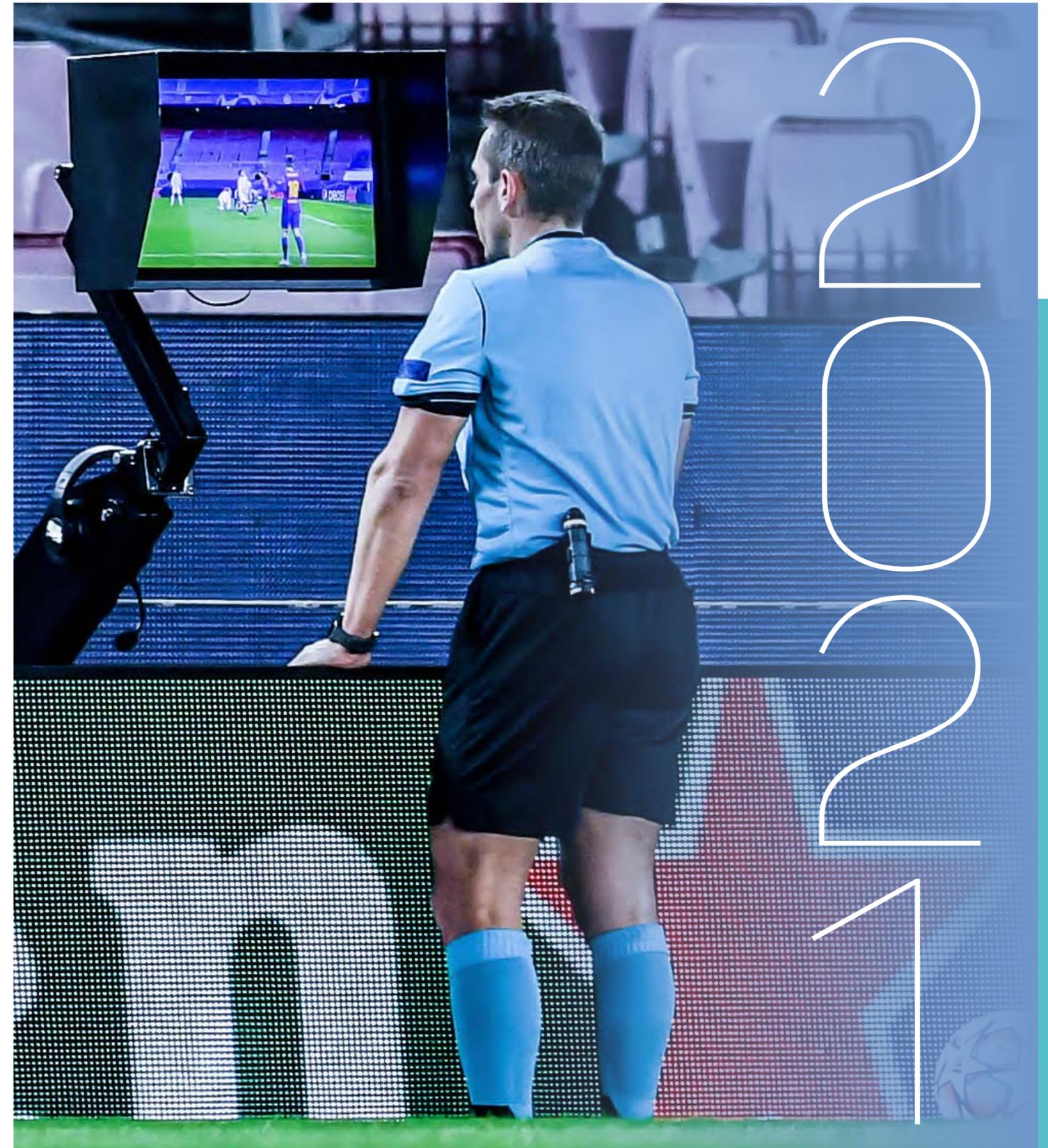




GLOBAL REPORT

SUSPICIOUS BETTING TRENDS
IN GLOBAL FOOTBALL





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FOREWORD

This is the fourth year that Stats Perform Integrity and Starlizard Integrity Services have come together to publish our report on suspicious football matches. As with previous editions, this year's report provides a summary of our analysis on trends relating to suspicious betting patterns in football matches played over the previous calendar year.

2020 was a year unlike any other as global football, together with many other aspects of everyday life, was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Both competitive and non-competitive matches were suspended for months in nearly every country around the world. When football eventually did restart games were generally played in empty or sparsely attended stadiums.

