

UEFA Research Report

**Analysis of the Key Factors Influencing the Beginning and
Continuation of Football Referees' Careers in Europe:
Improving Recruitment and Retention**

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Executive Summary

This study aimed to identify and define key variables that influence referees' decisions to continue or leave their careers in England, Spain and Italy. The research focused on obtaining a practical and working understanding of the careers of referees in Europe across the three countries, to help inform the policies of the federations/associations.

Surveys were designed and administered in England, Spain and Italy with the aim of exploring general patterns, similarities and differences across the three federations/associations. In addition, causations between independent and dependent variables estimated by means of exploratory tests were investigated, with the design and analysis informed by the theoretical framework and relevant publications in the subject area. Highlights and key findings from the research are presented below:

- The survey was completed by a total of 8,728 referees, comprising 1,779 in England, 2,036 in Spain, and 4,913 in Italy, evidencing substantial reach and interest in this project.
- The three countries share important areas of agreement in understanding referees' activity, along with specific circumstances that need to be addressed locally within each country. While the main reasons to start and to continue in refereeing are similar, there is no common pattern for the reasons why referees leave officiating. 'Aggression' and 'Physical condition' are most prevalent in England, 'Disappointment' and 'Personal incompatibility' in Spain, and 'Remuneration' and 'Professional incompatibility' are the primary reasons in Italy.
- The sample from England has a higher average start age (33.15) with a more altruistic profile – more focused on the social aspects of refereeing. Whereas Spain and Italy show a more competitive profile focused on advancement, with both also showing a lower average start age (18.86, 19.06) from their samples.
- The proportion of referees who officiate in each country, but who are born outside the three countries (5%) is lower than the proportion evident in the wider population.

- There is a high percentage of referees who have experienced threats (63%), which influences their decision to continue refereeing. Additionally, 16% mention aggressions as a risk to leave refereeing, and 13% of the referees who are no longer in refereeing mention aggression as the cause of their dropout.
- A significant portion of referees (36%) express an interest in participating in development programs but have not had the opportunity. However, the impact of these programs on referee progression is not clear.
- Half of the referees in the total sample consider reasons for continuing different from the practice of refereeing itself (see Table 13), suggesting potential for establishing alternative career paths or positions within federations/associations.
- Traditional reasons for starting refereeing (Table 15) remain relevant for informing recruitment, although only prior experience as a coach or player show a positive determination on the speed of referee promotion.
- A significant proportion of referees who have left the game feel that their federations/associations could have done more to retain them (59%). Individual career follow-up and monitoring have been identified as areas for improvement for federations/associations when focusing on retaining their referees.
- Women demonstrate a faster rate of promotion when compared to men. The targeted increase in recruiting women referees highlights their ability to integrate effectively into existing pathways and also the success of the pathways that are aimed primarily at women referees.

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1. Context

1.1. Relevance of the Study

Reduced recruitment and increased discontinuation of sports officials are major concerns for sporting organisations around the world (Cuskelly & Hoye, 2013). Following the Covid-19 pandemic and the return to organised, competitive sport, officiating numbers have struggled to keep pace with the demands of the sports (Moreno-Perez et al., 2021). Football is no different. Currently there are not enough referees across Europe to service the game, with approximately 277,000 referees required for the game to operate effectively across Europe (UEFA, 2023). Abuse towards officials has been shown to be a contributory factor to the discontinuation of referees in football. This issue has been examined in England (Cleland et al., 2018; Webb et al., 2017), the Netherlands and France (Dawson et al., 2021; Webb et al., 2020a; Webb et al., 2020b). Outside Europe, the issue of referee abuse in England has been compared with the current situation in Canada (Downward et al., 2024).

Other factors can also influence the retention of sports officials. For example, the support that officials receive as part of undertaking their roles is important (Choi & Chiu, 2017), with support networks and role models helping to foster a culture of support for officials (Tingle et al., 2014). Support can also be offered by sports organisations themselves. Officials are receptive to formal support through training and mentoring (Ridinger, 2015), or through teamwork, which can also be encouraged through sporting organisations (Phillips & Fairley, 2014). As such, it makes sense that if these support networks and associated training and development opportunities are removed, or perceived as lacking, it can mean that officials decide to leave their chosen sport (Tingle et al., 2014). In contrast, research has found that motivation can have a positive impact on officials remaining within their sport. For example, family support and internal motivation/commitment can assist the positive retention of sports officials (Hong et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2019).

All of the above factors influence the career lifespan of the referee. Sports organisations need to recruit and retain the necessary talent, and football is no different. However, little is known about the careers of referees (Loghmani et al., 2021), despite some understanding of the factors that might influence career longevity (Webb et al., 2020b). Aside from a small number of studies on sports officials' careers (Aliende

et al., 2023; Aliende & Escot, 2023; Loghmani et al., 2021), there is a lack of understanding of the subject area, with the majority of the research concentrated around physical training (Aragão e Pina et al., 2018). As such, there is a dearth of literature and informed policy initiatives/decisions that are underpinned by data collected from referees; an issue that the present study seeks to address.

Referee numbers across Europe have been an area of concern for UEFA for a number of years, whilst respect towards referees is “a value close to UEFA’s heart” (UEFA, 2015). Moreover, the desire of the UEFA Referee Assistance Programme (RAP) is to help and develop new and experienced officials with videos released every season to support progression, demonstrating UEFA’s commitment to the enhanced development of referees once they have been recruited within their home country. However, further understanding of this recruitment and retention would enhance UEFA’s offering, support associations/federations in their recruitment and retention endeavours and contribute to UEFA’s goal of recruiting 40,000 referees every season (UEFA, 2023).

1.2. Research Questions and Purpose of the Study

This study introduces a comprehensive model derived from a number of variables to analyse the factors influencing referee careers in England, Spain, and Italy. Expanding upon prior research on referees' career trajectories (Aliende et al., 2023; Loghmani et al., 2021), this investigation specifically examined the pivotal variables, formulated from engagement with the extant literature, shaping the initiation and continuity of referee careers across these three countries.

The variables encompass motivational, biographical, and organisational aspects, including factors such as satisfaction at the outset and during the career, readiness for promotion, presence of family or friends in refereeing, family status and dependents, age at the commencement of refereeing, experiences of abuse or aggression, academic attainment level, place of birth, gender, existence of a previous vocation, participation in development programs, and prior personal involvement in football.

This research is vitally important to both increase the number of referees in Europe and retain those referees that already exist. Therefore, the following research questions were devised to investigate the factors influencing referee careers in England, Spain and Italy:

- RQ1: Analyse the motivational, biographical, and organisational factors that influence the career length of referees in England (EN), Spain (SP), and Italy (IT).
- RQ2: Examine the factors that influence the beginning of referees' careers in EN, SP, and IT.
- RQ3 - Analyse and investigate the variables that extend the careers of referees in EN, SP, and IT.
- RQ4 - Explore the barriers and opportunities at different career stages for referees in EN, SP, and IT.

Through the examination of a substantial sample of referees, this study sought to understand their expectations and concerns. Furthermore, the present research aimed to analyse the key factors influencing both the commencement and continuation of referee careers in Europe, with a specific focus on improving policies that impact recruitment and retention. Through this analysis, federations/associations stand to gain valuable insights into reducing attrition rates among referees by adapting their policies, as highlighted in previous studies (Dawson et al., 2021; Loghmani et al., 2021). Additionally, the research endeavours to identify the challenges faced by referees at different stages of their careers, drawing from the existing literature (Loghmani et al., 2021; Webb, 2022). These findings will enable federations/associations to effectively tailor support mechanisms to address referee needs.

2. Literature Review

The experience of sports officials represents an emerging area of interest for researchers and those involved in the training and administration of officials. Challenges in the recruitment and retention of officials across sports are a global issue with many contributing factors (Webb et al., 2020b; Wicker & Frick, 2016). Officials who quit their chosen sport cite reasons such as verbal abuse from parents and supporters (Webb et al., 2020a), a lack of support from governing bodies and officiating organisations (Livingston & Forbes, 2016), stress (Hancock et al., 2015), and issues around engagement (Cuskelly & Hoyer, 2013). However, to date, little attention has been paid to career studies or the understanding that this approach can elicit.

