

# Protection of minors in European football

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## Aim of paper

The paper presents the results of the latest research undertaken by UEFA and academic partners on transfers of minor football players into and within Europe. The paper displays a summary of the current situation and trends and argues why the migration of very young football players is generally damaging both for young talented players and for the clubs which originally trained them.

## Organisational/managerial context

The protection of young football players is one of the priorities of UEFA. As a result, UEFA considers that the FIFA rule which restricts the poaching of U18 players, that currently applies throughout the world apart from within the European Union, should also apply within the EU.

In order to protect young football players, as well as the teams that invest in their education, the FIFA Regulations for the Status and Transfer of Players forbid international transfers of minor players. However, these regulations allow three exceptions to this rule:

- When the player's parents move to the country in which the new club is located for reasons not linked to football;
- When the player lives no further than 50 km from a national border and the club with which the player wishes to be registered in the neighbouring association is also within 50 km of that border (the maximum distance between the player's domicile and the club's headquarters shall be 100 km);
- When the transfer takes place within the territory of the European Union (EU) or European Economic Area (EEA) and the player is aged between 16 and 18.

The last exception is a consequence of article 39 of the EC Treaty. This article prohibits restrictions on the movement of workers within the EU and most EU Member States' legislations consider as a worker any person aged of at least 16 who undertakes an economic activity.

According to FIFA, UEFA and to the vast majority of the football family members, this situation is generally damaging both for young players and for the teams that invest in their education. Promising careers have been compromised by early moves. Furthermore, young players that join prestigious clubs with large squads are rarely part of the starting line-up whereas they could gain significantly more experience in their club of origin. Such early transfers also discourage clubs from investing in the training of young players. Many European clubs which have traditionally invested a lot in the training and the education of young players are now seriously reconsidering whether it is worth them doing so in the future. For these reasons, the Professional Football Strategy Council of UEFA (a body gathering representatives from the National Associations, clubs, leagues and player unions) agreed in March 2009 on a resolution stating that "With regards to the protection of young players and encouragement of youth development,

no international transfers (or first registration of non-nationals) of players under 18 into Europe or within Europe should be permitted”.

### **Organisational/managerial practice/issues**

In close cooperation with academic partners, UEFA undertakes research to gain a comprehensive understanding of minors’ international transfers into and within Europe.

The paper presents results of this recent research. It covers areas such as the evolution over the last few years of the number of minors that have been transferred within Europe, players’ principal countries of origin and destination, the average number of foreign minor players registered by clubs of the main national leagues in Europe, etc. The research also analyses the impact of international transfers on the career of young football talents. The paper also includes qualitative analysis.

### **Implications for sport and sport management**

The paper demonstrates a real example of cooperation between UEFA and academic partners on a research topic. It covers the international transfers of minor football players into and within Europe. This phenomenon is described in detail as well as being quantified. This will allow for a better basis for the decision-making and policy development.