

**Forum:** Fédération Internationale de Football Association

**Issue #1:** Addressing the challenges and controversies regarding the organization of international tournaments.

**Student Officer:** Salvador Miotti

**Position:** Chair of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association

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Fifa's 2014 goodie bag scandal: 48 luxury watches to be donated to charity (Arnd Wiegmann/Reuters Photo)

## Introduction

The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) is the self-regulated governing body of international football, organizing major tournaments such as the Men's World Cup, Women's World Cup, and the Club World Cup, amongst other tournaments. FIFA also recognizes six continental organizations, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), Confederation of African Football (CAF), Confederación Sudamericana de Fútbol (CONMEBOL), Oceania Football Confederation (OFC), Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), and the Confederation of North, Central

American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF). FIFA has faced multiple challenges over the years, the most prolific and prominent of those being corruption. The peak of this issue was the 2015 corruption scandal, which saw the arrest of multiple FIFA officials, including two vice presidents, and shortly after, the resignation of the current president, Sepp Blatter. While this issue has passed and multiple measures have been taken, not only to recover from the scandal but to ensure no such event happens again within FIFA, there are still current issues that have put FIFA's integrity into question. Qatar's 2022 World Cup had been the source of controversy since its bid won in 2010, up until 2022, when the conditions migrant workers were subjected to came to light.

Additionally, the European Club schedule has become increasingly crowded in the past year with the extension of both the UEFA Champions League and the Club World Cup. These extensions have caused players to miss out on crucial recovery time, making them more prone to injury and fatigue. Multiple players have vocalized their dissatisfaction with the current schedule, and a wide range of club and league officials have called out FIFA for their lack of consideration and transparency when making changes to the international match schedule. The combination of these issues and FIFA's history with corruption has brought into question the objectives of the organization as a whole, leaving many to wonder if the priorities of FIFA are to increase their earnings rather than sustainably promote the growth of football across the globe.

### Definition of Key Terms

**Sports Washing:** The act of utilizing the positive attention, flow of people, and media coverage of a major sporting event to cover up or ignore the controversies surrounding a country and its government, often related to human rights violations.

**Squad Rotation:** The alternation of the starting lineup of a team every few matches to prevent player injury, control fatigue, and maintain a high performance level, typically during periods of fixture congestion.

**Statutes:** The rules or regulations of an institution that serve a vital role in establishing how the institution or organization is to function and operate. In the case of FIFA, these

statutes serve as key indicators of the core values of the organization and set the standard by which FIFA should operate.

**IMC (International Match Calendar):** The global schedule set by FIFA for both club and international competitions, and one of the sources of the recent match congestion.

**Player Welfare:** The overall health of players, encompassing their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, is frequently a key topic of discussion in the current conversations being had over the overcrowded match schedule.

**European Commission:** The European Commission is the main executive branch of the EU, consisting of 27 commissioners. The European Commission is in charge of proposing policy changes and managing the EU's budget.

## General Overview

### Crowded Schedule

The UEFA Champions League increased its team participant count from 32 teams to 36 in the 2024-2025 season, most importantly as a result of the expansion and introduction of a new league format that replaced the previous group stage all teams would have to play 2 additional matches and possibly even more depending on their placement in the league table. Starting from June 2025, the Club World Cup would go from consisting of 6 teams, each belonging to the 6 confederations under FIFA, to a 32-team tournament with a group stage. Additionally, the previous Club World Cup format, since 2024, is now used for the new FIFA Intercontinental Cup, held annually. Looking at the major expansions happening across the world of international football, it becomes clear that teams will now face a tighter schedule. The increased matches for some major football clubs will certainly bring in more money and exposure to the club, but that is secondary when it comes to the decision to expand these competitions, as the topic that has been discussed by multiple clubs and organizations is the strain increased matches will cause on players' health. Increased stress on players will threaten their health and the longevity of their careers, which many, such as FIFPRO, state is a demonstration of FIFA's conflict of interest, which puts the organization's economic

gains over the health of players and national leagues.

### **Qatar World Cup**

Qatar's 2022 World Cup was the stage of an unforgettable competition, which saw the greatest players of the sport of football compete passionately till the point of exhaustion, but behind the scenes, a much darker topic was at play. As stated before, the humanitarian violations during the building of Qatar's world-class stadiums and the concerns regarding LGBTQ and Women's rights have been well recorded, but what happened in Qatar? Unregistered employment, unpaid wages, brutal overworking, and even the confiscation of passports are not only legal violations but, most importantly, human rights violations that occurred in Qatar. The lack of response to these violations has been alarming to many, while some claim they have been exaggerated or used to portray the Islamic world in a negative light.

### **Implications**

Overall, FIFA has been in the midst of a lot of controversy at the start of the new decade of the 21st century, putting into question if corruption, a major problem within FIFA in recent years, is starting to reemerge.

