	‘Professional football – Rules of procedure’ (procedural text)

Source: *European Commission social dialogue texts database*

All three European social partner organisations – Fifpro, European Leagues and ECA – set out their objectives in their statutes or articles of association.

Fifpro Division Europe’s articles of association (Article 3) explicitly include the ‘objective to improve and safeguard the terms and conditions of employment and the working conditions of professional footballers in Europe and to conclude a collective labour agreement ... at international or at European level’. The activities through which Fifpro envisages achieving these goals include ‘engagement in a Social Dialogue at European level in cooperation with all parties involved, such as the European Commission, employers’ organisations in European professional football, and the football organisations FIFA and UEFA, with whom a sector dialogue can also be conducted’.

The General Meeting has wide-ranging powers in relation to the goals and activities of Fifpro; it can, for example, amend the articles of association, appoint and dismiss board members, approve the budget and expel members. It is composed of all members (with voting rights) and observer members and observers (both categories with an advisory role). Although the members remain independent organisations, they have – as a matter of principle – to observe the decisions made by the General Meeting (of which they are part)

<sup>39</sup>

<https://kbopub.economie.fgov.be/kbopub/zoeknummerform.html?lang=en&nummer=803.844.641&actionLu=Search>

and the Board. Article 4 of the articles of association stipulate that the ‘members who are authorised to conclude a collective labour agreement on behalf of their own members give a mandate for this authority to Fifpro Division Europe to conclude collective agreements (including collective labour agreements) at European level, on behalf of these members’.

This implies that Fifpro, according to its articles of association, has a statutory mandate and the capacity to negotiate on behalf of its national member unions in matters pertaining to the professional football-related European sectoral social dialogue, as has been proven in practice (see Section 1.3).

In the case of European Leagues, some of the organisation’s objectives, according to Article 2 of its statutes, are to ‘foster friendly relations among its members and with the football stakeholders, and to ensure cooperation between [European Leagues], the leagues and the football stakeholders’. The statutes of European Leagues do not explicitly refer to European social dialogue as such. However, in Article 5 the rights of the ordinary members are described, including the right to ‘nominate candidates for the Board of Directors and other European Leagues bodies and committees’ and the right to ‘attend the meeting of the General Assembly, with the right to vote’. When this is considered in combination with the obligations of the ordinary members laid down in Article 6 – according to which the members have to ‘comply with these Statutes as well as any agreements entered into by the European Leagues with other football entities’ – and with Article 19 – which stipulates the functions and powers of the Board of Directors, including to ‘engage in discussions and enter into legally binding agreements with other entities, on behalf of the European Leagues, upon ratification of the [General Assembly]’ – an implicit mandate for European Leagues to negotiate in matters of European social dialogue on behalf of its members can be inferred. On the basis of Article 19, European Leagues has a statutory mandate and the capacity to negotiate legally binding agreements.

ECA has a statutory capacity to negotiate binding agreements based on its March 2023 statutes. In particular, one of ECA’s statutory objectives, as listed in the 2023 statutes, Article 2, point (c), is ‘to represent the interests of the clubs as employers in Europe and, where relevant, globally, including in the social dialogue process and to act as a social partner where appropriate’. Furthermore, in the same article of the statutes, point (m) notes that an objective is, ‘for the attainment of these objectives, to maintain contact, cooperation and negotiations with any football related organisations or any relevant public and private institutions, including in particular with the relevant social partners, as well as non-Member football clubs’. Therefore, ECA has a statutory mandate and the capacity to negotiate on behalf of all its members in matters pertaining to the professional football-related European sectoral social dialogue.

While only ECA’s ordinary members are entitled to vote on all matters that are under the jurisdiction of the General Assembly, associate members have a right to vote on what is arguably the most important matter subject to a vote by members: the election of representatives to the Board. Indeed, associate members are able to vote to elect subdivision representatives to the ECA Board. The 2023 statutes increased the rights of associate members: previously, they could vote for the election of subdivision representatives to the ECA Board but could not stand for those positions; now, they are entitled to both vote and stand for election. This means that the ordinary member and associate member clubs have access to the ECA Board, in terms of both voting to elect representatives and putting forward candidates for election. They also have access to more than 30 consultative bodies, which have a key role in recommending major decisions to the Board on fundamental topics such as competitions, revenue distribution and regulations, thereby facilitating their involvement at the centre of all ECA’s activities. ECA indicates that, subject to suitable candidatures being received from members, at least 180 clubs will in future have an opportunity to have a role in at least one of ECA’s consultative bodies, the make-up of which is decided by a process of calling for candidates and matching suitability/capability to the specific scope of the consultative body in question. The ECA Social



Dialogue Committee, which provides recommendations directly to the Board as regards all matters related to social dialogue, is composed of two ordinary and three associate members.

