

Financial analysis of big-5 league clubs' transfers

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1. Introduction

Since its creation in 2005, the CIES Football Observatory has been monitoring football players' transfers through information published by clubs, governing bodies and the media. This Monthly Report analyses economic flows for transactions occurred during the last decade from or to clubs in the big-5 European leagues: the English Premier League, the Spanish Liga, the German Bundesliga, the Italian Serie A and the French Ligue 1.

The report covers the ten-year period between 2013 and 2022. It analyses transfer fees paid by big-5 league teams (chapter "investments"), the clubs and leagues having benefited from these indemnities (chapter "receipts"), as well as the net balances at both teams' and leagues' level (chapter "net spending").

The figures published include fixed indemnities for permanent transfers, eventual "add-ons" regardless of their effective payment, as well as sums invested for paying loans. The amounts paid in the case of loans with an obligation to buy are computed for the year of the transfer. Within the limits of information available, data on beneficiaries take into consideration eventual "sell-ons" negotiated by former clubs.

2. Investments

After the pandemic years, big-5 league clubs' transfer market investments have risen sharply in 2022: +61% compared to the previous year. This holds true for both the winter (+190%) and the summer (+49%) transfer windows. The level of transfer fee expenditure observed in 2022 is the second highest over the ten-year period analysed: €6.2 billion (just about -7% with respect to the record high of 2019).

A noticeable increase compared to 2021 was recorded in the English Premier League: +€ 1.3 billion to exceed the €3 billion mark. This is an all-time record! Growth was measured in all of the major European championships. The share of English Premier League clubs' investments out of total big-5 league teams' ones also reached a new record in 2022: 48.5% compared to 38.7% during the whole ten-year period studied.

Figure 1: big-5 league club transfer fee investments, € billion (2013-2022)

Year	● Winter	● Summer	Total
2013	0.41	2.33	2.74
2014	0.39	2.52	2.91
2015	0.48	3.37	3.85
2016	0.51	3.73	4.24
2017	0.79	5.29	6.08
2018	1.04	4.78	5.82
2019	0.83	5.86	6.69
2020	1.30	3.53	4.83
2021	0.32	3.52	3.84
2022	0.94	5.25	6.19
Total	7.01	40.19	47.20

Figure 2: transfer fee investments per big-5 league, € million (2013-2022)

2013	0.94	0.58	0.46	0.31	0.45
2014	1.26	0.48	0.59	0.35	0.24
2015	1.50	0.85	0.63	0.50	0.37
2016	1.78	0.86	0.61	0.72	0.28
2017	2.10	1.27	0.80	0.80	1.12
2018	2.13	1.20	1.29	0.61	0.59
2019	1.88	1.48	1.55	0.92	0.85
2020	1.96	1.05	0.58	0.60	0.65
2021	1.70	0.78	0.36	0.51	0.50
2022	3.01	1.03	0.72	0.67	0.77
Total	18.26	9.58	7.59	5.99	5.82

The rankings for clubs having committed the most money (including add-ons irrespective of their effective payment) to sign new recruits over the last ten years shows the financial power of a handful of dominant teams. Chelsea is at the top of the table with an average of €181M transfer fee investments per year, closely followed by Barcelona and the two Manchester's clubs. The spending of the twenty most active clubs represents 52% of the total big-5 league club expenditure.

Chelsea (€333M) also tops the expenditure table for the 2022 calendar year, ahead of Manchester United (€268M), Barcelona (€267M) and the freshly Saudi-owned team of Newcastle United (€259M). The investments of the twenty most active clubs represent in this case almost 60% of total big-5 league teams' transfer spending, which reflects the considerable gaps existing in the financial means available to clubs.