Career studies can provide a valuable theoretical body of interpretation of contemporary trends in football referees' careers. For instance, Baruch and Sullivan (2022) underline the importance of studying careers and the variables that conform to individual well-being, which have implications for organisations. They argue that understanding careers is crucial for effective talent management and resource optimisation. Additionally, Spurk et al. (2019) expanded the study of careers to life perspectives under the central concept of occupational commitment, providing new insights. A number of studies and models have identified career stages, with a significant shift evident from a focus on traditional, more linear career models to using nontraditional, contemporary models to capture the growing variety of career patterns enacted by increasingly diverse workforces (Baruch & Sullivan, 2022).

The models devised to measure and explain career stages can be classified into different categories. The earliest model devised by Super (1980) focused on a number of age-based career stages, in which individuals complete tasks at each stage as they evolve, develop, and obtain work experience. Super (1980) built his model around the careers of men who ascended the organisational ladder, looked for outside incentives, and then retired permanently from the workforce (Super, 1980). Super's (1980) model has been integrated and utilised in other career research (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006), although it has been questioned whether this model adequately encapsulates the career experiences of both women and people from Black, Asian or Mixed Heritage backgrounds (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

Further development in our understanding of career development models has evolved over time. The first generation of contemporary career concepts was introduced in the 1990s (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Peiperl & Baruch, 1997) with a focus on various theories such as boundaryless, protean, post-corporate, and intelligent careers. Following this attention in the 1990s, the 2000s saw a renewed focus on the changing career landscape, with a second wave of contemporary theories covering elements such as Career Construction Theory (CRT) (Savickas, 2005), employability (Fugate, 2006) and career sustainability (De Vos & Heijden, 2015). Career theories, conceptualisations, and models have developed and evolved as people have amended their perspectives on their careers and available career routes. Moreover, career-related research has continued to receive calls from scholars to increase the use of longitudinal data, focusing on multi-country research designs

(Akkermans et al., 2021), and called for more research around the obstacles surrounding career development and progression (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009); all aspects directly relevant and applicable to the present study.

The literature has identified that one of the primary factors related to the duration of a referee's career is their initial motivation (Dosseville et al., 2013), including subjective factors such as personal preferences, volunteering or merely feeling a passion for officiating, while vocational inclination also plays an important role (Johansen, 2015). Besides, the initial motivational factors, other authors highlight the presence and importance of sequential stages in the careers of referees and the importance of these career stages (Giel & Breuer, 2020; Samuel, 2019). These motivational variables are also analysed inversely by the risks which diminish the level of motivation and trigger the decision for an official to quit (Ing & Mills, 2021; Loghmani et al., 2021).

3. Analysis Architecture

3.1. Research Design

Following a review of existing literature, our research approach involved utilizing survey data to conduct an analysis aimed at examining general trends, commonalities, and distinctions among federations/associations. Moreover, exploratory tests, as suggested by Tukey (1977), were employed to explore potential causal relationships between independent and dependent variables.

3.2. Survey

We designed and constructed a survey containing the necessary questions to collect information about the referee populations in England (EN), Spain (SP), and Italy (IT). The survey was informed by variables evident in the theoretical framework and by relevant publications in the subject area (Nardi, 2018).

The survey was shared with five members of the federations/associations involved in this study. This group of specialists reviewed the survey draft and suggested some modifications. Each federation/association in the countries (FA, RFEF, and FIGC) collaborated regarding the distribution of the survey to their registered referees. A link for each federation/association in the local language was created for referees to complete the online survey (see Appendix 1).

3.3. Data Access Statement

Data supporting this study derived from the survey responses are accessible by UEFA.

4. Measurement Approach

4.1. Instrumental Dependents Variables: 'Seniority' and 'Speed of Promotion'

We identified two primary variables that reflected the purpose of the project. 'Seniority' measures the time a referee stays active, allowing us to analyse how long a referee decides to continue; while 'Speed of promotion' indicates the preparation of that referee to occupy more qualified positions, reflecting the level of quality of refereeing in each of the countries.

4.2. Independent variables Influencing the Permanence of Referees

The survey gathered information about the independent variables that determined 'Seniority' and 'Speed of Promotion'. We included variables regarding the biographical status of the referees, motivational aspects, and their relationship with the organisational policies of the federations/associations.

The current structure of categories in EN, SP, and IT were organised into ten levels to provide a common hierarchy from the three federations/associations that might facilitate comparisons.

The resulting dataset presents a cross-sectional design, including information about the variables, as outlined in Appendix 2.

4.3. Sample and Population Representativeness

The sample of survey answers presented the characteristics outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Survey Sample

Federation	Referees #	Answers #	Participation %	Confidence %	Error %	Correlation by regionals	Female %
EN	21.633	1.811	8,37%	99%	2,90%	91,65%	4,1%
IT	31.566	4.740	15,02%	99%	1,73%	94,02%	6,3%

SP	18.432	2.034	11,04%	99%	2,69%	91,11%	8,4%
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The survey reached an optimal sample size, with a size that ensured the representativeness of the population, obtaining a highly correlated distribution by regional/county federations. The data were prepared according to the following process:

- To create a unified dataset of answers from the three different federations/associations, we established a common format in English, including the information of the variables.
- The initial samples (answers to the survey) of the three countries present high representation by the regions/counties, with a coefficient of correlation of over 90 %.
- We equalised the number of items in the final sample from each federation/association using 1,811 (EN number of answers) as the number of items per federation/association in the final sample, to provide the same ponderation to each country.
- This approach required SP and IT to follow a stratified sampling method by region/county to select the items to be included in the final sample according to the following criteria:
 - Omit items with a higher number of missing values by item, considering eight or more a high level of missing values.
 - All items omitted were male referees to keep the number of female referees, given that the number of female responses was much lower than male responses.
 - Items with less than 2 years of 'Seniority' were omitted.
 - Items over 40 years of Seniority were omitted because they were considered less representative of the current social situation.
 - Regions/counties with a level of items over the proportion in the population were filtered by stricter criteria.

The characteristics of the final sample maintained the conditions of representativeness and optimal distribution between regional federations/counties.

Table 2

Final Sample

Federation/ association	Referees #	Sample #	Selection %	Confidence %	Error %	Correlation by regionals	Female % sample
EN	21.633	1.811	100,00%	99%	2,90%	91,65%	4,1%
IT	31.566	1.811	38,21%	99%	2,94%	97,74%	16,4%
SP	18.432	1.811	89,04%	99%	2,80%	92,24%	9,4%

4.4. Ethical Aspects of the Study

The design and distribution of the survey maintained the anonymity of the respondents. No personal data that would identify the participants was requested from any of the survey questions.

4.5. Exploratory Analysis

This section offers an overview of the responses to the survey, providing understanding of the common characteristics and differences between the three federations/associations.

4.6. Target Response Variables

The information concerning the response variables relevant to the policies of the federations/associations are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3

Response Variables, Average by Country

Federation	Seniority	Speed of promotion	Top category	Current category	Demotion
EN	17,46	0,58	3,53	2,51	1,02
SP	11,52	0,59	4,43	3,23	1,20
IT	15,95	0,54	5,41	4,21	1,20

The average demotion rate (calculated by the difference between the top and current category of referees) and the speed of promotion (measured by the number of

categories promoted divided by the years of seniority) are similar across the three countries. The 'seniority' average is lower in SP, although this indicator could be influenced by the different recruitment campaigns that have previously taken place in the federations/associations. These results show that the referees in EN presented a higher 'start age' (see Table 5).

Table 4

Response Variables, Average by Country

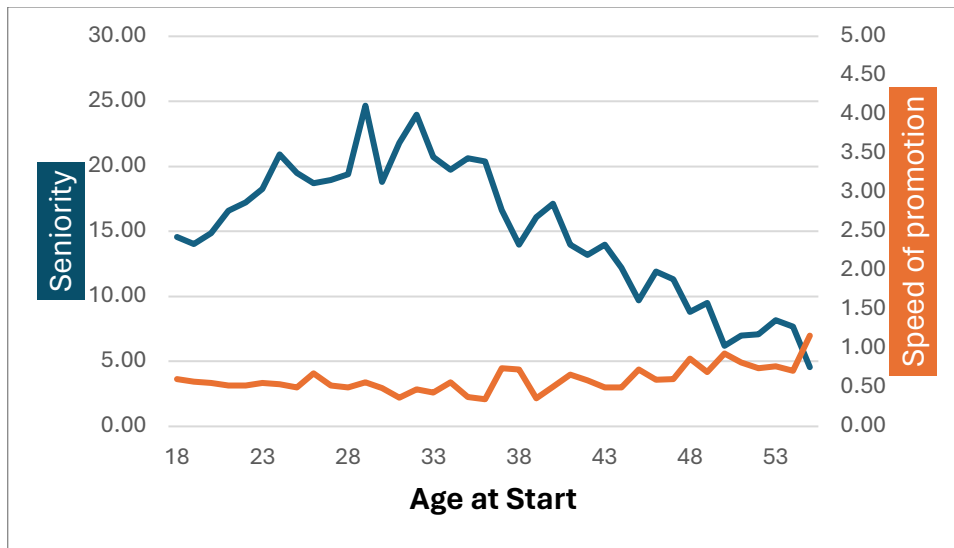
Federation	Start age average*
EN	33,15
SP	18,86
IT	19,06

Note: Only referees of legal age (18 and above) as of February 2024 included.