ECA's capacity to negotiate is further supported by a non-statutory document, the MoU between UEFA and ECA dating from 2019, specifically Article 4, which states that 'there is a need to find the right balance between labour legislation and the specific characteristics of football, for example through the vehicle of social dialogue and/or collective bargaining agreements'.

Finally, this assessment has also been corroborated in practice, since the three European-level social partner organisations concluded an autonomous collective bargaining agreement in 2012 regarding minimum requirements for standard player contracts in the professional football sector in the European Union and in the rest of the UEFA territory.

For all three parties under scrutiny – Fifpro, European Leagues and ECA – it is also worth noting that their mandate to negotiate binding agreements is also enshrined in Article 1 of the rules of procedure for the ESSDC in the professional football sector and the addendum to those rules.

### 3.7. Effective participation in the professional football ESSDC

In December 2021, there was one plenary meeting of the professional football ESSDC. Eight national delegates from the Member States attended this meeting representing the employers' side, as did the delegates from European Leagues and ECA. Seven national delegates from the Member States attended representing the workers' side, in addition to Fifpro delegates. Attendance during 2021 was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and participation via video conference was preferred. (In 2020, no plenary meeting could take place. Only the EU-level social partners took part in the working group meetings.) The 2021 meeting was also attended by representatives of a number of UEFA affiliates (national football associations), as well as delegates from the larger UEFA territory. In 2021, no working group meetings took place.

The plenary meeting in December 2022 was attended by a large number of participants, as emphasised in the opening address by the UEFA chair and recorded in the ESSDC minutes.

Table 33: Participation in the ESSDC for the professional football sector, 2020–2021

<b>12 Member States with trade union participation in the ESSDC for the football sector</b>	BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, PL, RO, SI, SK
<b>12 Member States with Fifpro-affiliated sectoral trade unions (including observer member from LT) but no participants in the ESSDC</b>	AT, DK, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, MT, NL, PT, SE
<b>12 Member States with employer organisation/club participation in the ESSDC for the professional football sector</b>	CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, HR, IE, LV, PL, RO, SE, SK
<b>9 Member States with European Leagues-affiliated sectoral employer organisations/leagues but no participants in the ESSDC</b>	AT, BE, FI, FR, HU, IT, LT, NL, PT
<b>14 Member States with ECA-affiliated clubs but no participants in the ESSDC</b>	AT, BE, BG, CY, EE, FI, FR, HU, LT, LU, MT, NL, PT, SI

**Notes:** Although the German trade union VDV is not affiliated to Fifpro, there is a cooperation agreement between Fifpro and the trade union, as mentioned in Section 3.1. Croatia and Ireland are included as they were represented by ECA-affiliated clubs.

**Sources:** Eurofound and European Commission

Comparing these attendance figures with the attendance information for 2018 and 2019 reveals the following. During 2018–2019, there were 18 Member States with a trade union participant. All the Member States for which there was a participant during 2021–2022 were also represented during the 2018–2019 period, except Poland. The seven Member States from which there was a participant during 2018–2019 but not during 2021–2022 are Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands and Sweden. On the employers’ side, attendance during 2018–2019 varies much more from that during 2021–2022. Only from Croatia, Poland and Slovakia were there participants during both periods.

