FIFPRO EUROPE | PLAYER IQ

ANALYSIS SUMMARY REPORT

PROTECTING THE GLOBAL PLAYER WORKFORCE

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF EUROPE'S EMPLOYMENT MARKET IN CREATING SHARED VALUE AND SUSTAINING INDUSTRY SOLIDARITY

ABOUT

PROTECTING THE INFRASTRUCTURE BEHIND FOOTBALL'S GLOBAL ECONOMY

FIFPRO Europe, in cooperation with Player IQ and Football Benchmark, have released a new analysis "Protecting the Global Player Workforce", a data driven report of the value the European employment market and its players contribute to the global game, and inviting closer cooperation and coordination among all stakeholders, global and European, on the governance reforms it points to.

The report, focused predominantly on the 2026 FIFA World Cup, uses the tournament to illustrate the global nature of the player workforce and the interconnected employment market that underpins it.

THE FOUR KEY FINDINGS

Four connected findings on the role of the European employment market in the FIFA World Cup — its contribution to the tournament, and the way value flows back to the players, clubs and member associations that generate it.

The European employment market is part of football's critical infrastructure - treating their contributions as a sellable asset puts the global solidarity system at risk.

FINDING 01

GLOBAL VALUE: THE EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT MARKET

Value generated by the European Employment Market

PLAYER PARTICIPATION

More than two-thirds of FIFA WC26 players - **over 850** at FIFA WC 2026 - are employed in the European Football Ecosystem.

PLAYER MARKET VALUE SHARE

Over 90% of player market value at the tournament is attributed to players employed by European clubs.

CLUB CONCENTRATION

60% of total FIFA WC player value is concentrated among the **top 20 releasing clubs** – all of which are from Europe.

PLAYER ON PITCH PERFORMANCE

All 20 player award winners across the past five FIFA WC editions were from European releasing clubs.

PLAYER POPULARITY

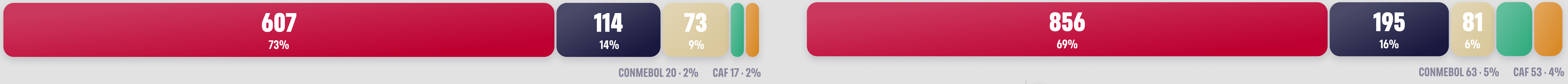
Half of the tournament's social media audience is linked to players employed by European clubs.

WHERE WORLD CUP PLAYERS ARE EMPLOYED

More than two-thirds of FIFA World Cup players — over 850 at FIFA WC 2026 — are employed in the European market.

UEFA · AFC · CONCACAF · CONMEBOL · CAF · OFC

FIFA WC 2022 — FIFA WC 2026



Europe's share edged down from 73% to 69% as the tournament grew from 32 to 48 teams — but the absolute number of European-employed players rose 41%, from 607 to 856.

PLAYER MARKET VALUE SHARE BY RELEASING LEAGUE

83% of total FIFA WC player value is concentrated among five releasing leagues — the so-called "Big Five" European leagues.

TOP FIVE EUROPEAN LEAGUES (BIG FIVE) · OTHER EUROPEAN LEAGUES · NON-EUROPEAN LEAGUES

83% of the total FIFA WC player value is concentrated among five releasing leagues, highlighting the concentration of talent among leading European leagues.

PLAYER MARKET VALUE BY EMPLOYMENT MARKET

Over 90% of player market value at the tournament is attributed to players employed by European clubs.

FIFA WC 2026

94% European releasing club · EUR 16,879m

FIFA WC 2022

97% European releasing club · EUR 13,161m

European clubs released EUR 16.9 billion of the EUR 18.0 billion of player value at FIFA WC 2026 — 94% of the tournament total.

EVERY AWARD WINNER CAME FROM A EUROPEAN CLUB

All 20 individual player award winners across the past five FIFA World Cup editions were employed by European clubs.

