

## World demographic study: 15 leagues' comparison

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### 1. Introduction

This Monthly Report compares ten non-European leagues and the top five European ones from the point of view of the demographic characteristics of players involved. The comparison covers footballers fielded in domestic league games during the second semester of 2021. In total, the analysis comprises 7,617 players from 286 clubs.

The study includes five leagues from Latin America (Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Mexico), one North American (United States and Canada), three Asian (Japan, China and South Korea), one Oceanic (Australia and New Zealand), as well as the five most competitive European ones (England, Spain, Italy, Germany and France).

Figure 1: sample of the study








		Players	Clubs	Matches
	Liga Profesional (ARG)	773	26	325
	A-League (AUS)	231	12	31
	Brasileirão (BRA)	680	20	309
	Primera División (CHI)	491	17	193
	Super League (CHN)	422	16	126
	Primera A (COL)	585	20	226
	Premier League (ENG)	479	20	183
	La Liga (ESP)	520	20	182
	Ligue 1 (FRA)	503	20	188
	Bundesliga (GER)	447	18	153
	Serie A (ITA)	508	20	189
	J1 League (JPN)	509	20	187
	K League 1 (KOR)	345	12	117
	Liga MX (MEX)	467	18	171
	MLS (USA/CAN)	696	27	334
	All the leagues	7'617	286	2'914

## 2. Age of players

The values for the average age of line-ups fielded vary from a minimum of 26.3 years in the French Ligue 1 to a maximum of 28.6 years in the Chinese Super League. The championships of three countries stand out when it comes to using footballers under 21 years of age: Brazil (9.4% of total playing time), Argentina (9.3%) and France (9.2%). These three countries also are the three exporting the most footballers worldwide.

By club, the average age on the pitch varies from just 23.4 years for New York RB to a maximum of 31.0 for the Chileans of CD Palestino. It is also interesting to note that the youngest Brazilian team, RB Bragantino, and the third youngest German one, RB Leipzig, are part of the Red Bull empire. Undergoing a complete rebuild, FC Barcelona is the team where U21 players have had the greatest amount of match time during the semester studied: 28.0%.

Figure 2: average age on the pitch, per league (second semester 2021)

	Age	<21years	>30years
 Ligue 1 (FRA)	26.30	9.2%	18.9%
 Bundesliga (GER)	26.55	7.0%	21.5%
 MLS (USA/CAN)	27.15	7.0%	26.9%
 Premier League (ENG)	27.16	4.2%	24.3%
 Serie A (ITA)	27.26	4.7%	26.3%
 Liga Profesional (ARG)	27.29	9.3%	30.1%
 Brasileirão (BRA)	27.43	9.4%	31.6%
 A-League (AUS)	27.50	8.3%	33.4%
 Primera A (COL)	27.55	6.8%	29.9%
 Primera División (CHI)	27.69	7.9%	36.2%
 Liga MX (MEX)	27.77	3.4%	28.8%
 J1 League (JPN)	27.85	4.7%	31.5%
 La Liga (ESP)	27.91	4.6%	28.4%
 K League 1 (KOR)	28.23	5.6%	35.2%
 Super League (CHN)	28.65	3.5%	42.8%
Total	27.44	6.5%	29.2%

### 3. Club-trained players

Club-trained players are defined as footballers having played for at least three seasons between 15 and 21 years of age for their employer club. The percentage of minutes for this category of players within the 15 leagues covered in the study varies between just 7.4% in the Italian Serie A and 29.4% in the Argentinean Liga Profesional. This proportion was also less than 10% in the MLS, where few clubs have set up effective training programmes.

Club-trained footballers have played more than two-thirds of minutes in three teams: the Colombians of Envigado (71.5%), as well as the Argentineans of Banfield (70.3%) and Rosario Central (69.3%). Conversely, twenty teams used none, of which six from the MLS and four from the Italian Serie A. Boca Juniors trained the most players present in the 15 leagues analysed: 78 footballers who played a total of 61,517 minutes, of which 12.3% at Boca itself, 58.4% in other top division Argentinean teams and 29.3% in clubs abroad.