Figure 3: transfer fee investments by club, € million (2013-2022)

1		Chelsea FC (ENG)	1 815
2		FC Barcelona (ESP)	1 811
3		Manchester City (ENG)	1 806
4		Manchester United (ENG)	1 754
5		Juventus FC (ITA)	1 580
6		Paris St-Germain (FRA)	1 459
7		Real Madrid (ESP)	1 215
8		Liverpool FC (ENG)	1 178
9		Arsenal FC (ENG)	1 116
10		Atlético Madrid (ESP)	1 115
11		Tottenham Hotspur (ENG)	1 099
12		AS Monaco (FRA)	1 037
13		Internazionale (ITA)	1 008
14		Everton FC (ENG)	1 000
15		AS Roma (ITA)	959
16		Bayern München (GER)	918
17		Borussia Dortmund (GER)	886
18		West Ham United (ENG)	869
19		Milan AC (ITA)	866
20		SSC Napoli (ITA)	861

Figure 4: transfer fee investments by club, € million (2022)

1		Chelsea FC (ENG)	333
2		Manchester United (ENG)	268
3		FC Barcelona (ESP)	267
4		Newcastle United (ENG)	259
5		West Ham United (ENG)	220
6		Nottingham Forest (ENG)	216
7		Tottenham Hotspur (ENG)	191
.		Paris St-Germain (FRA)	191
9		Juventus FC (ITA)	188
10		Liverpool FC (ENG)	181
11		Bayern München (GER)	175
12		Manchester City (ENG)	174
13		Everton FC (ENG)	173
14		Wolverhampton FC (ENG)	153
15		Arsenal FC (ENG)	144
16		Leeds United (ENG)	126
17		SSC Napoli (ITA)	109
18		Borussia Dortmund (GER)	108
19		Aston Villa (ENG)	107
20		Atalanta BC (ITA)	104

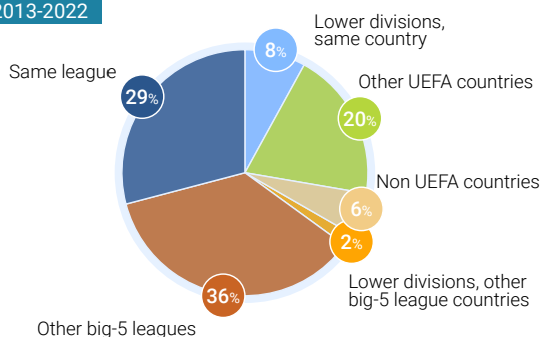
3. Receipts

The analysis of teams having benefited from transfer fees invested by big-5 league clubs over the past ten years shows that most of the money stays within the five major championships: almost two thirds of the total. This reflects the fact that the most expensive transfers generally occur between clubs of the five biggest leagues. However, in 2022, the share of fees cashed in by teams from other UEFA associations was particularly high (23.9%).

The Portuguese top division is the non-big-5 league that benefited most from transfer fee investments of clubs from the five major European championships. Their teams have collected €2.4 billion over the last ten years (on average €241M per year). Next, we find the English Championship (€216M/year), the Dutch Eredivisie (€172M/year) and, following further down, the Brazilian (€119M/year) and Belgian (€110M/year) top divisions.

Figure 5: beneficiaries of transfer fees invested by big-5 league clubs

2013-2022



2022

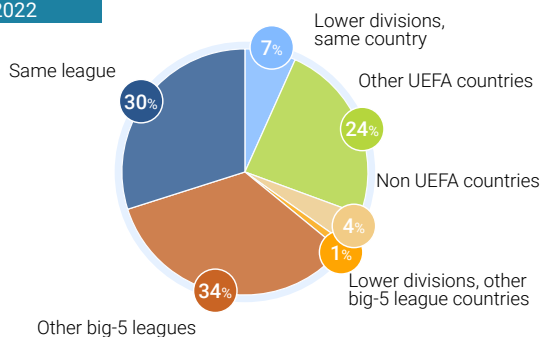


Figure 6: top non-big-5 league beneficiaries of transfer fees invested by big-5 league clubs, € million (2013-2022)