	2010	2014	2018	2022	2026
GOLDEN BALL	Diego Forlán (UEFA)	Lionel Messi (UEFA)	Luka Modrić (UEFA)	Lionel Messi (UEFA)	Rodri (UEFA)
GOLDEN BOOT	Thomas Müller (UEFA)	James Rodríguez (UEFA)	Harry Kane (UEFA)	Kylian Mbappé (UEFA)	Kylian Mbappé (UEFA)
BEST YOUNG PLAYER	Thomas Müller (UEFA)	Paul Pogba (UEFA)	Kylian Mbappé (UEFA)	Enzo Fernández (UEFA)	Pau Cubarsí (UEFA)
GOLDEN GLOVE	Iker Casillas (UEFA)	Manuel Neuer (UEFA)	Thibaut Courtois (UEFA)	Emiliano Martínez (UEFA)	Unai Simón (UEFA)

20 / 20 award winners across 2010–2026 were employed by European clubs — 13 of them were also of European nationality.

FINDING 02

THE GLOBAL GATEWAY

Player Development and Career Advancement

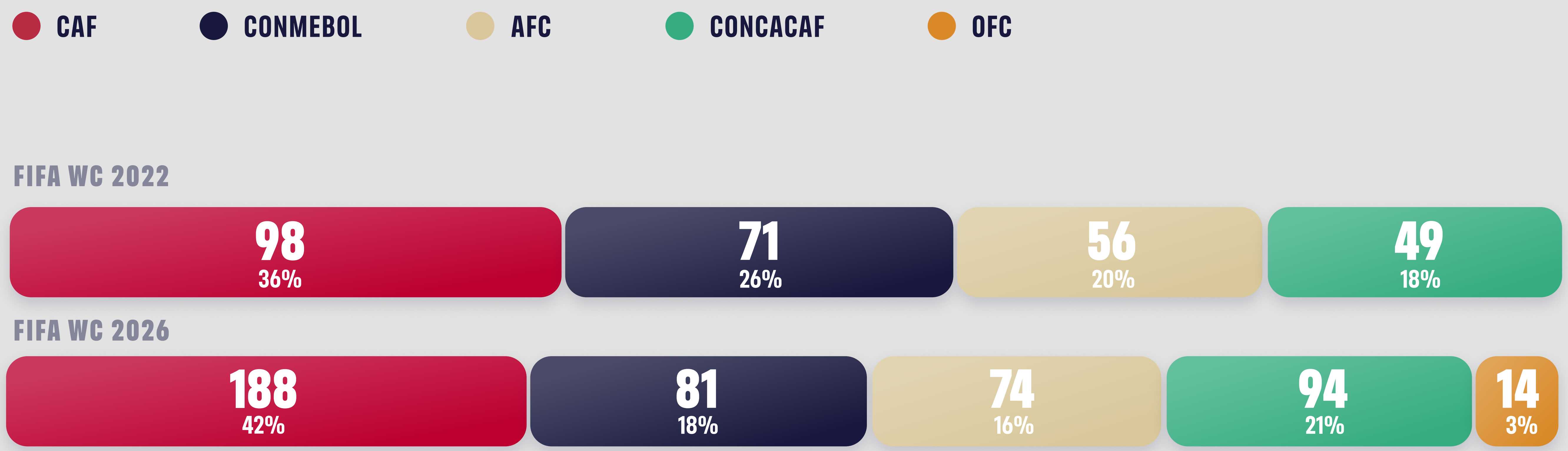
THE EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT MARKET – CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND A GLOBAL ASSET:

the European employment market is the system that provides the majority of players that supply FIFA's flagship competitions — at a scale and level of investment no other market currently replicates. Because so much of the global game's talent, performance and resource generation runs through it, any disruption to how that market operates does not stay contained to Europe: it effects the global football eco-system.

By employing close to 500 non-European FIFA WC players, Europe functions as a home for top-level talent from other regions.

NON-EUROPEAN FIFA WC PLAYERS EMPLOYED IN EUROPE

European clubs employ nearly 500 non-European FIFA WC players



The total number of non-European FIFA WC players employed by European clubs increased from 274 to 451 between 2022 and 2026.