Table 34: Participation in the ESSDC for the professional football sector, 2018–2019

<b>18 Member States with trade union participation in the ESSDC for the football sector</b>	AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, HR, HU, MT, NL, RO, SE, SI, SK
<b>11 Member States with employer organisation/club participation in the ESSDC for the professional football sector</b>	AT, BE, CY, FI, FR, HR, HU, MT, NL, PL, SK

**Note:** Cyprus and Malta are included as they were represented by ECA-affiliated clubs.

**Sources:** Eurofound and European Commission

## 4. Conclusions

There were about 30,000 professional football players in the EU27 in 2021. About 2,000 of them were women (7%). There were men professional football players in all Member States. Women professional football players were reported in 18 Member States. The nine Member States in which no women professional football players were reported are Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Croatia, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Slovakia. In several Member States, there are also under-age professional football players.

This study identified 28 trade unions representing professional football players, in 24 Member States. The three Member States in which no sectoral trade union was found were Estonia, Latvia and Luxembourg. The employers are represented by 29 national sectoral employer organisations, in 20 Member States. The Member States for which no sectoral employer organisation was found were Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia.

There is multi-employer collective bargaining for professional football players at sectoral level in 10 Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. In Belgium and the Netherlands, there is sectoral-level collective bargaining in addition to single-employer bargaining at club level. National-level sectoral social dialogue on professional football takes place in nine Member States. These are Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia.

Of the 28 sectoral trade unions, 23 in 23 Member States are affiliated to the International Federation of Professional Footballers' Associations – Division Europe (Fifpro Europe). The Lithuanian trade union is an observer member. Germany has no affiliated trade union, but there is a cooperation agreement between a German trade union and Fifpro. As noted, there is no sector-related trade union in Estonia, Latvia or Luxembourg.

In each of the 23 Member States in which Fifpro has an affiliated trade union, it is the trade union with the most affiliated professional football players in the country. There is no affiliated sectoral trade union in Estonia, Germany, Latvia or Luxembourg. The five sectoral trade unions not affiliated to Fifpro are assessed in Table 35.

**Table 35: Trade unions in professional football not affiliated to Fifpro**

<b>Sectoral trade unions not affiliated to Fifpro</b>	<b>Assessment of the affiliated trade unions in the Member States in question</b>
ABVV-FGTB BBTK-SETCa and ACVLB-CGSLB, Belgium	ACV-CSC United Athletes is affiliated to Fifpro, and it has either the most or the second most affiliated professional football players in Belgium
VDV, Germany	There is no German trade union affiliated to Fifpro (VDV is the only sectoral trade union in Germany)
ProProf, the Netherlands	VVCS is affiliated to Fifpro, and it has the most affiliated professional football players in the Netherlands
Unionen, Sweden	Spelarföreningen is affiliated to Fifpro, and it has the most affiliated professional football players in Sweden

Source: NEC, 2020/2021

Of the trade unions affiliated to Fifpro, 10 are involved in collective bargaining, one from each of the 10 Member States in which collective bargaining takes place. Altogether, there are 12 trade unions involved in collective bargaining for professional football players; thus, 2 of them are not represented by Fifpro.

Of the 18 Member States in which women professional football players were reported, there are trade unions affiliated to Fifpro that organise women football players in 16 of them. The affiliated trade union in Austria does not organise women professional football players, and in Germany Fifpro has no affiliated trade union.

Two trade unions are affiliated to EU Athletes as well as Fifpro.

Based on this, it can be concluded that Fifpro is the **most representative** European trade union organisation in professional football.

European Leagues has 23 affiliates in 19 Member States, of the 29 national employer organisations identified. In Bulgaria, there is a league – BPFL – that is not affiliated to European Leagues. In France, two sectoral employer organisations are affiliated, in the Netherlands two and in Italy three; in all the other Member States only one employer organisation is affiliated.

The six employer organisations not affiliated to European Leagues are assessed in Table 36.

**Table 36: Employer organisations in professional football not affiliated to European Leagues**

Sectoral employer organisations not affiliated to European Leagues	Assessment of the affiliated employer organisations in the Member States in question
Nationale Voetballiga, Belgium	Nationale Voetballiga, which is not affiliated to European Leagues, is ranked most important in Belgium, while Pro League, the European Leagues affiliate, is the second most important organisation
BPFL, Bulgaria	The only employer organisation in Bulgaria is not affiliated to European Leagues
DBU, Denmark	DL in Denmark, a league playing the role of an employer organisation, is affiliated to European Leagues; DBU, which is an organisation representing not only football clubs, is not affiliated
Ligue 1, France	UCPF and LFP, which have the most member clubs, are affiliated to European Leagues
Arbetsgivaralliansen and EFD, Sweden	SEF is affiliated to European Leagues, and it has the same number of member clubs as Arbetsgivaralliansen and EFD, which are not affiliated