Despite the cancellation of so many fixtures, we analysed global betting market data from over 60,000 matches played in 2020 for this report. We hope our analysis serves to support football governing bodies and integrity stakeholders in protecting the integrity of football, and to this end we have provided a number of relevant stakeholders with the details of all suspicious matches identified in this report.

The aim of this report is neither to accuse nor make assumptions. It seeks simply to show where football has been associated with irregular betting markets, and to act as a guide as to where integrity issues might exist from a betting market perspective. Whilst these may be indicative of suspected match-fixing, inferences should not be made without further investigation. The findings of this report serve as indicators rather than indictments. We hope the analysis and findings in this report are useful and contribute to the understanding of suspicious betting activity in football.





61,296

football matches analysed within this report

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2021 report on Suspicious Trends in Global Football, our fourth annual review of suspicious betting activity associated with the world's most popular sport. This year's report covers 61,296 football matches played across the globe in 2020. Many readers will be familiar with previous editions but if this is your first look at one of our reports, we hope that you find it both interesting and informative.

The report combines Starlizard Integrity Services' unique real-time and retrospective analysis of the biggest betting markets in global football matches, together with Stats Perform Integrity's betting market monitoring systems and intelligence provided by betting operators across the globe, to provide a multi-dimensional and inside-the-market view of each match.

The result is an in-depth analysis of key betting markets (Asian Handicap, 1X2 and Total Goals markets) relating to the matches covered. Each match was carefully scrutinised, both in real-time and retrospectively, in order to identify whether any suspicious activity occurred within related betting markets.

"Suspicious" betting markets by definition refer to markets in which betting patterns show a divergence from regular expectations given the relevant sporting factors, and for which no legitimate explanation could be found.

METHODOLOGY

The initial analysis involved Stats Perform Integrity and Starlizard Integrity Services each independently identifying suspicious activity across global betting markets for matches played during 2020.

Stats Perform Integrity identified suspicious matches through a combination of betting market analysis, intelligence from Stats Perform's Integrity Intelligence Network, including betting operator alerts to suspicious activity, and analysis of team and player on-field performance using Opta's analytical capabilities.

Starlizard Integrity Services used Starlizard's ability to analyse events on and off the football pitch and convert them into true probabilities – this was then used to identify anomalous matches and atypical betting markets that were judged by a number of expert analysts to be suspicious.

Stats Perform Integrity and Starlizard Integrity Services then reviewed all suspicious matches in order to remove duplicates and identify unique matches.

Analysts from both companies shared findings prior to a quality assurance process that resulted in a consensus conclusion on each match. Stats Perform Integrity and Starlizard Integrity Services both had to agree in order for a match to be categorised as suspicious.

GLOBAL REPORT

SUSPICIOUS BETTING
TRENDS IN GLOBAL
FOOTBALL

2020



A LOOK BACK TO LAST YEAR'S REPORT

In last year's report, betting markets for 80,939 matches played in 2019 were analysed. These covered over 1,000 different domestic and international competitions, played in 113 different countries, and across six continents.

Identified as suspicious were:

456

A total of **456** matches, representing 0.56% of all matches analysed.

1.23%

1.23% of all Asian matches analysed, the highest proportion of any continent.

74

74 cross border matches - 36 involving national teams and 38 competitive matches involving clubs from different nations.