THE CENTER OF FOOTBALL INVESTMENT

Non-European presence at ownership level in the European market is significant and still growing – 40% of European "Big Five" clubs had a non-European controlling owner as of the 2025/26 season.

FOREIGN OWNERSHIP IN EUROPEAN CLUBS

Non-European investors own ~40% of "Big Five" league clubs as their presence continues to grow across the continent

● EUROPEAN MAJORITY OWNER ● NON-EUROPEAN MAJORITY OWNER

BIG FIVE CLUB OWNERSHIP (2025/26 SEASON)

FINDING 03

VALUE CREATION & GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

Protecting that infrastructure is essential to protecting the global development and solidarity system that depends upon it. Recognising how that value is created, and protecting the critical infrastructure that sustains it, is central to the future growth, investment and solidarity of the global game as a whole.

REPRESENTATION EUROPEAN NATIONAL TEAMS ACCOUNT

52% of FIFA World Ranking's top **48 nations** but receive only **16 World Cup** slots.

NATIONAL TEAM VALUE SHARE

57% of total FIFA WC player value is concentrated among **10 national teams**, eight of which are European.

EUROPEAN NATIONAL TEAMS DRIVING TOURNAMENT PERFORMANCE

46% of teams reaching the knock-out stage

70% of finalists across the last five tournaments were European.

THE IMPACT ON BROADCASTING REVENUES

72% of the 25 most-watched English-language FIFA WC broadcasts in the US featured at least one European team.

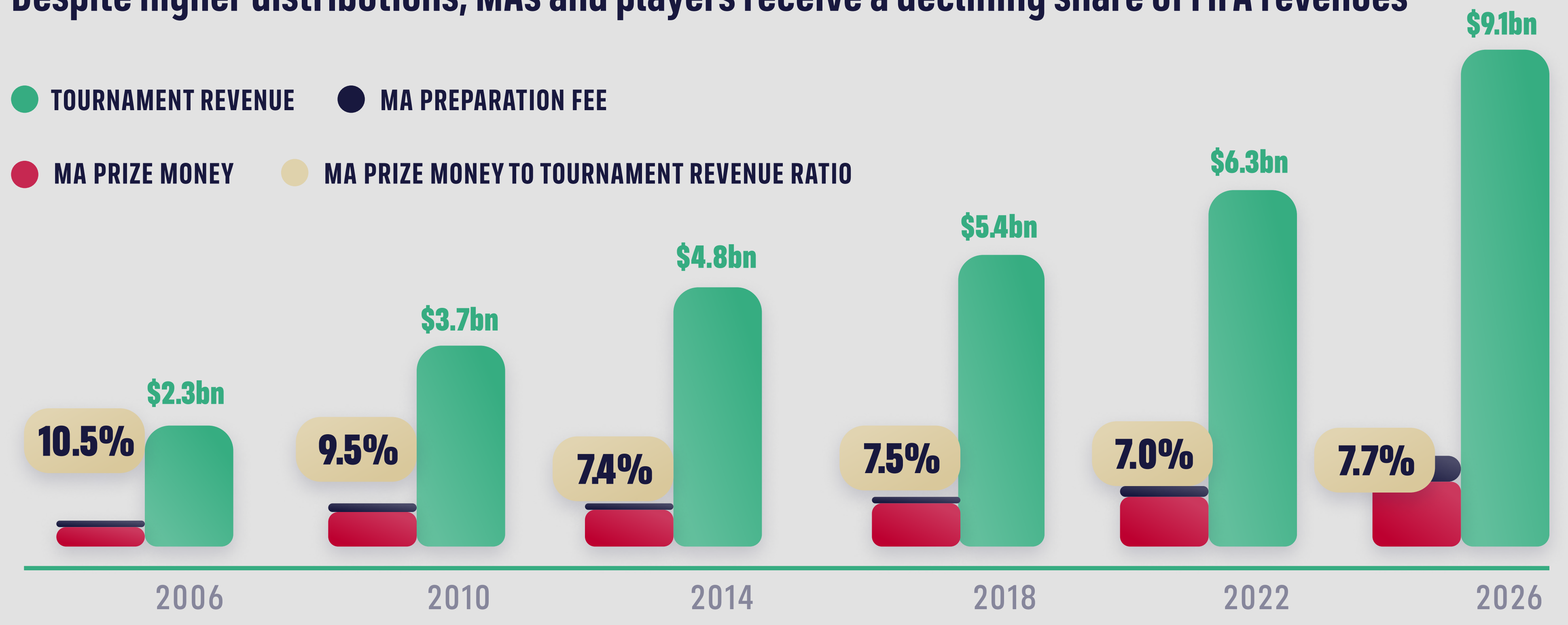
USD 1 billion in broadcasting revenues were generated by the six largest European markets. A sizeable portion of this is funded by public broadcasters.