Source: NEC, 2020/2021

Each of the six employer organisations not affiliated to European Leagues is involved in collective bargaining. As for the affiliated trade unions, there are 10 employer organisations involved in collective bargaining in 8 of the 10 Member States where sectoral collective bargaining takes place. The two Member States in which collective bargaining takes place without the involvement of an employer organisation affiliated to European Leagues are Bulgaria and Sweden.

Of the 18 Member States with reported women professional football players, in 4 of them there are leagues affiliated to European Leagues that represent the employers of women football players. These are Belgium, Hungary, the Netherlands and Portugal. In Austria, Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Romania there is no national league organising the employers of women professional football

players. In Denmark, France, Italy, Sweden and Spain there is a league that represents the employers of women professional football players, but it is not affiliated to European Leagues.

ECA represents clubs in the men's first division in all EU Member States. Clubs in the first division not affiliated to ECA and clubs in other divisions are, as employers of professional football players, represented indirectly through European Leagues and the national associations to which they are affiliated. In eight Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia), the interests of ECA members are represented at European level exclusively through ECA and their national associations. This is because European Leagues does not have an affiliated league in those countries.

ECA has 136 affiliated clubs, all from the men's first divisions, and in each of the 27 Member States. Together with clubs included in the ECA network, that represents close to 50% of all the first division clubs in the EU. Because its membership is based on the UEFA club coefficient ranking, it changes to a certain degree from year to year. A total of 76 clubs, from 25 Member States, from the list of member clubs provided by ECA in November 2020 provided information for the purpose of this study. Of those, 15 clubs reported being involved in collective bargaining, in six Member States: Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and Spain. ECA also has affiliated clubs involved in collective bargaining in Italy and Portugal, which, however, did not provide information for this study. This means that ECA has member clubs involved in collective bargaining in eight Member States.

ECA has affiliated clubs employing women professional football players in 10 Member States: Austria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

With regard to other European associations organising the employers of professional football players, the UEC, which represents clubs at European level, was established in 2023 (see Section 3.5). Based on the composition of its interim executive board, it has a proven membership of affiliated clubs in at least five EU Member States, namely Belgium, Croatia, Ireland, Latvia and Spain. The UEC reported newly affiliated clubs in the second half of 2023; however, this information could not be checked in the scope of this study. The UEC statutes were published in the Belgian official journal<sup>40</sup> in July 2023.

Based on the available information in 2023, European Leagues and ECA are the **most representative** employer organisations in professional football.

This study has illustrated that there are opportunities for future social partner capacity building in the sector, at both national and European levels.

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<sup>40</sup><https://kbopub.economie.fgov.be/kbopub/zoeknummerform.html?lang=en&nummer=803.844.641&actionLu=Search>

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## Annex 1: Lists of national-level organisations

Table 37: National-level professional football trade unions identified in the report