1	Primeira Liga (POR)	2410
2	Championship (ENG/2)	2165
3	Eredivisie (NED)	1716
4	Brasileirão (BRA)	1186
5	Pro League (BEL)	1100
6	Serie B (ITA/2)	603
7	Ligue 2 (FRA/2)	546
8	2. Bundesliga (GER/2)	521
9	Primera División (ARG)	515
10	Bundesliga (AUT)	513
11	LaLiga 2 (ESP/2)	469
12	Premier League (RUS)	464
13	Super League (SUI)	396
14	Süper Lig (TUR)	367
15	Premier-Liha (UKR)	337
16	1. HNL (CRO)	328
17	Superliga (DEN)	290
18	Premiership (SCO)	232
19	Super League 1 (GRE)	203
.	MLS (USA/CAN)	203

With almost €1.2 billion in income generated by transferring players to big-5 league teams, Monaco tops the clubs' earnings table for the ten-year period studied. Four teams outside of the five major European championships figure in the top 20: Benfica (7th, €867M), Ajax (9th, €812M), Porto (14th, €694M) and Sporting CP (20th, €551M). Though several wealthy clubs, such as Chelsea (2nd, €1.1 bn), are in the top 20, as we shall see in the following chapter, their transfer operations are in the red.

Manchester City (€279 M) is at the top of the table for transfer fees received from big-5 league clubs in 2022 (Sterling, Ferran Torres, Gabriel Jesus, Zinchenko, etc.). The English team outranks Ajax (Antony, Lisandro Martínez, Haller, Gravenberch, etc.), Brighton & Hove (Cucurella, Bissouma, Maupay, Östigard, etc.) and Porto (Luis Díaz, Vitorinha, Fábio Vieira, Corona, etc.).

Figure 7: top club beneficiaries of transfer fees invested by big-5 league teams, € million (2013-2022)

1		AS Monaco (FRA)	1 174
2		Chelsea FC (ENG)	1 110
3		Real Madrid (ESP)	1 028
4		Juventus FC (ITA)	1 002
5		FC Barcelona (ESP)	973
6		Borussia Dortmund (GER)	873
7		SL Benfica (POR)	867
8		Manchester City (ENG)	825
9		AFC Ajax (NED)	812
10		Atlético Madrid (ESP)	793
11		AS Roma (ITA)	766
12		Liverpool FC (ENG)	732
13		Sevilla FC (ESP)	717
14		FC Porto (POR)	694
15		LOSC Lille (FRA)	678
16		Olympique Lyonnais (FRA)	664
17		Internazionale (ITA)	628
18		Atalanta BC (ITA)	575
19		Valencia CF (ESP)	569
20		Sporting CP (POR)	551

Figure 8: top club beneficiaries of transfer fees invested by big-5 league teams, € million (2022)

1		Manchester City (ENG)	279
2		AFC Ajax (NED)	226
3		Brighton & Hove (ENG)	156
4		FC Porto (POR)	140
5		Juventus FC (ITA)	136
6		AS Monaco (FRA)	135
7		Bayern München (GER)	125
8		Sporting CP (POR)	120
9		LOSC Lille (FRA)	118
10		Leeds United (ENG)	115
11		Burnley FC (ENG)	113
12		Real Madrid (ESP)	110
13		Everton FC (ENG)	103
14		US Sassuolo (ITA)	102
15		Olympique Lyonnais (FRA)	100
16		SL Benfica (POR)	99
17		Sevilla FC (ESP)	99
18		RB Salzburg (AUT)	93
19		RB Leipzig (GER)	89
20		ACF Fiorentina (ITA)	88

4. Net spending

For an optimum understanding of the transfer market, beyond the sums spent and received, it is relevant to study the net balance of operations. With an accumulated deficit of almost €9.5 billion, the English Premier League stands apart from the rest. Conversely, despite Paris St-Germain's highly negative balance (-€868M), the French Ligue 1 is the only competition from the big-5 recording a positive net transfer spending (+€350M) over the last decade.

The league figures for transfer operations concluded in 2022 confirm the specificity of the English case. Premier League teams registered a total negative spending of more than -€1.7 billion. This deficit is ten times higher than that of the league with the second most negative balance: the Spanish Liga (-€144M). Conversely, the French Ligue 1 (+€76M) and the German Bundesliga (+€18M) have positive figures.