THE PRIZE MONEY HAS FALLEN FROM 10.5% IN 2006 TO AROUND 7.7% IN 2026

The share of total FIFA tournament revenue distributed as prize money for the FIFA World Cup to the competing federations has fallen from an estimated 10.5% in 2006 to around 7.7% in 2026 — a relative decline of roughly a quarter in what performance returns to those who provide significant contributions to it, even as tournament revenue itself has multiplied several times over across the same period.

EVOLUTION OF PRIZE MONEY DISTRIBUTION TO FIFA WC PARTICPANTS

Despite higher distributions, MAs and players receive a declining share of FIFA revenues



The share of FIFA World Cup revenues allocated to MAs and players has declined, despite higher distributions in absolute terms.

ADVANCING FUNDING FOR DEVELOPING FEDERATIONS

Raising funds for under-resourced federations is a shared goal. The objection is, and remains in the future, to a solidarity mechanism designed and governed unilaterally, without the people who create the underlying value having a seat at the table. A future and strengthened proposal to grow solidarity funding should be built together, through the governance reforms set out below — not advanced unilaterally and then defended, when challenged, by recasting evidence-based concerns as an attack on development.

DISTRIBUTION OF FIFA FORWARD FUNDING

National MAs receive broadly similar funding

TURKS & CAICOS ISLANDS

FIFA FORWARD FUNDS (2016–2025)
$18.5m

POPULATION	RANKING WORLD
47k	205

ITALY

FIFA FORWARD FUNDS (2016–2025)
$16.3m

POPULATION	RANKING WORLD
58.9m	15

FINDING 04

TRUSTED GOVERNANCE

Not unilateral decision-making

This year's FIFA Forward Enterprise proposal showed what happens when that imbalance goes unaddressed: an attempt to convert the game's core competition into an investable asset for private capital, developed without the entire eco-system whose work creates the value in question.

What must change is the way decisions affecting that workforce and the infrastructure around it are made. Football's governance should reflect the reality of its value chain: players, clubs, leagues, federations and governing bodies are interdependent, and decisions with material consequences for that ecosystem cannot credibly be taken unilaterally.

ENHANCING GOVERNANCE WHILE PREVENTING UNILATERAL DECISION-MAKING

FIFPRO Europe calls for an independent review of the FIFA Council's executive decision-making function, so that no single office can act unilaterally again, and for the formal integration of professional football stakeholders — the players, clubs and leagues that create the game's value — into that decision-making, alongside Member Associations.

It is a shared opportunity for the global football community to strengthen football's governance, so that it reflects and serves everyone who sustains and depends on the game.

FORMAL INTEGRATION OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL STAKEHOLDERS

REVIEW OF THE FIFA COUNCIL EXECUTIVE DECISION-MAKING FUNCTION

ANNEX

FAQ

Headline Finding

WHAT IS THE HEADLINE FINDING OF THIS RESEARCH?

Football's global value is created by one global workforce, drawn from every confederation, and channelled predominantly through a single piece of critical infrastructure: the European employment market. That market does not generate this value alone — it depends on talent arriving from every part of the world and on the professional development of the game globally. Protecting that infrastructure is therefore not simply a European interest; it is essential to protecting the global development and solidarity system that depends on it.

WHAT DOES "ONE GLOBAL WORKFORCE" MEAN?