MS	Abbreviation	Original language name	English name
AT	VdF	Vereinigung der Fußballer	Association of Football Players
BE	ABVV-FGTB BBTK-SETCa	Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond/Fédération générale du travail de Belgique Bond van Bedienden, Technici en Kaderleden/Syndicat des employés, techniciens et cadres	General Labour Federation of Belgium, Union of White-collar Workers, Technicians and Professional and Managerial Staff
BE	ACV-CSC United Athletes	Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond/Confédération des syndicats chrétiens United Athletes (before 2021, ACV-CSC Sporta)	General Christian Union Confederation United Athletes
BE	ACVLB-CGSLB	Algemene Centrale der Liberale Vakverbonden van België/Centrale générale des syndicats libéraux de Belgique	General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium
BG	ABF	Асоциация на българските футболисти	Association of Bulgarian Footballers
CY	PASP	Παγκύπριος Σύνδεσμος Ποδοσφαιριστών	Pan-Cyprian Footballers' Association
CZ	ČAFH	Česká asociace fotbalových hráčů	Czech Association of Football Players
DE	VDV	Vereinigung der Vertragsfußballspieler	Association of Professional Footballers in Germany
DK	SPF	Spillerforeningen	Danish Football Players' Association
EL	PSAPP	Πανελλήνιος Σύνδεσμος Αμειβόμενων Ποδοσφαιριστών	Pan-Hellenic Professional Football Players' Association
ES	AFE	Asociación de Futbolistas Españoles	Spanish Footballers' Association
FI	JPY	Jalkapallon Pelaajayhdistys	Football Players' Association of Finland
FR	UNFP	Union National des Footballeurs Professionnel	National Union of Professional Footballers
HR	HUNS	Hrvatska udruga nogometni sindikat	Croatian Association Football Union
HU	HLSZ	Hivatásos Labdarúgók Szervezete	Hungarian Association of Professional Footballers
IE	PFAI	Professional Footballers' Association of Ireland	Professional Footballers' Association of Ireland
IT	AIC	Associazione Italiana Calciatori	Italian Footballers' Association
LT	PFA	Profesionalių futbolininkų asociacija	Professional Footballers' Association
MT	MFPA	Malta Football Players Association	Malta Football Players Association
NL	ProProf	ProProf	ProProf



MS	Abbreviation	Original language name	English name
NL	VVCS	Vereniging van Contractspelers	Association of Contract Players
PL	PZP	Polski Związek Piłkarzy	Polish Union of Footballers
PT	SJPF	Sindicato dos Jogadores Profissionais de Futebol	Professional Football Players' Union
RO	AFAN	Asociația Fotbaliștilor Amatori și Nonamatori	Association of Professional and Amateur Football Players
SE	Spelarföreningen	Spelarföreningen Fotboll i Sverige	The Players' Union
SE	Unionen	Unionen	Unionen
SI	SPINS	Sindikat profesionalnih igralcev nogometa Slovenije	Union of Professional Football Players of Slovenia
SK	UFP	Únia futbalových profesionálov	Slovakian Union of Football Professionals

Table 38: National-level professional football employer organisations and leagues identified in the report

MS	Abbreviation	Original language name	English name
AT	ÖFBL	Österreichische Fußball-Bundesliga	Austrian Federal Football League
BE	Nationale Voetballiga	Nationale Voetballiga	National Football League
BE	Pro League	Pro League	Pro League
BG	BPFL	Професионална Футболна Лига	Bulgarian Professional Football League
CZ	LFA	Ligová fotbalová asociace	League Football Association
DE	DFL	Deutsche Fußball Liga	German Football League
DK	DBU	Dansk Boldspil-Union	Danish Football Association
DK	DL	Divisionsforeningen	Danish League
EL	Super League Ellada	Σουπερλίγκ Ενα Ελλάδα Συνεταιρισμός Περιορισμένης Ευθύνης	Super League Greece
ES	LNFP	Liga Nacional de Fútbol Profesional	Spanish Football League
FI	FFL	Veikkausliiga	Finnish Football League
FR	LFP	Ligue de Football Professionnel	Professional Football League
FR	Ligue 1	Ligue 1	League One
FR	UCPF	Union des clubs professionnels de football	Union of Professional Football Clubs
HU	MLSZ	Magyar Labdarúgó-szövetség	Hungarian Football Federation
IT	Legapro	Lega Italiana Calcio Professionistico	Italian Professional Football League
IT	LNPA	Lega Nazionale Professionisti Serie A	First Division Professional League
IT	LNPB	Lega Nazionale Professionisti Serie B	Second Division Professional League
LT	A Lyga	Lietuvos futbolo klubų asociacija A lyga	Lithuanian Football Club Association League A
LV	LFV	Latvijas Futbola Virslīga	Latvian Football Higher League
NL	Eredivisie	Eredivisie	Premier League

MS	Abbreviation	Original language name	English name
NL	FBO	Federatie van betaald voetbal organisaties	Federation of Professional Football Organisations
PL	Ekstraklasa	Ekstraklasa	Polish Professional Football League Ekstraklasa
PT	Liga Portugal	Liga Portuguesa de Futebol Profissional	Portuguese Professional Football League
RO	LPF	Liga Profesionistă de Fotbal	Romanian Professional Football League
SE	Arbetsgivaralliansen	Arbetsgivaralliansen	The Employers' Alliance
SE	EFD	Elitfotboll dam	Elite Football Women
SE	SEF	Svensk elitfotboll	Swedish Elite Football Association
SK	ULK	Únia ligových klubov	League Clubs Union