Figure 9: net transfer spending per league, € million (2013-2022)

	Invest.	Receipts	Balance
Premier League (ENG)	18 259	8 760	-9 499
Serie A (ITA)	9 574	8 188	-1 386
LaLiga (ESP)	7 577	6 788	-789
Bundesliga (GER)	5 978	5 195	-783
Ligue 1 (FRA)	5 809	6 159	+350

Figure 10 : net transfer spending per league, € million (2022)

	Invest.	Receipts	Balance
Premier League (ENG)	3 006	1 280	-1 726
LaLiga (ESP)	721	577	-144
Serie A (ITA)	1 033	955	-78
Bundesliga (GER)	667	685	+18
Ligue 1 (FRA)	769	845	+76

Three French clubs, LOSC Lille (+€379M), Olympique Lyonnais (+€282M) and Monaco (+€215M), are at the top of the rankings for current big-5 league teams with the most positive transfer balances since January 2013. Two Italian teams specialised in the trading of players follow them: Udinese (+€190M) and Atalanta (+€139M).

At the opposite end of the picture, Manchester United totals by far the most negative net transfer spending over the past decade (-€ 1.27 billion), followed by Manchester City (-€902M) and Paris St-Germain (-€868M). Thirteen clubs from the English Premier League are in the top 20. All of the current English top division teams have negative transfer balances, while only five French Ligue 1 teams are in this situation.

Figure 11: most positive net transfer spending for current big-5 league clubs, € million (2013-2022)

		Invest.	Receipts	Balance
1	 LOSC Lille (FRA)	342	721	+379
2	 Olympique Lyonnais (FRA)	441	723	+282
3	 AS Monaco (FRA)	1 037	1 252	+215
4	 Udinese Calcio (ITA)	231	421	+190
5	 Atalanta BC (ITA)	453	592	+139
6	 TSG Hoffenheim (GER)	229	355	+126
7	 Montpellier HSC (FRA)	75	186	+111
8	 Sampdoria UC (ITA)	338	450	+112
9	 Empoli FC (ITA)	93	201	+108
10	 Sevilla FC (ESP)	710	798	+88
11	 Angers SCO (FRA)	65	149	+84
12	 Real Sociedad (ESP)	233	318	+85
13	 Toulouse FC (FRA)	96	178	+82
14	 Athletic Club (ESP)	107	184	+77
15	 ACF Fiorentina (ITA)	473	549	+76
.	 FSV Mainz 05 (GER)	184	260	+76
17	 Valencia CF (ESP)	553	616	+63
18	 FC Lorient (FRA)	96	157	+61
.	 Stade de Reims (FRA)	115	176	+61
20	 SC Freiburg (GER)	145	201	+56

Figure 12: most negative net transfer spending among current big-5 league clubs, € million (2013-2022)

		Invest.	Receipts	Balance
1	 Manchester United (ENG)	1 754	485	-1 269
2	 Manchester City (ENG)	1 806	904	-902
3	 Paris St-Germain (FRA)	1 459	591	-868
4	 FC Barcelona (ESP)	1 811	1 062	-749
5	 Arsenal FC (ENG)	1 116	424	-692
6	 Chelsea FC (ENG)	1 815	1 256	-559
7	 West Ham United (ENG)	869	313	-556
8	 Juventus FC (ITA)	1 580	1 080	-500
9	 Milan AC (ITA)	866	378	-488
10	 Newcastle United (ENG)	761	294	-467
11	 Everton FC (ENG)	1 000	536	-464
12	 Tottenham Hotspur (ENG)	1 099	645	-454
13	 Aston Villa (ENG)	748	325	-423
14	 Bayern München (GER)	918	566	-352
15	 Crystal Palace (ENG)	475	142	-333
16	 Wolverhampton FC (ENG)	606	283	-323
17	 Liverpool FC (ENG)	1 178	857	-321
18	 Internazionale (ITA)	1 008	710	-298
19	 Fulham FC (ENG)	436	160	-276
20	 SSC Napoli (ITA)	861	614	-247

The over-representation of Premier League clubs among those with the most negative balances for transfers is also noticeable for 2022. Indeed, ten English teams rank in the top twelve positions. Only Barcelona and Paris St-Germain break this hegemony. Conversely, Manchester City, Brighton & Hove and Leicester City are the only Premier League clubs in the top 20 of clubs from the big-5 having recorded the most positive net transfer spending in 2022.