The correlation of 'start age' with 'seniority' and with 'speed of promotion' are low (-0.02 and 0.05). It means that an earlier 'start age' does not mean that higher seniority or a faster speed of promotion are achieved. In Figure 1 we observe two different segments by 'start age'; one increasing up to approximately 32 years old, and another decreasing from 32 years of age. This indicates that up to 32 years of start age, the seniority ascends, while after that age, seniority decreases. Those referees whose start age is around 40 years of age show a similar seniority to those who start before the age of 20.

Figure 1

Seniority and Speed of Promotion by Age of Start



The ‘speed of promotion’ in the three countries is similar, with an average of 0.57 promotions by year of seniority in the sample. This means that, on average, referees in the three countries are promoted approximately 0.57 times for each year they are a referee. This suggests a relatively consistent rate of advancement among the referees across the sample.

The speed of promotion for women is higher, possibly because women have been a target group for recruitment and retention within the past 5-10 years. However, given the focus on the recruitment and retention of women by federations and associations; it is clear that their retention and promotion to higher levels has been successful.

Table 5
Speed of Promotion by Gender

Federation	Women	Men	Total
EN	0,86	0,56	0,58
SP	0,80	0,56	0,59
IT	0,71	0,51	0,54

4.7. Explaining Variables

4.7.1. Place of Birth (Explaining Independent Variable)

The three countries present a different distribution of referees by their birth (see Table 6). In particular, IT shows the highest proportion of referees who were born in the same region where they currently referee.

Table 6

Place of Birth

Federation	A	B	C	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)
EN	986	671	125	55%	38%	7%
SP	714	838	80	44%	51%	5%
IT	1329	307	53	79%	17%	3%

In general, it can be surmised in Table 7, that referees from category C present a shorter 'seniority' and the fastest promotion rate. This is also evident in EN and IT. Referees from area B present a longer 'seniority' in EN (besides higher age) and a slower promotion rate in IT.

Table 7

Place of Birth by Federation/Association and General

England				
Place of birth	Top category (average)	Seniority	Speed of promotion (average)	Year of birth
A	3,49	16,87	0,56	1976
B	3,60	19,37	0,51	1969
C	3,52	12,01	1,06	1978
total	3,53	17,46	0,58	1974
Spain				

Place of birth	Top category (average)	Seniority	Speed of promotion (average)	Year of birth
A	4,37	11,19	0,60	1995
B	4,51	11,85	0,57	1994
C	4,14	11,00	0,61	1992
total	4,43	11,52	0,59	1994

Italy				
Place of birth	Top category (average)	Seniority	Speed of promotion (average)	Year of birth
A	5,35	15,87	0,55	1990
B	5,72	16,91	0,49	1988
C	5,11	12,49	0,62	1991
total	5,41	15,95	0,54	1989

Total				
Place of birth	Top category (average)	Seniority	Speed of promotion (average)	Year of birth
A	4,53	15,03	0,57	1987
B	4,39	15,32	0,54	1984
C	4,05	11,78	0,82	1985
total	4,46	14,98	0,57	1986

4.7.2. Reasons to Start

When considering the reasons that referees started officiating, the combined answers from the three countries show that 16% of the responses were because “It was appealing to me’ (see Table 8).

Table 8

Reasons to Start

Description	EN	SP	IT	Average
It was appealing to me	12%	19%	17%	16%
Because my friends/ relatives	2%	9%	8%	6%
Financial reward	6%	16%	8%	10%
To remain in sport after retiring	15%	16%	9%	14%
Family member encouragement	3%	4%	2%	3%
My child played, needed an official	8%	0%	1%	3%
Giving something back to community	9%	0%	1%	4%
Likes a personal challenge	7%	9%	14%	10%
To practise sport or stay fit	13%	12%	13%	13%
Participating in a social activity	2%	1%	2%	1%

Enthusiasm or passion for a sport	15%	9%	16%	13%
Learning new skills	4%	4%	5%	4%
Satisfaction as a volunteer	2%	1%	1%	1%
To improve my CV	1%	0%	1%	1%

An ANOVA test indicated that there was no confirmatory difference between federations/associations ($F(2, 26) = 0.1, p = 0.902$) about the distribution by reasons to start. Only in the case of EN, could financial reward be connected to 'Seniority' or 'Speed of promotion,' since in EN seniority is longer for those who expressed that they did not have financial motivation to start refereeing, and the speed of promotion is higher for those who did express an initial motivation for remuneration (see Table 9).

Higher remuneration can influence the motivation of new referees in two alternative ways: it can attract more referees, but it can also decrease the proportion of referees motivated by other factors if communication primarily emphasises financial incentives. The combined effect is uncertain.

Table 9

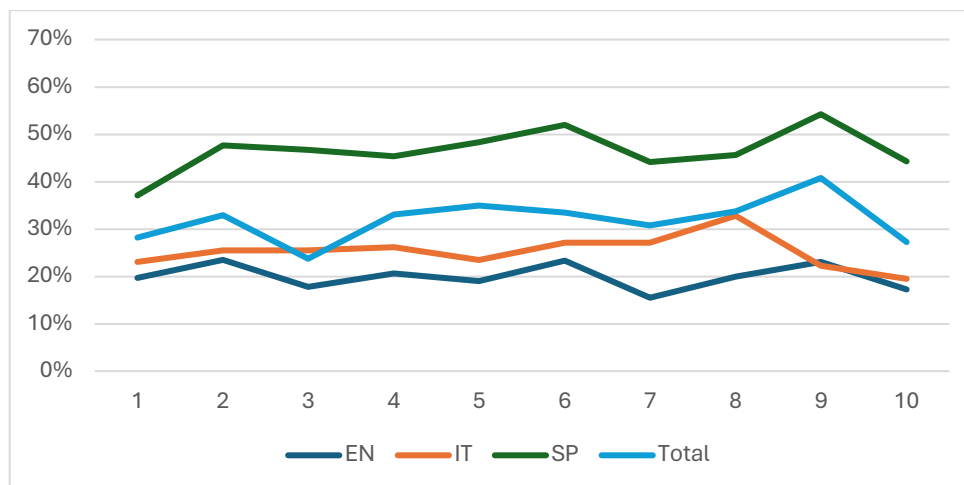
Seniority and Speed of Promotion whether Financial Reward was a Reason to Start for the Referee

Federation	Financial reward was NOT a reason to start		Financial reward was a reason to start	
	Seniority	Speed of Promotion	Seniority	Speed of Promotion
EN	18,92	0,53	11,45	0,76
SP	11,73	0,60	11,26	0,57
IT	15,85	0,56	16,23	0,50

Figure 2 does not demonstrate a determination of remuneration for the category reached, but SP shows it is of paramount importance for this variable.

Figure 2

Remuneration was a Reason to Start by Current Category



4.7.3. Reasons to Leave

The variations between the three countries regarding why people quit are more significant than the differences in why they start.