29

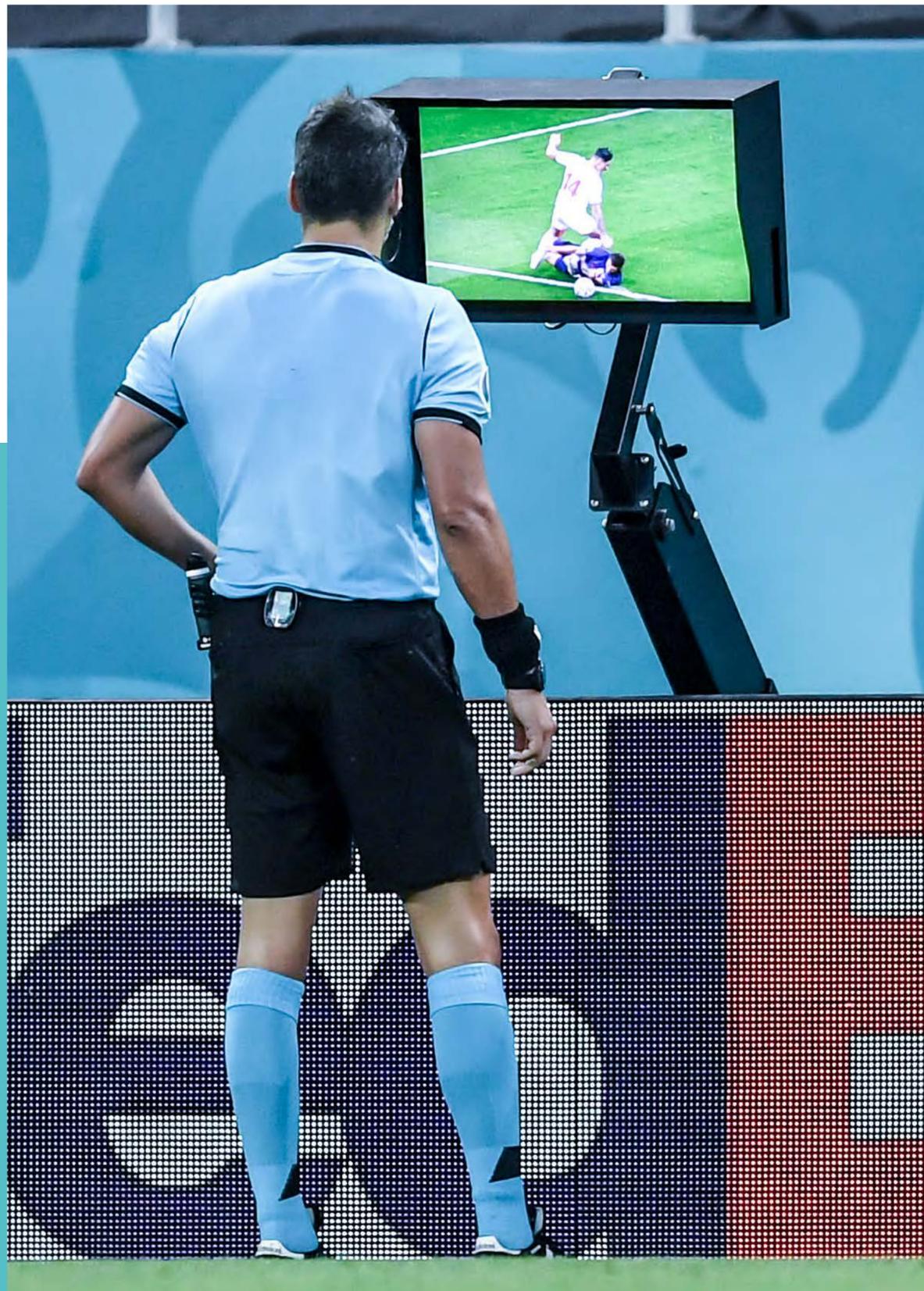
29 friendly matches, five involving national teams.

5

Five women's matches.

46

46 youth matches (Under 23 or below).



THIS YEAR'S HEADLINE FIGURES

In this year's report, betting markets for **61,296** matches taking place in 2020 have been analysed, from over **800** different domestic and international competitions. These matches were played in **112** different countries and across six continents.

Identified as suspicious were:

217

A total of **217** matches, representing **0.35%** of all matches analysed.

80

Matches in **80** different competitions and across **51** different countries.

48

48 club friendly matches (**1.19%**).

16

16 youth matches (**0.35%**).

3

Three national team matches (**0.38%**) and **11** competitive matches between clubs from different countries (**0.9%**).

1

One women's match (**0.03%**).

HEADLINE FIGURES: COMPARISON TO PREVIOUS YEARS

A total of 61,296 matches played in 2020 have been analysed for this year's edition of the report. This represents a reduction of around 23% from the 80,939 matches analysed the previous year. The lower number is in part due to the cancellation of many matches during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is still comparable to the 62,250 matches analysed two years ago.