### **Major Parties Involved**

**Gianni Infantino:** Gianni Infantino is the president of FIFA and has been for the last 9 years. During the 2022 World Cup, Infantino defended Qatar as it faced constant criticism from multiple sources, trying to focus on the progress Qatar had made to uphold international human rights rather than addressing the violations and concerns regarding these same rights surrounding the event. Infantino has naturally also defended the expansion of the IMC, but FIFA has opened itself to discussion on the topic, while Infantino highlights the importance of collaborating and communicating with key stakeholders when implementing these changes.

**Javier Tebas:** As the president of LaLiga, Tebas is extremely concerned about the expansion of the IMC by FIFA and, jointly with FIFPRO has presented a complaint against FIFA to the European Commission. Statements by Tebas indicate that he

believes FIFA is acting in its own interest amidst these changes and that FIFA is ignoring “the value of our national leagues” ([FIFPRO](#)).

**Aleksander Čeferin:** Aleksander Čeferin, president of UEFA has recognized the increased congestion of the IMC in Europe, stating that “We cannot play one more match” ([Sky News](#)) but also acknowledging that the expansions made, more specifically that of the Champions League, were necessary to aid clubs facing financial challenges. Regarding the 2022 Qatar World Cup, Čeferin has stayed at a relative middle ground in the controversies, both praising Qatar for its preparations but also criticizing certain political actions taken by Qatar before the World Cup.

**Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani:** Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani is the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, and just like Infantino, has defended Qatar as it faced criticism before, during, and after the World Cup. Al-Thani has strongly criticized those who opposed the decision to host the World Cup in Qatar, calling them out as hypocrites and highlighting how these critiques don't represent the grand majority of football fans or even countries. Additionally, Al-Thani acknowledged the controversies connected to worker safety and wellbeing, stating some of the actions that have been taken, but reminding that reforms like these take time to be implemented and noticed.

**Maheta Molango:** Maheta Molango, president of FIFPRO, has a clear stance regarding the congested IMC in Europe. The complaint to the European Commission, headed by FIFPRO based on an alleged conflict of interest on FIFA's part. FIFPRO believes this conflict of interest stems from FIFA's role as a “competition organizer and governing body” ([FIFPRO](#)) and that the issue has been exacerbated by “a lack of meaningful engagement with social partners” ([FIFPRO](#)). FIFPRO argues that FIFA has acted with a lack of consideration for national leagues, tournaments, and players' well-being, which has ultimately resulted in these parties being negatively affected in the process.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
21 May 1904	The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) is founded.
2006	Former CONCACAF President Jack Warner's family business allegedly profits \$900,000 from commissions on ticket sales in Warner's home country of Trinidad and Tobago. Warner got off with a warning.
2010-2011	Hosting rights for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups are awarded to Russia and Qatar, respectively. This decision sparked controversy and allegations of corruption immediately; Mohamed Bin Hammam, who was the face of the Qatar bid, faces allegations of \$1.5 million in bribes. Subsequently, in 2011, Bin Hammam was banned from international football for life during his FIFA presidential campaign due to offering bribes to officials and representatives for votes.
2015	2015 saw the outbreak of all, if not most, of the corruption within FIFA at the time, a corruption that had been growing over the decades. This resulted in the indictment of 14 FIFA officials in May of the year based on charges of money laundering, wire fraud, and racketeering. In June, Sepp Blatter, President of FIFA at the time, resigned soon after re-election, being later suspended for 90 days by the FIFA ethics committee alongside Secretary General Jérôme Valcke and UEFA President Michel Platini. Following this, in December, Blatter and Platini were banned for 8 years from international football, while Valcke received a 12-year sanction.
2016-2017	Reform efforts by the FIFA committee include increased transparency, checks on officials, term limits, and, most importantly, the separation of powers. This marks a key stepping stone in the history of FIFA and highlights their efforts to move past the adversities faced the prior year. During this period, Gianni Infantino was elected as the new President of

FIFA.

2022

The controversial Qatar World Cup takes place after being a source of criticism since 2010. While the World Cup was successfully hosted in the country, concerns regarding human rights abuses, LGBTQ expression, and the legacy FIFA was leaving were still incredibly present and casting a grim shadow over the entirety of the tournament.