Table 10

Reasons to Leave

		EN	SP	IT	Average
Aggression	Suffering aggression or threat	23%	12%	14%	16%
Physical condition	Lack of physical condition or an injury	19%	6%	7%	11%
Disappointment	Disappointment at not in development programs	5%	18%	5%	9%
Personal circumstances	Incompatibility with my personal circumstances	14%	20%	10%	15%
Professional circumstances	Incompatibility with professional circumstances	7%	11%	15%	11%
Interest	Loss of interest	9%	5%	9%	8%

Federation/association	Lack of follow-up from my federation/association	5%	3%	5%	4%
Physical requirements	Physical requirements and tests are too onerous	4%	3%	3%	3%
Disagreement	Disagreement with the response from federation/association	2%	7%	2%	4%
Remuneration	Insufficient remuneration	5%	5%	17%	9%
Demotion	Demotion	2%	9%	2%	4%
Developmental unfairness	Unfair promotions or evaluations	6%	1%	12%	6%

'Aggression' and 'physical condition' are both prominent for EN, whereas 'disappointment' and 'personal circumstances' are most common in SP, and 'remuneration' and 'professional circumstances' are more evident in IT. Some points in this table should be addressed regionally/locally, within the three countries, although an ANOVA test indicated that there was no confirmatory difference between the different groups ($F(2, 18) = 0.83, p = .453$).

A majority of the inactive referees who answered the survey in SP and IT affirmed that their dropout was somehow avoidable by the federation/association. In EN, the proportion of referees who believe that their discontinuation was avoidable by the federation/association is equal to those who think that it was mainly due to personal circumstances (see Table 11).

When we analyse the reasons provided by referees who have stopped officiating, we find that the reasons are more concentrated when the referee believes it was due to personal circumstances. In addition to the incompatibility with 'personal circumstances', across the three leagues we find incompatibility with 'professional circumstances', 'aggression', and 'physical condition'. In SP, remuneration is considered particularly important, whilst physical condition is the most important in EN, across the three countries in that particular category.

For those referees who indicated that the reason for their discontinuation was avoidable, in EN aggression is the most selected reason before lack of follow-up and unfair promotions. In IT remuneration is the primary reason given for discontinuation, before unfair promotions, and in SP demotion was particularly relevant.

The sample included 822 inactive referees, with a confidence interval of 95% and a margin of error of 3.4 for the total population of referees in the three countries.

Table 11

Reasons to Leave, Referees who Stopped Officiating

	EN	IT	SP	Total
Personal reasons	50%	34%	40%	41%
Aggression	14%	14%	13%	13%
Physical condition	27%	9%	3%	12%
Disappointment	3%	4%	21%	10%
Personal circumstances	14%	15%	23%	18%
Professional circumstances	11%	16%	12%	13%
Interest	9%	10%	2%	7%
Federation/association	3%	4%	5%	4%
Physical requirements	8%	4%	1%	4%
Disagreement	2%	3%	5%	3%
Remuneration	5%	13%	6%	8%
Demotion	2%	3%	5%	4%
Developmental unfairness	5%	7%	3%	5%
Avoidable reasons	50%	66%	60%	59%
Aggression	18%	12%	7%	11%

Physical condition	10%	3%	9%	7%
Disappointment	10%	7%	10%	9%
Personal circumstances	6%	6%	15%	9%
Professional circumstances	7%	13%	8%	10%
Interest	9%	7%	10%	9%
Federation/association	13%	6%	4%	7%
Physical requirements	4%	3%	8%	5%
Disagreement	7%	4%	8%	6%
Remuneration	5%	20%	2%	11%
Demotion	3%	2%	15%	7%
Developmental unfairness	12%	16%	3%	10%

4.7.4. *Reasons to Continue*

Across the three countries, 'sport involvement' is the first reason for referees to continue (being especially relevant in EN), followed by 'stay fit' (IT especially). 'Social activities' are also very important in EN, 'money' and 'promotion' are the most important in SP, and 'relationships' and 'promotion' are relevant in IT. Conversely, 'federation treatment' and 'referee status' were not found to be a relevant motivation for referees to continue (see Table 12).

Table 12

Reasons to Continue

Title	Description	EN	SP	IT	Average
Promo	Promotion expectations	10%	18%	16%	15%
Money	An extra income	15%	18%	11%	15%

Status	The social status of referees	4%	2%	3%	3%
Treat	Differential treatment from Federation	1%	1%	2%	1%
Stay	The excitement to follow in refereeing	14%	19%	24%	19%
Relation	The relationship with other referees	13%	15%	17%	15%
Sport	To practise sport or stay fit	26%	16%	18%	20%
Social	Enjoy the social activity that refereeing represents	17%	11%	10%	13%

An ANOVA test indicated that there was no confirmatory difference between the three federations/associations ($F(2, 14) = 0.14, p = .874$). Again, the social aspect of refereeing is more relevant in EN, while remuneration in SP is highly relevant. This finding requires further examination concerning the level of remuneration in the three countries and the potential effect on retention.

4.7.5. Engagement Factors by the Stage of the Career

As noted in the literature review, different stages of referees' careers can provide different perceptions of their career (see Table 13, Table 14).

Table 13
Reasons to Continue by Stage of Seniority (Percentage of the Sample)

Stage	Promo	Money	Status	Treat	Stay	Relation	Sport	Social
1	51%	43%	7%	3%	54%	37%	51%	37%
2	55%	47%	8%	4%	52%	37%	50%	33%
3	57%	45%	7%	3%	53%	44%	52%	28%
4	43%	45%	8%	4%	55%	42%	57%	33%

5	28%	44%	7%	4%	55%	42%	62%	39%
6	20%	31%	11%	4%	56%	51%	64%	44%
Total	42%	42%	8%	4%	54%	43%	56%	36%

Note. **1:** 2 seasons or less; **2:** 3-5 seasons; **3:** 6-10 seasons; **4:** 11-15 seasons; **5:** 16-20 seasons; **6:** More than 20 seasons.

Promo: Promotion expectations; **Money:** An extra income; **Status:** The social status of referees; **Treat:** Differential treatment from Federation; **Stay:** The excitement to follow in refereeing; **Relation:** The relationship with other referees; **Sport:** To practise sport or stay fit.

Table 14

Reasons to Leave by Stage of Seniority (Percentage of the Sample)

Stage	Agre	Phys	Diss	Pers	Prof	Lose	Fede	Requ	Disa	Remu	Demo	Unfa
1	54%	27%	28%	43%	27%	18%	12%	7%	9%	14%	7%	11%
2	44%	23%	30%	40%	29%	20%	9%	8%	12%	19%	15%	13%
3	37%	23%	26%	40%	37%	18%	10%	7%	11%	28%	15%	22%
4	37%	25%	25%	36%	33%	19%	11%	10%	11%	32%	15%	23%
5	44%	30%	21%	34%	25%	20%	14%	9%	10%	31%	10%	22%
6	46%	40%	16%	35%	23%	26%	12%	11%	8%	24%	7%	16%
Total	44%	29%	24%	38%	29%	21%	11%	9%	10%	24%	11%	17%

Note. **1:** 2 seasons or less; **2:** 3-5 seasons; **3:** 6-10 seasons; **4:** 11-15 seasons; **5:** 16-20 seasons; **6:** More than 20 seasons.

Agre: Agression; **Phys:** Physical Condition; **Diss:** Dissapointment; **Pers:** Personal circumstances; **Prof:** Professional circumstances; **Lose:** Lose of interest; **Fede:** Lack of follow-up; **Requ:** Physical Requirements; **Disa:** Disagreement with a response from the federation/association; **Remu:** Remuneration; **Demo:** Demotion; **Unfa:** Development unfairness.

These results are relevant for the federations/associations when considering any adaptation of their policies, specifically related to the career path of referees. The key findings in this area are summarised below:

- Relationships with other referees are increasingly important the longer a referee's career is
- Aggression is a particular reason to leave in the first five seasons
- Lack of follow-up by the federation/association as a reason to leave increases approximately after season 5
- Remuneration as a reason to leave is increasingly important from junior levels to senior levels

4.7.6. Influences to Start

Across the three countries, 'family or friend', 'play or coach' and 'initial vocation' can be considered relevant in terms of recruitment, because over 50% of these cases were important when referring to why individuals started refereeing across the three federations/associations.

Table 15
Influences to Start

		EN	SP	IT	Total
Family or friend	Did you have any friend/relative who influenced you to start refereeing?	30%	58%	45%	44%
Play or coach	Did you participate in regional football leagues or above as a player or coach?	65%	59%	29%	51%
Initial vocation	Would you say that you initially had a vocation for refereeing?	48%	56%	41%	48%

In EN, 'play or coach' was the primary reason given for beginning refereeing (65%), while 'family or friend' was only 30%. In IT, 'play or coach' was only 29%. However, exploratory tests demonstrated minimal effect on 'seniority' and 'speed of promotion', except the 'speed of promotion' for those referees who played or coached is faster than the remainder of the referees ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < .001$).