Figure 3: % of minutes by club-trained players, per league (second semester 2021)

	Minutes (%)	Players per club
Liga Profesional (ARG)	29.4%	12.1
Primera División (CHI)	25.0%	10.3
Primera A (COL)	23.5%	9.6
A-League (AUS)	20.2%	4.5
Super League (CHN)	18.6%	5.8
Brasileirão (BRA)	18.4%	8.7
La Liga (ESP)	17.5%	5.8
J1 League (JPN)	17.3%	5.1
K League 1 (KOR)	16.3%	5.8
Liga MX (MEX)	15.7%	6.1
Premier League (ENG)	12.0%	3.7
Ligue 1 (FRA)	11.6%	4.2
Bundesliga (GER)	10.1%	2.8
MLS (USA/CAN)	9.2%	3.5
Serie A (ITA)	7.4%	2.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>16.8%</b>	<b>6.1</b>

Figure 4: main training clubs

	Number of players trained	% minutes		
		[Club]	[League]	[Abroad]
Boca Juniors (ARG)	78	12.3%	58.4%	29.3%
River Plate (ARG)	60	15.0%	24.6%	60.4%
Deportivo Cali (COL)	56	19.0%	41.2%	39.8%
FC Barcelona (ESP)	50	15.1%	25.7%	59.2%
São Paulo FC (BRA)	49	21.7%	52.8%	25.5%
Colo Colo (CHI)	48	24.8%	54.7%	20.5%
Newell's Old Boys (ARG)	48	32.0%	47.2%	20.8%
Real Madrid (ESP)	46	8.4%	58.6%	33.0%
Rosario Central (ARG)	45	45.0%	35.0%	20.0%
Atlético Nacional (COL)	43	12.0%	46.5%	41.5%
CA Lanús (ARG)	42	40.8%	40.0%	19.2%
Santos FC (BRA)	42	24.2%	53.3%	22.5%
Envigado FC (COL)	41	47.8%	30.5%	21.7%
Universidad Católica (CHI)	41	23.7%	60.3%	16.0%
CA San Lorenzo (ARG)	40	25.4%	45.1%	29.5%
Flamengo (BRA)	40	12.6%	58.6%	28.8%
SC Internacional (BRA)	40	18.6%	56.1%	25.3%
Independ. Medellín (COL)	39	10.3%	65.5%	24.2%
CA Independiente (ARG)	39	32.9%	33.9%	33.2%
Santiago Wanderers (CHI)	38	57.1%	35.9%	7.0%

[Club]: in the club, [League]: in other clubs of the same league, [Abroad]: abroad

### 4. Expatriates

Expatriates are defined as footballers playing outside of the association where they grew up and from where they departed for football-related reasons. Players from the United States active in Canadian teams and Australians in New Zealand were not considered expatriates. In total, expatriates have played 34.7% of minutes during the second semester of 2021, with a minimum of 9.0% in Chile and a maximum of 64.0% in Italy. The Serie A also has the most diversified clubs with 11.5 origins per team on average.

Seven teams did not field any player having grown up abroad during domestic league matches played in the second semester of 2021: Athletic Club (ESP), CD Guadalajara (MEX), Atlético Huila (COL), Associação Chapecoense (BRA), as well as CA Sarmiento, Arsenal de Sarandí and CA Platense in Argentina. Conversely, expatriates played a record percentage of minutes in the MLS team of Portland Timbers: 85.9%

Argentina supplies the most expatriate players active in the championships analysed, followed by Brazil, France, Uruguay and Colombia. The 246 Argentineans abroad played a total of 245,172 minutes during the semester covered. They are most numerous in Chile (65 players, 26.3% of minutes of all Argentinean expatriates), while the principle destination of Brazilians is Japan (63 players, 23.5%) and that of the French is England (41, 24.5%).