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

### FIFA 2015 Reform

Amidst the 2015 scandal, FIFA was in dire need of change, proactive policies, and power controls to prevent a calamity of such magnitude from ever occurring again within the organization. The reforms that took place in the following years sought to do just that. The main focus of the reform was to improve the governance of the organization and with it the structure on which it is based. To do so, the political and executive powers within FIFA were separated, and term limits on senior officials, such as a three-term limit on the President, were implemented. To ensure the quality of governance, FIFA implemented eligibility and integrity checks and requirements to ensure leaders are appointed appropriately. Transparency within the organization had been a major issue in the past. To improve the public perception of FIFA and its processes, the handing of hosting rights for the World Cup was moved from being made by the Executive Committee to the entirety of the FIFA congress. With this change also came the public disclosure of multiple aspects of FIFA's finances, such as salaries, bonuses, and specific compensations given to senior officials. Furthermore, to safeguard the integrity of FIFA, even if the security barriers put in place failed, the Ethics Committee was given increased power, authority, and responsibility by being tasked with investigating and evaluating violations in FIFA's code of ethics. While these reforms look good in theory and were made with the intention of preventing the spread of corruption throughout FIFA, as it had happened before by carefully monitoring and investigating officials, the current rise of dissatisfaction with FIFA, especially by European leagues and clubs, showcases a different problem. In the past, corruption within FIFA benefited a small group of individuals at the expense of the organization itself, while



current concerns over governance highlight a disconnect with the football world and the many organizations that form it. FIFA's expansionary actions and views, according to them, seek to expand football throughout the whole world but often come at the cost of local and regional organizations, putting into question if FIFA's objective is to expand the influence of football or their organization's power.

### Possible Solutions

Tackling this ongoing issue within FIFA is key to securing the health of existing football markets while ensuring football continues to properly develop in different markets. Since the basis of this issue is the ongoing concerns of corruption within FIFA, concerns which in the past have proven to be true, it is critical that every approach to this issue is done knowing the rules and checks put in place to prevent corruption. Starting off from this base, there are two main pathways to follow. If believed, that FIFA is showing signs of corruption reforms to FIFA's anti corruption measures are vital, secondly an approach and investigation onto FIFA's mission is key as the presumed conflict of interests that has marred the extension of the Club World Cup puts into question the truthfulness of FIFA's mission especially the section that states "for the benefit of the entire world". In the case that it is believed that FIFA has not faulted on its mission statement or is brewing an environment of corruption, it is still pertinent for action to be taken to clear up FIFA's image to the public but most importantly improve the transparency of the organization as the lack of this quality, that has generated much of the concerns around FIFA.

### Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

#### **SDG 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions**

The question of corruption and the nature behind an organization's goals are closely connected with the social development goal 16, peace, justice, and strong institutions. The section of this SDG that most accurately represents the basis of the issue is strong institutions. Addressing the lack of trust and transparency within FIFA and the football world, especially amongst leagues and players, is key to preventing past scandals from repeating themselves and, more importantly, it helps protect the viability of the institution that has been part of football's history for more than a century. Strong institutions are the lifeblood of an organized society; entrusting our money, security, and



time to these organizations is a testament to this. By ensuring FIFA is a strong institution, decent work that respects human rights will be secured, inequalities between workers will fall, and the football connected to FIFA will thus be responsibly produced and consumed.

### **SDG 12, Ensure Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns**

Following up on the final remark of the paragraph above, the responsible consumption and production of football as a product and source of entertainment should be the first priority of the consumer and producer alike. While the main purpose of this goal in the framework of the United Nations sustainable development plan is to ensure goods and services are produced and consumed in an environmentally sustainable manner, the value of this goal in the context of FIFA and football is closely connected to the upholding of human rights. Upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not only the standard that nations should be held up to, but also any organized institution in any field. This issue is notably present in the human rights concerns overshadowing the Qatar World Cup, and it is because of this that this SDG is of vital importance for the issue. Football is a beautiful sport; its potential to help the world is immense. Before concerning ourselves with the benefits and costs of an expanded schedule, which nonetheless are important discussion points, we must first establish and guarantee that football is not produced at the expense of individuals and their lives. Consumers and producers alike hold this responsibility and must always remember that this guarantee is the base of any reputable business.

### **Appendix**

This section of the issue bulletin is dedicated to providing delegates with valuable sources to utilize during their research.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/11/qatar-inaction-by-qatar-and-fifa-a-year-on-from-the-world-cup-puts-legacy-for-workers-in-peril/>

**Source A:** Amnesty International is a non-governmental organization focused on the fulfillment of human rights around the world. This source is especially useful regarding the concerns surrounding the Qatar World Cup.

<https://www.fifa.com/en>

**Source B:** Vital for any investigation, serves as both a starting point and a reference for most major data points you need to find.

<https://fifpro.org/en/who-we-are/fifpro-members/fifpro-europe/player-unions-and-leagues-file-complaint-to-european-commission-over-fifa-s-imposition-of-international-match-calendar>

**Source C:** To fully understand the problem at hand, looking at this article is one of the main steps that needs to be taken. Additionally, FIFPRO is a major player in this conflict, and thus, it is key to look into the organization and its function.

<https://www.bbc.com/sport>

**Source D:** Solid news source with a wide variety of news and a long collection of articles. To find articles relevant to this issue, focus on the sports section.

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