4.7.7. Level of Threats/Abuse/Aggression

Table 16 shows that across EN, SP and IT 63% of the referees felt physically threatened at some point, and one out of twenty referees felt threatened many times. 48% of the referees occasionally felt threatened in SP, and approximately one-quarter of referees in IT felt threatened sometimes.

Table 16

Did the Referee feel Physically Threaten?

	EN	SP	IT	Average
No	40%	29%	43%	37%
Occasionally	39%	48%	26%	38%
Sometimes	15%	17%	27%	20%
Many times	6%	6%	4%	5%

A regression analysis revealed that referees who reported experiencing physical threats faced a significant decline in their promotion prospects, with the likelihood decreasing by between 6% to 18% each year, depending on the frequency of threats encountered. In practical terms, this means that a referee facing threats may never achieve promotion, even after eight seasons of eligibility ($\beta = -0.06$, $p < .001$).

4.7.8. Participation in Development Programs

The three federations/associations present a similar rate of participation in development programs, although EN is slightly under the average (see Table 17). They also showed a similar excess of expectations, calculated as the proportion of referees who would have liked to participate over the total interested in the development programs. This measures how much the federations/associations did not respond to the referees' expectations.

Table 17

Participation in Development Programs

	EN	SP	IT
Participated (1)	364 (20%)	456 (25%)	478 (26%)

No, but I would have liked (2)	528	656	780
Excess [2 / (1+2)]	59%	59%	62%

The impact of any participation in development programs on 'seniority' measured by a regression (p-value=0.08) presents a negative coefficient of -0.07, which can be considered a low and counter effective effect. In other words, the fact that a referee takes part in the development programs reduces their seniority on average.

The influence on 'speed of promotion' is relevant (p-value 0.01), positive but low, with a coefficient of 0.052 (it implies that having participated in a development program the speed of promotion improves in 0.052 category levels a year on average).

4.7.9. Impact of Dependents

Male referees have more dependents than women referees, possibly because women started refereeing more recently and are, therefore, younger (Table 18). In EN, the average of dependents by gender tended to converge in recent years, since women started to referee before than in SP and IT.

In addition, referees do not show any sign that an increased number of dependents could be affecting the top category that they can reach.

Table 18

Referees with Dependents

	EN	SP	IT
Dependents of women referees	53	21	49
Dependents of men referees	2700	614	869
Dependents per year of seniority of woman referees	0,07	0,02	0, 02
Dependents per year of seniority of men referees	0,09	0,03	0,03

4.7.10. Academic Level

The samples from the three countries exhibited a high academic level (see Table 19). However, the sample from EN showed a slightly lower academic level, which may be attributed to a higher average age and a lower proportion of older generations accessing university education.

Table 19

Academic Level

	EN	SP	IT
Uncompleted basic education	0,33%	0,22%	0,17%
Basic education	7,06%	1,39%	1,22%
Compulsory secondary education	25,19%	9,10%	13,99%
Non-compulsory secondary education	19,91%	29,36%	34,09%
Bachelor's degree or equivalent level	34,71%	43,40%	27,43%
Post-graduate (master or doctoral level)	12,79%	16,54%	23,10%

No influence from academic level to 'Seniority' or "Speed of promotion' was detected, with both coefficients of correlation between -0.05 and 0.05.

5. Results and Findings

5.1. Research Questions

RQ1 - Analyse the motivational, biographical, and organisational factors that influence the career length of referees in England (EN), Spain (SP), and Italy (IT).

The explanatory variables observed in the literature on the topic of referee retention have demonstrated different significance over the length of referees' careers

and their speed of promotion. Table 9 highlights the similarities and differences between the three countries.

The three blocks of independent variables (biographical, motivational, and organisational) showed some influence over the two dependent variables (seniority and speed of promotion). Therefore, it is important to observe and monitor the relationship between biographical variables and seniority. Start age has shown that it is not a deterrent to seniority, with the referees who start in their thirties reaching the highest seniority. In addition, the descriptive analysis highlighted that the participation in refereeing of people from other countries might grow to reach the same proportion that this population represents in wider society. The problem of threats against referees has also proven to be important (Downward et al., 2024; Webb et al., 2020a), impacting on their possibilities of promotion.

Those traditionally considered triggers to start refereeing, such as family or friends in refereeing, initial vocation, and previous experience as a player or coach, proved their relevance (Aliende et al., 2023), although only the latter showed influence on speed of promotion.

In addition to the study of causation, it is critical that federations/associations monitor these variables to ensure they have accurate information about the profile of referees to improve the channels and contents of their communication with these referees. For example, we showed the high average academic level of referees (WINS, 2023), the growth of the proportion of women in refereeing or their family status, and the number of dependents. All of these factors can inform the communication with these groups.

Regarding motivational variables, we identified some variables with notable impacts as causes to start, continue, or leave refereeing. While the ANOVA test did not confirm a different pattern of variables, these causes were not equally significant in the three countries.

In terms of the organisational variables, development programs across the three countries showed an important proportion of referees who were willing to participate. While it is a factor that generates engagement, the programs have not demonstrated any effect on seniority, which is also a result for federations/associations to consider. Other aspects connected to federations/associations' policies are associated with the risks to leave. They were shown to be diverse across the three

countries, which is a critical insight for local federations and associations within each country. A third point linked to federations/associations' policies is the important proportion of former referees who consider the cause of their dropout avoidable.

RQ2 - Examine the factors that influence the beginning of referees' careers in EN, SP, and IT.

The results of this study have enabled us to formulate recommendations to improve the recruitment and selection policies of federations/associations. First, we observe that the start age can be extended from youth to middle-aged candidates, whilst not impacting seniority. Second, senior referees present diverse profiles, whether they are self-servicing or altruistic. Third, when it comes to the place of birth, federations/associations have room to extend recruitment plans to candidates from other countries that are still less than the number present in wider society. It has also been proven that traditional networks are effective in attracting candidates (Webb et al., 2020b), such as relatives and friends and former players and coaches, although only the later demonstrates a certain determination over the speed of promotion. Finally, we found homogeneity across the three countries regarding the factors influencing the start of refereeing (the appeal of refereeing, remuneration, remaining involved in sports, stay fit, or passion for sports), although the priorities can differ for the three federations/associations.

RQ3 - Analyse and investigate the variables that extend the careers of referees in EN, SP, and IT.

The study highlights the main risks to leave and the expectations of continuing referees. Violence against referees and dealing with professional and personal compatibility with referees' lives are the main challenges faced by federation/association policies, along with other local priorities.

RQ4 - Explore the barriers and opportunities at different career stages for referees in EN, SP, and IT.

This study differentiates the intensity of the different motivational factors over the course of referees' careers. While some motivational factors present similar levels throughout the careers, others are especially sensitive, such as promotion for the youngest stage and relationships with other referees for the most senior. Regarding the risks to leave, it is remarkable that professional compatibility is relevant throughout the

entire refereeing career, and remuneration is the most important from the fifth year of officiating.

5.2. Comparative Analysis Between the Three Federations/Associations

Table 20

Similarities and Differences in the Level of Significance of the Factors Determining the Length of Referees' Careers in England, Spain and Italy

Variable	Similarities	Differences
Speed of promotion	Average of 57% across the three countries	
Current age		Average current age is 50 in EN, 30 in SP and 35 in IT.
Place of birth	Referees born out of the country present a higher speed of promotion.	IT particularly presents a bigger proportion of referees who were born in the region/county where they referee (79%, versus SP 44% and EN 55%).
Reasons to start	<p>“To practise sport” or “stay fit” are common reasons to start (RtS) refereeing (13%)</p> <p>“To remain involved with a sport after retiring from playing” is an important RtS in EN (15%) and SP (16%).</p> <p>“Passion for sport” is relevant in EN (15%) and IT (16%).</p>	<p>Financial reward is an important RtS in Spain (16%).</p> <p>Other altruistic RtS such as “giving something back to the community” (9%) or providing an official to their children (8%) are relevant in EN.</p> <p>The challenge refereeing represents is relevant in IT (14%).</p>