Figure 13: most positive net transfer spending per club, € million (2022)

		Invest.	Receipts	Balance
1	Manchester City (ENG)	174	292	+118
2	Brighton & Hove (ENG)	71	162	+91
3	LOSC Lille (FRA)	34	121	+87
.	AS Monaco (FRA)	61	148	+87
5	Olympique Lyonnais (FRA)	30	110	+80
6	Sevilla FC (ESP)	40	107	+67
7	Leicester City (ENG)	20	80	+60
8	Valencia CF (ESP)	15	67	+52
9	AS Roma (ITA)	12	62	+50
10	Udinese Calcio (ITA)	13	54	+41
11	Stade de Reims (FRA)	38	75	+37
12	US Sassuolo (ITA)	76	111	+35
13	ACF Fiorentina (ITA)	61	92	+31
14	Sampdoria UC (ITA)	5	35	+30
15	RB Leipzig (GER)	84	111	+27
.	VfB Stuttgart (GER)	16	43	+27
.	FSV Mainz 05 (GER)	17	44	+27
18	Empoli FC (ITA)	20	45	+25
19	Angers SCO (FRA)	9	31	+22
20	Real Sociedad (ESP)	61	82	+21

Figure 14: most negative net transfer spending per club, € million (2022)

		Invest.	Receipts	Balance
1	Chelsea FC (ENG)	333	74	-259
2	Newcastle United (ENG)	259	3	-256
3	Manchester United (ENG)	268	35	-233
4	FC Barcelona (ESP)	267	56	-211
5	Nottingham Forest (ENG)	216	6	-210
6	West Ham United (ENG)	220	24	-196
7	Paris St-Germain (FRA)	191	70	-121
8	Tottenham Hotspur (ENG)	191	75	-116
9	Arsenal FC (ENG)	144	37	-107
10	Southampton FC (ENG)	100	1	-99
11	Liverpool FC (ENG)	181	85	-96
12	Wolverhampton FC (ENG)	153	83	-70
.	Olympique Marseille (FRA)	93	23	-70
.	Everton FC (ENG)	173	103	-70
15	Brentford FC (ENG)	70	5	-65
16	Aston Villa (ENG)	107	49	-58
.	Fulham FC (ENG)	83	25	-58
18	Crystal Palace (ENG)	57	6	-51
19	Juventus FC (ITA)	188	141	-47
20	AC Monza (ITA)	45	0	-45

5. Conclusion

Transfer fee investments of clubs from the five major European leagues strongly increased in 2022 in comparison to the pandemic years: +61% with respect to 2020 and +28% compared to 2021. A record spending for a calendar year was observed in the English Premier League: €3.0 billion (+€878 M with respect to the previous 2018 record).

A new record high was also registered with regard to the share of transfer fees paid by English Premier League teams out of total big-5 league clubs' investments. From an average of 38.7% during the ten-year period studied, this percentage reached 48.5% in 2022. Ten clubs from the English top division figure in the top twelve positions of big-5 league teams with the most negative net transfer spending in 2022.

At league level, during the ten years analysed, the English Premier League cumulated a transfer deficit of almost €9.5 billion, followed by the Italian Serie A with "just" €1.4 billion. The French Ligue 1 is at the opposite end (+€350M). Manchester United tops the table for the most negative last ten years' net transfer spending at club level (-€1.27 billion), while LOSC Lille is at the other extreme (+€379M). For 2022, the totals stretch from -€259M for Chelsea to +€118M for Manchester City.