## **Annex 2: Information on clubs affiliated to ECA not included in Table 28**

Table 39 includes all football clubs included in the list of ECA affiliates provided in 2020 that did not respond to the questions posed to them by the NEC for this study. The table lists 60 clubs from 18 Member States. The limited information on the clubs comes mostly from their websites. In addition, for seven clubs from Italy and two from Romania, information was provided by ECA. Partial information was submitted by the Eurofound correspondent for Italy on 5 of the 10 ECA member clubs, indicating that these clubs tend to be significant in terms of numbers of men professional players and other staff. Some of these Italian clubs employ women professional players, since the concept of professionalism has been applied to the women's league in Italy since July 2022 – that is, one year after the data collection stage for this report was finalised.

Table 39: Other ECA affiliates' membership domains and strengths

MS	Club	Number of ...					Activities outside football**	Collective bargaining involvement***
		Professional footballers	Men	Women	Under-age players	Other workers*		
AT	SK Sturm Graz	54	52	2	14	59	Yes	No
AT	FC Salzburg	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	Yes	No
BE	KRC Genk	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	Yes
BE	RSC Anderlecht	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	Yes
BE	Standard Liège	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	Yes
BE	KAA Gent	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	Yes
BG	PFC CSKA Sofia	36	36	0	251	23	Yes	No
CZ	FK Mladá Boleslav	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No
CZ	FC Viktoria Plzeň	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No
CZ	AC Sparta Praha	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No
CZ	FC Slovan Liberec	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No
DE	Borussia Mönchengladbach	39	39	0	214	115	Yes	No
DE	TSG 1899 Hoffenheim	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No
DE	RB Leipzig	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No
DE	Bayer 04 Leverkusen	54	28	26	72	300	No	No
DE	Eintracht Frankfurt	158	112	46	161	336	No	No
DE	SV Werder Bremen	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No
DK	Brøndby IF	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

## Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Professional football sector

MS	Club	Number of ...					Activities outside football**	Collective bargaining involvement***
		Professional footballers	Men	Women	Under-age players	Other workers*		
DK	Aalborg BK	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
DK	Odense BK	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
EL	Asteras Tripolis	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No
ES	Villarreal CF	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
ES	Valencia CF	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
ES	Real Sociedad	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
FI	HJK Helsinki	50	25	25	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No
FR	Montpellier Hérault SC	28	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
FR	Stade Rennais FC	27	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
FR	AS Saint-Étienne	30	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
FR	AS Monaco	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
IT	AC Milan	60	60	0	n.a.	322	No	No
IT	Juventus FC	85	85	0	334	496	No	No
IT	Udinese Calcio <sup>ECA</sup>	28	28	0	192	35	Yes	Yes
IT	FC Internazionale Milano <sup>ECA</sup>	118	90	28	289	340	Yes	Yes
IT	UC Sampdoria <sup>ECA</sup>	94	71	23	302	174	No	Yes
IT	SSC Napoli	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
IT	Atalanta BC <sup>ECA</sup>	101	101	0	107	80	No	Yes
IT	AS Roma <sup>ECA</sup>	104	73	31	299	125	No	Yes
IT	SS Lazio <sup>ECA</sup>	55	55	0	235	n.a.	Yes	Yes
IT	ACF Fiorentina <sup>ECA</sup>	90	65	25	300	200	No	Yes

## Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Professional football sector