Variable	Similarities	Differences
Reasons to leave	<p>“Suffering aggression” is one of the main reasons to leave (RtL) across the countries, especially in EN (23%). SP reaches 12% and IT 14%.</p>	<p>“Lack of physical condition” is important in EN (19%).</p> <p>The main RtL in SP are “Disappointment at not being included in development programs” (18%) and “Incompatibility with my personal circumstances” (20%).</p> <p>The main RtL in IT are “Insufficient remuneration” (17%) and “Incompatibility with my professional circumstances” (15%).</p>
Reasons to continue	<p>“To practise sport or stay fit” , “The excitement to follow in refereeing”, and “The relationship with other referees” are three common important RtC, at 15% in all three countries.</p>	<p>In SP “Promotion expectation” and “An extra income” are especially important (18%).</p> <p>In EN “Enjoy the social activity that refereeing represents” is 17%.</p>
Influences to start	<p>‘Family or friend’, ‘play or coach’, and ‘initial vocation’ triggers can be considered relevant, since in approximately one half of the cases these reasons were given as important to start refereeing, with different percentages in the three federations/associations (see Table 15).</p>	<p>In EN, ‘play or coach’ was 65%, whilst ‘fam or friend’ was only 30%. In IT, ‘play or coach’ was only 29%.</p>
Threats	<p>63% of the referees have felt physically threatened at some point.</p> <p>One out of twenty referees felt threatened many times.</p>	<p>Almost one half of the referees occasionally felt threatened in SP, and approximately one quarter of IT referees felt threatened sometimes.</p>

Variable	Similarities	Differences
Social attitudes	The media in (38/100) and fans on the pitch (40/100) present the lowest average values.	EN presents the least negative perception of fans (57/100 on the pitch and 73/100 off the pitch) and IT presents the least negative perception of the media (55/100 on the pitch and 54/100 off the pitch).
Development programs	Between 20% and 26% of referees took part in at least one development program. Approximately 60% of the referees interested in participating in the programs were not selected.	
Gender	Women started refereeing later and women present a lower number of dependents.	The higher average age can explain the higher number of dependents in EN (1,52), versus IT (0,51) and SP (0,35).
Academic age	The three countries present a similarly high academic level, being the average over non-complimentary secondary education.	

5.3. Implications

In this section we focus on the implications of our findings. We have classified these implications into five groups related to talent management utilised in business management and by wider organisations: recruitment and selection; training and development; remuneration; support and engagement; and performance monitoring.

5.3.1. *Recruitment and Selection*

- EN represents a plausible future scenario for SP and IT because the data show that the average age is clearly higher (33 years old) in EN. There is space for SP and IT to increase the potential age of recruitment, therefore targeting the

potential recruitment of future referees in older age brackets. Figure 1 shows the peak of seniority for referees is 32 years of age.

- The motivational profile of referees in EN includes fewer expectations about reaching the higher categories and is more empathetic with the social aspects of refereeing (see Table 12).
- The proportion of referees born out of the country in which they now officiate is below the wider national ratio. We observe in Table 6 that referees born out of the country are around 5%, while approximately 18% of the sample population from EN was born out of England (Office for National Statistics), 14% in SP, and 9% in IT (Eurostat, 2023). Nevertheless, the referees born out of the country have an increased 'speed of promotion' when compared to those referees that are born in the country. This is a point of consideration for federations/associations to drive their attention towards people coming from other countries who are underrepresented in refereeing.
- In the reasons to start we observed that they are mainly common across the three countries, although there are some small differences. For example, "to remain involved with a sport after retiring from playing", "to practice sport or stay fit", and "enthusiasm or passion for a sport" are common reasons for attracting people to refereeing across the countries, whilst giving something back to the community" is also evident in EN, "financial reward" is additional in SP, and "personal challenge" is evident in IT. These characteristics of the candidates who qualify as referees should be taken into account when attracting new candidates. These findings could be considered in the construction of courses, but particularly in any external communications and strategies to increase the number of people being recruited to the initial referee qualifications.
- Factors such as having a friend or relative who influenced the decision to start refereeing, prior participation in regional football leagues as a player or coach, and possessing an initial vocation for refereeing are significant reasons why individuals begin officiating. These factors were deemed important in 50% of the cases, although the prevalence of each trigger varies among different federations or associations. These three factors can be employed as effective sources to attract referee candidates by federations/associations; however, having participated in regional football leagues or above as a player or coach is

the only trigger that improves the 'speed of promotion' of the referees.

Therefore, it is advisable to study in detail the particular benefits that former players and coaches provide to refereeing, and how they might be recruited, trained and developed by federations/associations.

- In the case of referees in EN, those who cite remuneration as a motivating factor demonstrate a faster rate of promotion. This suggests that such referees may possess characteristics that are indicative of higher expectations for promotion and are potentially more driven to be promoted. Investigating if referees who are comfortable with an intense competition tend to stay in their roles longer, could offer valuable insights. Thus, conducting a thorough analysis of different profiles of the referee in each country could help create more effective plans to attract new referee candidates and will help retain each different profile.

5.3.2. Training and Development

- We observed that participating in development programs has an important impact on referees' engagement. A significant number of referees who would have participated in the programs but were not given the opportunity in SP was given as one of the main reasons for leaving.
- Related to the point above, relationships with other referees and social activities are two of the main reasons for referees to continue. Both are boosted in training programs.
- It has been observed that implementing a comprehensive strategy to address the social issue of threats, coupled with adequate training for referees to handle such situations, is an essential component of development programs. Neglecting this aspect could lead to ongoing attrition and hinder advancement opportunities for referees who are exposed to abuse/aggression.
- It is necessary to revise the development/training programs and the way of presenting, delivering, and communicating these programs since it has been found that their effect on 'seniority' and 'speed of promotion' is minimal.
- Development plans are enhanced with mentoring programs, particularly for talented young referees, creating a connection between training programs and ongoing support, as suggested by some parts of the analysis. Additionally,

expanded training opportunities can include social activities and community building, both of which can encourage permanence.

- Given the high academic level of our sample, it is worth exploring the implementation of programs in collaboration with universities. Establishing agreements between federations/associations and universities to formally recognise these programs in education settings could enhance referee engagement and provide social recognition for their efforts.

5.3.3. Remuneration

- Remuneration has been mentioned as a motivational factor. However, it has not demonstrated a direct effect on 'seniority' or 'speed of promotion' for those referees who mentioned it. This variable will require further analysis to compare the level of remuneration among the three countries (see Table 9). By conducting comprehensive research in the remuneration practices in refereeing across the three countries it would be possible to gain a deeper understanding on the implications for recruitment, retention, and overall satisfaction within the profession. This will help elucidate the situation regarding SP, where compensation achieves a notable significance.
- When we analyse the impact of remuneration, we find that it is a potential reason to leave, so different mechanisms of compensation should be analysed and considered to increase the tenure of referees.

5.3.4. Support and Engagement

- Responses to the question about the reasons why referees leave their role provided insights into how federations/associations can monitor the careers of referees. Organisations can boost development paths through different programs:
 - Training and Development programs can facilitate the widening of access to referees and include new subject areas to enhance the skills of referees on subjects such as communication and decision-making (Aragão e Pina et al., 2018).
 - Maintaining open communication channels between referees and federations/associations allows for the exchange of feedback,

concerns, and ideas. Regular communication helps build trust and fosters a supportive environment for referees (Cuskelly & Hoye, 2013). Besides any such communication oriented to performance, social channels such as intranets, surveys, think tanks, forums, and newsletters reinforce engagement.

- Assigning experienced referees as mentors or coaches can be valuable in guiding new or young referees and helping them navigate challenges in their careers. Mentors can provide advice, support, and encouragement to referees at all stages of their career (Samuel, 2019).
 - Providing complementary support services such as medical, legal, and psychological support can help referees overcome challenges and stay motivated in their careers (Samuel, 2020).
- In the context of employee experience, it is vital to delve deeper into the referees' overall journey, encompassing both their professional and personal aspects. This entails understanding the challenges they face in maintaining their careers and how these intersect with their personal lives. Federations/associations must prioritise finding flexible solutions that accommodate the diverse personal and professional circumstances of senior referees. This approach ensures that referees can integrate officiating into their wider lifestyle, thereby enhancing their overall experience and improving retention.
 - Federations/associations should find ways to create a community environment to facilitate personal connections between referees (gatherings, joint training programs, interest-based groups, peer learning opportunities, etc.). This was shown to have an increasing importance as referees gain seniority. This is connected to the lack of follow-up as a reason to leave after the first season refereeing. More personalised attention towards these referees would go some way to mitigating this problem.
 - Aggression and threats against referees is a prior social problem. In this research it has been shown to be a particular reason to leave in the first five seasons. Junior and youth referees in regional divisions require special

protection to deal with any such issues. We have clear evidence from this research that this would be a worthwhile and advantageous strategy.