Figure 5: % of minutes by expatriates and expatriate origins per club, per league (second semester 2021)

	Minutes (%)	Origins per club
Serie A (ITA)	64.0%	11.5
Premier League (ENG)	59.5%	10.1
MLS (USA/CAN)	58.8%	9.8
Bundesliga (GER)	54.1%	9.4
Liga MX (MEX)	48.2%	5.2
La Liga (ESP)	41.5%	6.7
Ligue 1 (FRA)	39.4%	7.5
A-League (AUS)	27.1%	3.9
Primera División (CHI)	26.8%	3.1
Super League (CHN)	21.2%	3.7
J1 League (JPN)	21.2%	2.7
K League 1 (KOR)	16.2%	3.4
Liga Profesional (ARG)	11.2%	2.0
Brasileirão (BRA)	9.8%	3.0
Primera A (COL)	9.0%	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>34.7%</b>	<b>5.8</b>

Figure 6: main expatriates' origins

	Players	Minutes	%
Argentina	246	245,172	12.7%
Brazil	240	202,460	10.5%
France	172	135,216	7.0%
Uruguay	140	137,493	7.1%
Colombia	112	104,635	5.4%
Spain	101	78,086	4.0%
The Netherlands	93	65,999	3.4%
Portugal	62	61,015	3.2%
England	60	41,762	2.2%
Paraguay	52	45,038	2.3%
Venezuela	52	36,121	1.9%
Germany	51	47,224	2.5%
Belgium	47	39,506	2.1%
Serbia	43	35,303	1.8%
Denmark	39	26,036	1.4%
Austria	39	25,582	1.3%
Chile	38	34,044	1.8%
Switzerland	38	29,992	1.6%
Croatia	35	27,612	1.4%
Ecuador	35	24,308	1.3%

### 5. Mobility

The leagues studied also differ considerably when it comes to squad stability. At one extreme, in Colombia, the players used during the second semester of 2021 were on average present for 20 months in the first team squad of their employer club. At the other extreme, the average length of stay in the employer club of an English Premier League or Chinese Super League player was almost the double: 37 months.

The longest average stay was recorded for the Chinese team of Shanghai Port: 72 months. Shandong Taishan (62.5) and Real Madrid (60.0) complete the podium. Conversely, the average stay was less than ten months in three Mexican teams (Atlético San Luis, Club Necaxa, Querétaro FC), Western Sydney (AUS), EC Juventude (BRA), Atlético Bucaramanga (COL), as well as in the recently established MLS team of Austin FC (USA).

Figure 7: average stay in the employer club, per league (second semester 2021)

	Stay
Premier League (ENG)	37.0 months
Super League (CHN)	36.7 months
Bundesliga (GER)	34.3 months
La Liga (ESP)	33.5 months
J1 League (JPN)	31.1 months
MLS (USA/CAN)	27.1 months
Ligue 1 (FRA)	25.8 months
Serie A (ITA)	25.7 months
Primera División (CHI)	25.0 months
Liga MX (MEX)	22.5 months
Brasileirão (BRA)	22.4 months
K League 1 (KOR)	22.2 months
A-League (AUS)	21.1 months
Liga Profesional (ARG)	21.0 months
Primera A (COL)	20.0 months
Total	27.1 months

## 6. Conclusion

This first global demographic study provides a comparative vision of squad building strategies adopted by teams from 15 leagues in four continents. It complements the studies carried out by the CIES Football Observatory research team since 2009 on 31 top divisions of UEFA member associations. Over time, we shall be in a position to present trends also for the ten non-European leagues now included in our field of analysis.

In comparison to the big-5 European leagues, the ten non-European competitions studied notably differ from the point of view of the greater amount of match time given to club-trained players: on average 19.4% as opposed to 11.7%. On the contrary, the percentage of minutes for expatriate footballers is much higher in the big-5 (51.6%) than elsewhere (25.9%).

Whether for club-trained or expatriate players, the MSL (United States and Canada) constitutes an exception compared to the other non-European championships. Indeed, record percentages were measured: only 9.2% of minutes played by club-trained players and up to 61.6% by footballers imported from abroad. With 48.2% of minutes played by expatriates, the Mexican Liga MX is also on this aspect similar to the European big-5 leagues.

With the exception of some minor variations, it is as if the economic development of leagues goes hand in hand with an internationalisation of recruiting networks, with a growing number of clubs who buy players rather than training them. Besides, it is no surprise to note that the leagues where young players have the most match time are also those who export the most footballers: Brazil, Argentina and France.