MS	Club	Number of ...					Activities outside football**	Collective bargaining involvement***
		Professional footballers	Men	Women	Under-age players	Other workers*		
LU	FC Differdange 03	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No
LU	CS Fola Esch	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No
LV	FK Spartaks Jūrmala	20–30	20–30	0	n.a.	n.a.	No	No
LV	FK Ventspils	20–30	20–30	0	n.a.	n.a.	No	No
NL	AZ Alkmaar	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	Yes
NL	SBV Vitesse	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
NL	FC Twente	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
NL	Feyenoord Rotterdam	76	55	21	23	283	Yes	Yes
NL	PSV Eindhoven	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
NL	SC Heerenveen	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
PL	Jagiellonia Białystok	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No
PL	Wisła Kraków	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	Yes	No
PL	Lech Poznań	88	62	26	245	245	Yes	Yes
PL	Ślask Wrocław	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	Yes	No
PT	FC Porto	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	Yes
RO	FC Astra Giurgiu	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No
RO	CFR 1907 Cluj <sup>ECA</sup>	48	48	0	280	35	Yes	No
RO	FCSB <sup>ECA</sup>	64	55	9	347****	89	No	No
SE	AIK Fotboll	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	Yes	No
SE	IFK Göteborg	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No	No

Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Professional football sector

MS	Club	Number of ...					Activities outside football**	Collective bargaining involvement***
		Professional footballers	Men	Women	Under-age players	Other workers*		
SE	IF Elfsborg	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	No	No
18 of 27 MS	60 ECA member clubs (membership numbers not checked by the NEC)	Number of professional footballers ranges from 20 to 158	20 to 112 men professional players	0 to 46 women professional players	14 to 347**** under-age professional players	23 to 496 other workers	At least 13 clubs engaged in activities outside professional football	At least 15 clubs involved in collective bargaining

**Notes:** \* Workers employed by the club other than professional football players, such as medical staff, managers, coaches, etc. \*\* Activities such as merchandising, event management, hospitality, etc. \*\*\* Direct collective bargaining involvement (exclusively single-employer bargaining). \*\*\*\* This figure probably includes non-professional under-age players. <sup>ECA</sup> Information provided by ECA during the consultation process in 2023; not checked by the NEC. n.a. = not available.

**Source:** NEC, 2021

## Annex 3: Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Table 40: National correspondents who contributed to this report

Member State	Correspondent(s)	Organisation
AT	Georg Adam	Working Life Research Centre
BE	Dries Van Herreweghe	HIVA Research Institute, KU Leuven
BG	Violeta Ivanova Ivailo Dinev	Institute of Social and Trade Union Research
CY	Pavlos Kalosinatos	Cyprus Labour Institute – Pancyprian Federation of Labour
CZ	Ales Kroupa	Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs
DE	Sandra Vogel	German Economic Institute
	Mona Aranea	Institute for Economic and Social Research, Hans Boeckler Foundation
DK	Carsten Jorgensen	FAOS, University of Copenhagen
EE	Ingel Kadarik	Praxis Centre for Policy Studies
EL	Penny Georgiadou	GSEE Labour Institute
ES	Oscar Molina Romo	Institute for Labour Studies, Autonomous University of Barcelona
FI	Amanda Kinnunen	Oxford Research AB
FR	Frédéric Turlan	IR Share
HR	Predrag Bejakovic Irena Klemencic	Institute of Public Finance
HU	Nóra Krokovay	Kopint-Tárki Institute for Economic Research
IE	Andy Prendergast	IRN Publishing
IT	Lisa Dorigatti	Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan
LT	Inga Blaziene	Lithuanian Social Research Centre
LU	Franz Clément	Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research
LV	Krišs Karnītis	EPC Ltd
MT	Vincent Marmara	University of Malta
NL	Amber van der Graaf Thomas de Winter	Panteia BV
PL	Maciej Pańków	Foundation Institute of Public Affairs
PT	Reinhard Naumann	CESIS – Centre for Studies on Social Intervention
RO	Victoria Stoiciu Nicoleta Voicu	European Institute of Romania
SE	Sirin Celik Nils Brandsma	Oxford Research AB
SI	Barbara Lužar	Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana
SK	Rastislav Bednárík	Institute for Labour and Family Research



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This study provides information allowing for an assessment of the representativeness of the actors involved in the European sectoral social dialogue committee for the professional football sector. Their relative representativeness legitimises their right to be consulted, their role and effective participation in the European sectoral social dialogue and their capacity to negotiate agreements.

The aim of Eurofound's studies on representativeness is to identify the relevant national and European social partner organisations in the field of industrial relations in the EU Member States. This study identifies Fifpro – representing employees – and European Leagues and ECA – representing employers – as the representative European-level social partner organisations in the professional football sector.

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