5.3.5. Performance Monitoring

- The answers to the question “do you feel prepared to be promoted? and “in case you are not active any longer, did you feel prepared to be promoted to a higher category than the one you had reached?” show a miscommunication between federations/associations and referees. It is not feasible that in a funnel-shaped occupation like refereeing, referees should expect to be promoted in such high numbers, especially in IT and SP. Therefore, federations/associations should correct this by developing policies to improve the communication with referees regarding the expectations of promotion and performance management initiatives/procedures. In simple terms, there is an over expectation from referees around promotion possibilities given that fewer referees operate at higher or elite levels of the game.
- Implementing a robust performance evaluation system allows federations/associations to periodically assess referee performance. Regular assessments help identify areas for improvement and provide personalised feedback to referees. Additionally, the manner in which federations/associations handle the disappointment resulting from a lack of promotion constitutes another crucial aspect of the referee experience. Addressing this issue through effective communication and mentoring is essential to alleviate the burden of frustration it may cause and temper the excessive expectations it can generate among selected referees.
- The higher speed of promotion of women, possibly due to increased numbers of initiatives and a more focused approach to their recruitment and retention in recent years, should be examined to ensure the same levels of development and preparation are evident to access the highest categories.
- Federations/associations could consider adopting a different career strategy. This would involve broadening the potential career pathways available to referees within the federations/associations, and could entail offering a wider range of opportunities for involvement from the outset, encompassing a more diverse array of roles. In the organisational chart of a referees' section of a

federation/association, we find staff departments such as administration, communication, and marketing or compliance, and other roles such as mentors, coaches, and psychologists. These roles could be promoted or expanded within refereeing. It is recognised that there would be a financial implication attached to any such changes.

6. Continuation of the Research

6.1. Limitations of the Study and Future Lines of Investigation

This study opens possibilities for further research by segmenting referees based on various traits, such as age stage and/or seniority, and clustering profiles according to characteristics, such as expectations, previous experience in football, or location. By segmenting the population of football referees, federations/associations can gain deeper insights into the diverse needs and preferences of referees, allowing them to tailor their support programs and allocate resources more effectively.

In addition, since the study mainly employed a sample of active referees, expanding the sample to include referees who have recently left would provide valuable insights into the triggers of retention within the field. By examining the experiences and reasons for departure among these individuals, researchers can identify the key factors influencing referee turnover and develop targeted strategies to improve retention rates. Understanding why referees choose to leave can help football federations/associations address systemic issues such as burnout, lack of support, or dissatisfaction with working conditions, thus fostering a more sustainable and fulfilling environment for referees.

Finally, this investigation encourages the development of specific analyses to measure the impact of future changes in the policies of federations/associations using the theoretical framework that this study provides. For instance, examining the influence of initiatives such as new welcome programs, personalised mentoring, or adjustments to the remuneration system on indicators of satisfaction or attrition rates could shed light on the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing overall performance and retention.

6.2. Application to other Federations/Associations Study-Kit

The survey utilised in this research serves as a model to be customised to the unique circumstances of each federation/association, enabling the exploration of referees' perceptions and characteristics.

These are the steps to be followed for other federations/associations to replicate this study:

1. Survey adaptation. Revise the questionnaire and modify it according to the specific context of the federation/association in aspects such as levels of categories, regional federations/associations, or locally frequent reasons to start, continue and leave refereeing.
2. Ask for advice and collaboration of a steering committee of experts in refereeing that locally might revise the survey, help interpret results, and foster distribution among referees.
3. Distribute the survey using the most effective channels, ensuring anonymity and guaranteeing compliance with personal data protection laws. Federations are a relevant channel to access referees, ensuring the importance and quality of the research for recipients.
4. Data analysis. This study can be employed to mirror essential processes and statistical tests employed here to interpret responses. Exploratory data analysis allows the identification of the main patterns, trends, and significance levels among the explanatory variables.
5. Elaboration of recommendations. The joint work of data analysts and the steering committee can produce fruitful results in terms of learning to improve the policies of the federations/associations to enhance recruitment and retention.

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Appendix A

Survey

TITLE OF THE STUDY: Analysis of the Key Factors Influencing the Beginning and Continuation of Football Referees' Careers in Europe: Improving Recruitment and Retention

Welcome to the survey funded by the UEFA Academy to study the careers of European football referees. We do appreciate you taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

This research aims to understand the careers and experiences of referees to assist federations/associations and associations in establishing the necessary policies to retain and attract talent.

If you are a current or former football referee in England, Spain, or Italy, you are the intended participant in this survey.

In the following pages, you will find an ANONIMOUS questionnaire about your career as a football referee. It will take about 15 minutes to complete.

You can read the detailed terms and conditions of the survey at [-LINK TO DOC-](#)

To proceed to the questionnaire, please click on "Next." By doing so, you are giving your consent to participate in this study.

PARTICIPANT DATA

1. What is the highest category you have officiated/refereed?
2. What is the category you CURRENTLY officiate/referee?
3. Family status
 - Single
 - Married or Registered partnership
 - Divorced or Separated
 - Widowed
4. Gender
 - Woman
 - Man
 - Non-conforming
5. Year of birth:
6. What year did you start refereeing (as a certified referee by a regional or national federation/association)?
7. Which regional federation/association do you currently belong to?

8. How many seasons have you been actively refereeing?

2 or less

3-5 seasons

6-10 seasons

11-15 seasons

16-20 seasons

More than 20 seasons

9. Place of birth:

10. Select the THREE most important reasons for why you STARTED refereeing.

Then write 1 in the box of the most important one, 2 for the second and 3 for the third. Leave the rest empty:

It was appealing to me

Because my friend/s or relative/s did

Financial reward

To remain involved with a sport after retiring from playing

Family member encouragement

My son/daughter played sport and their team needed an official

Giving something back to the community

Like a personal challenge

To practise sport or stay fit

Participating in a social activity

Enthusiasm or passion for a sport

Learning new skills

Satisfaction with achievements as a volunteer

To improve my CV

11. If you did not identify a reason for starting officiating/refereeing in the previous question, please write your reason for STARTING below:

12. Select the most important THREE reasons (or risks if you are still active) for you to LEAVE refereeing.

Then write 1 in the box of the most important one, 2 for the second and 3 for the third. Leave the rest empty:

Suffering aggression or being threatened with aggression

Lack of physical condition or an injury

Disappointment at not being included in development programs

Incompatibility with my personal circumstances

Incompatibility with my professional circumstances

Loss of interest

Lack of follow-up from my federation/association

Physical requirements and tests are too onerous

Disagreement with the response received from my federation/association to any of my requests

Insufficient remuneration

Demotion

Unfair promotions or evaluations

13. Write your own reason to LEAVE in case you are not finding it in the previous question:

14. Did you have any friend or relative who decisively influenced you to start refereeing?

Yes

No

15. Did you participate in regional football leagues or above as a player or coach?

Yes

No

16. Would you say that you initially had a vocation for refereeing?

Yes

No

17. Select your THREE main motives for CONTINUING refereeing or your motives before quitting if you are not active.

Then write 1 in the box of the most important one, 2 for the second and 3 for the third. Leave the rest empty:

Promotion expectations

An extra income

The social status of referees

The differential treatment from the Federation

The excitement to follow in refereeing

The relationship with other referees

To practise sport or stay fit

Enjoy the social activity that refereeing represents

18. If you did not identify a reason for CONTINUING officiating/refereeing in the previous question, please write your reason below:

19. Do you feel prepared to be promoted? In case you are not active any longer, did you feel prepared to be promoted to a higher category than the one you had reached?

Yes

No

Not sure

20. Did you go through any situation when you felt physically threatened?

No

Occasionally

Sometimes

Many times

21. According to your experience, how would you mostly describe the attitudes of COACHES regarding your refereeing:

(a)On the pitch | (b)Off the pitch

Collaborative

Neutral

Confrontative

Hostile

22. According to your experience, how would you mostly describe the attitudes of SPECTATORS and FANS regarding your refereeing:

(a)On the pitch | (b)Off the pitch

Collaborative

Neutral

Confrontative

Hostile

23. According to your experience, how would you mostly describe the attitudes of CLUB REPRESENTATIVES regarding your refereeing:

(a)On the pitch | (b)Off the pitch

Collaborative

Neutral

Confrontative

Hostile

24. According to your experience, how would you mostly describe the attitudes of the MEDIA regarding your refereeing?

(a)On the pitch | (b)Off the pitch

Collaborative

Neutral

Confrontative

Hostile

25. According to your experience, how would you mostly describe the attitudes of OTHER REFEREES regarding your refereeing:

(a)On the pitch | (b)Off the pitch

Collaborative

Neutral

Confrontative

Hostile

26. According to your experience, how would you mostly describe the attitudes of SUBSTITUTE PLAYERS ON THE SIDELINE regarding your refereeing?