Players who compete at the FIFA World Cup and other top competitions are contracted, developed, trained and released for international duty by a global network of clubs and leagues, but that network channels overwhelmingly through Europe's employment market. The workforce itself — the players — is drawn from every confederation. Europe is where most of that workforce is professionally employed and reaches peak performance, not where it originates or who it serves.

WHY DOES THE RESEARCH FOCUS SPECIFICALLY ON EUROPE'S EMPLOYMENT MARKET?

Because the data shows it functions as the game's principal gateway. Players employed by European clubs account for 94% of total estimated player market value at the 2026 FIFA World Cup and fill more than two in three squad places. Eighty-three per cent of tournament player value sits with players at clubs in Europe's "big-five" leagues alone. Every individual FIFA World Cup award of the last five editions — Golden Ball, Golden Boot, Best Young Player, Golden Glove — was won by a player employed at a European club. This is a statement about where the game's leading workforce is professionally employed, reaches peak performance and released for international competition, not a statement about nationality.

How Global Is the European Employment Market?

IS THIS RESEARCH ONLY AN ARGUMENT TO PROTECT THE EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT MARKET?

No. FIFPRO Europe is a players' organisation and its interest is to provide fair, decent and often the best possible working conditions for players to reach peak performance. Of the 856 players employed in Europe at the 2026 World Cup, 451 are non-European nationals, and together they account for 33% of the tournament's total player market value. A market that channels a third of its value through non-European talent is not a closed system serving one region; it is a shared gateway. Any policy that weakens that market reduces wages, protections and opportunities for players from every confederation, not only Europe.

IS OWNERSHIP OF EUROPEAN FOOTBALL ITSELF BECOMING MORE GLOBAL?

Yes. Approximately 40% of Big-Five league clubs had a non-European majority owner in 2025/26, rising to around 50% when minority stakes are also considered. Investor interest is expanding beyond the largest markets too, with more than 25 majority transactions involving non-European investors recorded across Europe in 2025, including 10 in first-division leagues. Europe's gateway function and role in the global value chain extends well beyond its purpose as an employment market and a centre for footballing culture.

WHAT ROLE DO EUROPEAN NATIONAL TEAMS PLAY IN THE WORLD CUP'S VALUE?

A disproportionate one in outcomes, though not in participation. European teams provided 39% of participating nations across the past five tournaments on average, but accounted for 60% of quarter-finalists, 70% of semi-finalists and 70% of finalists. The commercial interest that follows UEFA nations — together with a small number of other major markets (Brazil, Argentina, and for 2026, hosts Mexico and the USA) — underpins much of the tournament's revenue: all 15 of the most expensive FIFA World Cup 2026 matches by secondary-market ticket price included a European team, Mexico or Argentina, and 24 of the top 25 matches by FOX's English-language broadcast audience in the United States included the USA, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina or a European team.

Revenue, Prize Money and FFE

WHAT DO THE FIGURES ABOUT PRIZE MONEY AND REVENUE-SHARING MEAN?

The share of total FIFA World Cup revenue distributed as prize money to competing federations has fallen from an estimated 10.5% in 2006 to around 7.7% in 2026 — a relative decline of roughly a quarter in what performance returns to those who contribute to it, even as tournament revenue itself has multiplied several times over across the same period. Players themselves receive only a fraction of this, since prize money is earmarked to federations and their expenses first. For participating federations, this prize money is also their sole performance-based revenue stream from FIFA.

WHY DID FIFPRO EUROPE OBJECT TO THE FIFA FORWARD ENTERPRISE (FFE) PROPOSAL?

FFE was an attempt to convert the game's core competitions into an investable, tradeable and undervalued financial asset for private capital, developed without the entire ecosystem whose work creates the value in question. FIFPRO Europe's objection was to how the mechanism was designed and imposed — unilaterally, without the consent, transparency or participation of the players, clubs, leagues and federations whose labour sustains that value — not to the underlying goal of providing development funds. FFE was withdrawn, but the governance gap that allowed it to be proposed in the first place still exists.