Collaborative

Neutral

Confrontative

Hostile

27. Could your dropout have been avoided by the Federation if they had provided appropriate responses or alternatives to retain you, or was your departure essentially due to personal reasons?

I am still an active referee

Yes, it could have been avoided

No, it was due to personal reasons

Not sure

28. Did you participate in any development program (high-potential program, assistant referees, women, or other)?

Yes

No

No, but I would have liked

29. If you answered YES in the previous question, in which development program did you participate?

30. Do you have children or other economically dependent people, or did you have children or other economically dependent people during your period as a referee?

Yes

No

31. If you answered YES in the previous question, how many dependent people do you support or have you supported?:

1

2

3

4

5 or more

32. What is the highest academic level you reached?:

Post-graduate (master or doctoral level)

Bachelor's degree or equivalent level

Non-compulsory secondary education

Compulsory secondary education

Basic education

Uncompleted basic education

33. Is there anything else that you would like to share that has not been covered in the questionnaire? If so, please explain below

34. If you would like to be kept informed or are happy to be contacted again about the project, please provide your contact details. Any contact details that are provided will be kept strictly confidential and will never be shared:

First Name

Last Name

Email Address

Appendix B

Description of Variables

Variable	Type	Description of the variable
Federation	Categorical	Federation (EN, SP or IT)
Status	Binomial	Active referee
Top_category_level	Ordinal	Highest category the respondent reached (from 10-top, to 1-lowest) in their career
Current_category_level	Ordinal	Current category the respondent participates (from 10-top, to 1-lowest)
fam_status_group	Categorical	Family status: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Married or Registered partnership (M) - Single (S) - Divorced or Separated (D) - Widowed (W) - Other (0)
Gender_man	Binomial	Male
Born_Year	Numeric	Year of birth
Start_Year	Numeric	Year of start refereeing
Start_Age	Numeric	Age at start
Regional_Fed	Categorical	Regional federation/association
Seniority	Numeric	Years of experience
Cat_by_Seniority	Numeric	Top_category_level divided by 'Seniority' (synthetic variable)
Place of birth	Character	Place of birth: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Same as the region/county the referee currently referees (A) - Other places in the country (B) - Out of the country (C)

Variable	Type	Description of the variable
RtS_interesting	Binomial	Reason to start - It was appealing to me
RtS_others	Binomial	Reason to start - Because my friend/s or relative/s did
RtS_money	Binomial	Reason to start - Financial reward
RtS_stay	Binomial	Reason to start - To remain involved with a sport after retiring from playing
RtS_family	Binomial	Reason to start - Family member encouragement
RtS_mychildren	Binomial	Reason to start - My son/daughter played sport and their team needed an official
RtS_giveback	Binomial	Reason to start - Giving something back to the community
RtS_challenge	Binomial	Reason to start - Like a personal challenge
RtS_sport	Binomial	Reason to start - To practise sport or stay fit
RtS_social	Binomial	Reason to start - Participating in a social activity
RtS_enthusiasm	Binomial	Reason to start - Enthusiasm or passion for a sport
RtS_learn	Binomial	Reason to start - Learning new skills
RtS_volunt	Binomial	Reason to start - Satisfaction with achievements as a volunteer
RtS_resume	Binomial	Reason to start - To improve my CV
RtL_agression	Binomial	Reason to Leave - Suffering aggression or being threatened with aggression
RtL_shape	Binomial	Reason to Leave - Lack of physical condition or an injury
RtL_dissap	Binomial	Reason to Leave - Disappointment at not being included in development programs

Variable	Type	Description of the variable
RtL_incompPers	Binomial	Reason to Leave - Incompatibility with my personal circumstances
RtL_incompProf	Binomial	Reason to Leave - Incompatibility with my professional circumstances
RtL_loseInt	Binomial	Reason to Leave - Loss of interest
RtL_lackFollow	Binomial	Reason to Leave - Lack of follow-up from my federation/association
RtL_requir	Binomial	Reason to Leave - Physical requirements and tests are too onerous
RtL_dissag	Binomial	Reason to Leave - Disagreement with the response received from my federation/association to any of my requests
RtL_remunera	Binomial	Reason to Leave - Insufficient remuneration
RtL_demotion	Binomial	Reason to Leave - Demotion
RtL_unfair	Binomial	Reason to Leave - Unfair promotions or evaluations
famORfriend	Binomial	Did you have any friend or relative who decisively influenced you to start refereeing?
playORcoach	Binomial	Did you participate in regional football leagues or above as a player or coach?
ini_vocation	Binomial	Would you say that you initially had a vocation for refereeing?
RtC_promo	Binomial	Reason to continue - Promotion expectations
RtC_money	Binomial	Reason to continue - An extra income
RtC_refstatus	Binomial	Reason to continue - The social status of referees
RtC_fedtreat	Binomial	Reason to continue - The differential treatment from the Federation

Variable	Type	Description of the variable
RtC_stay	Binomial	Reason to continue - The excitement to follow in refereeing
RtC_relation	Binomial	Reason to continue - The relationship with other referees
RtC_sport	Binomial	Reason to continue - To practise sport or stay fit
RtC_social	Binomial	Reason to continue - Enjoy the social activity that refereeing represents
Ready_Promo	Binomial	Do you feel prepared to be promoted? In case you are not active any longer, did you feel prepared to be promoted to a higher category than the one you had reached?
threaten	Ordinal	Did you go through any situation when you felt physically threatened? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many times (3) - Sometimes (2) - Occasionally (1) - No (0)
coach_in	Ordinal	How would you mostly describe the attitudes of COACHES regarding your refereeing on the pitch: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborative (3) - Neutral(2) - Confrontative (1) - Hostile (0)
coach_off	Ordinal	How would you mostly describe the attitudes of COACHES regarding your refereeing off the pitch (same key)
fans_in	Ordinal	How would you mostly describe the attitudes of SPECTATORS and FANS regarding your refereeing on the pitch (same key)

Variable	Type	Description of the variable
fans_off	Ordinal	How would you mostly describe the attitudes of SPECTATORS and FANS regarding your refereeing off the pitch (same key)
reps_in	Ordinal	How would you mostly describe the attitudes of CLUB REPRESENTATIVES regarding your refereeing on the pitch (same key)
reps_off	Ordinal	How would you mostly describe the attitudes of CLUB REPRESENTATIVES regarding your refereeing off the pitch (same key)
media_in	Ordinal	How would you mostly describe the attitudes of the MEDIA regarding your refereeing in the pitch (same key)
media_off	Ordinal	How would you mostly describe the attitudes of the MEDIA regarding your refereeing off the pitch (same key)
refs_in	Ordinal	How would you mostly describe the attitudes of OTHER REFEREES regarding your refereeing in the pitch (same key)
refs_off	Ordinal	How would you mostly describe the attitudes of OTHER REFEREES regarding your refereeing off the pitch (same key)
subs	Ordinal	How would you mostly describe the attitudes of SUBSTITUTE PLAYERS ON THE SIDELINE regarding your refereeing (same key)
avoidable_drop	Binomial	Could the Federation have avoided your dropout if they had provided appropriate responses or alternatives to retain you, or was your departure essentially due to personal reasons? (same key)
dev_prog	Binomial	Did you participate in any development program (high-potential program, assistant referees, women, or other)?

Variable	Type	Description of the variable
dev_prog_idlike	Binomial	No, but I would have liked
dependents	Binomial	Do you have children or other economically dependent people, or did you have children or other economically dependent people during your period as a referee?
dependents#	Numeric	Number of dependents
academic_level	Ordinal	Highest academic level reached by the respondent: Post-graduate (master or doctoral level) (6) Bachelor's degree or equivalent level (5) Non-compulsory secondary education (4) Compulsory secondary education (3) Basic education (2) Uncompleted basic education (1)