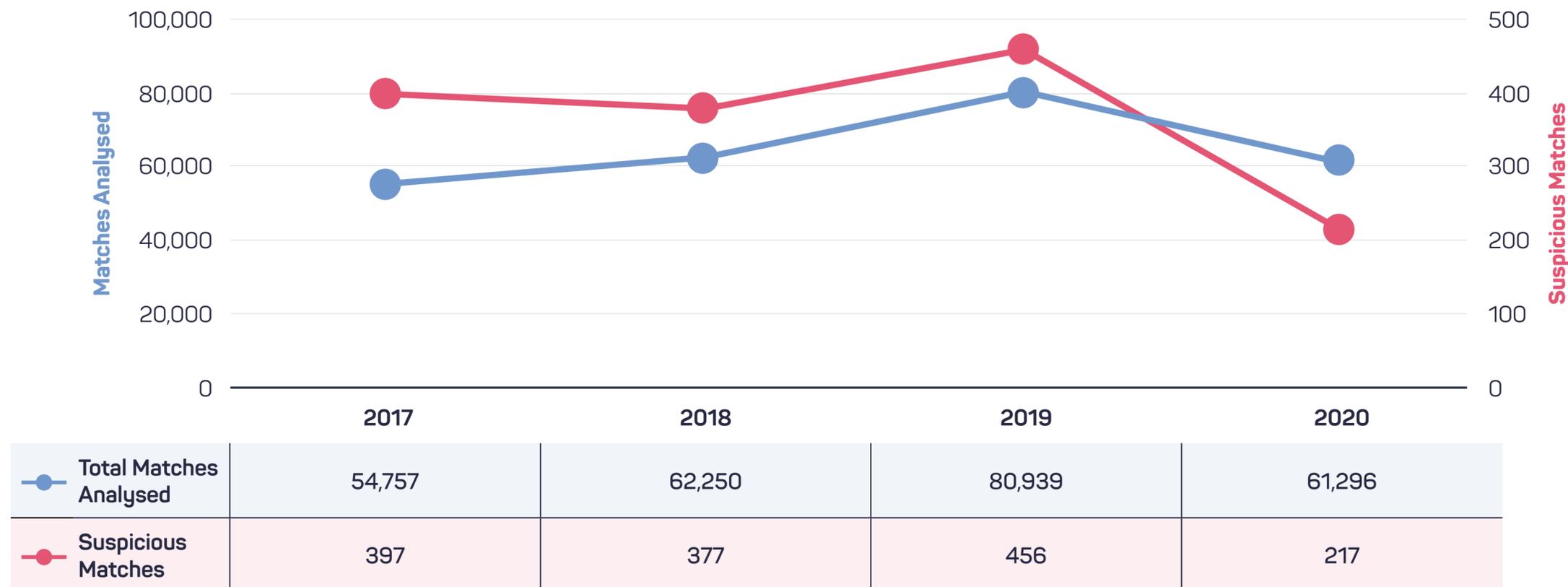
217 (0.35%) of the analysed football matches played in 2020 have suspicious betting markets. This is a significant decrease on the 456 (0.56%) suspicious matches analysed from 2019. It is also a decrease of more than 40% on the 377 suspicious matches identified from 2018, and less than half the 0.73% identified in our inaugural report that covered matches played in 2017.

The percentage of suspicious friendly matches has increased from 0.67% in 2019 to 1.19% in 2020, with the overall number of suspicious friendly matches doubling from 24 to 48. We analysed a similar number of friendly matches played in both 2019 and 2020, as a number of countries replaced their suspended domestic schedule with friendly matches.

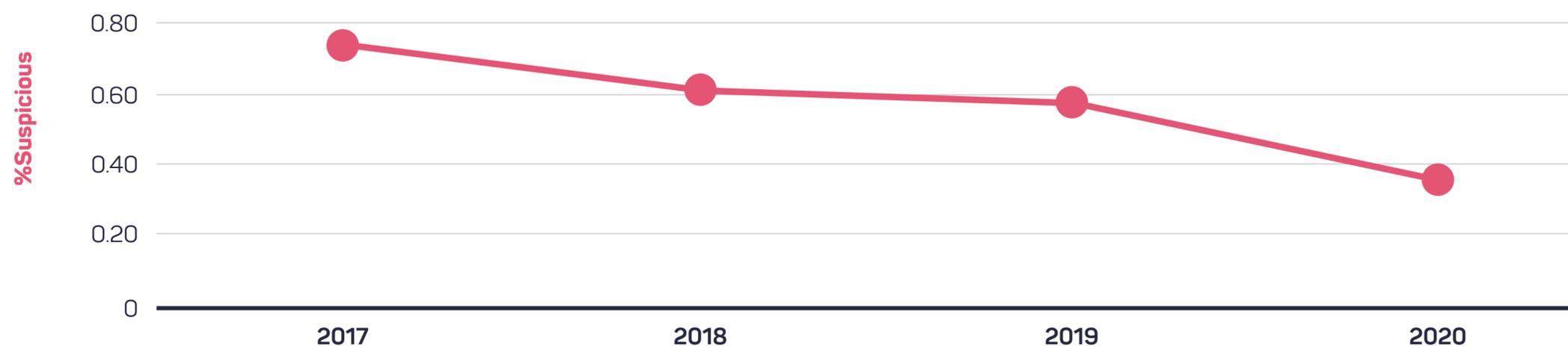
Suspicious youth matches decreased for the third consecutive year, down from 46 in last year's report to 16 this time around. This also represents a percentage decrease, with 0.53% of youth matches analysed in 2019 assessed as suspicious compared to 0.35% in 2020.

The number of suspicious national team matches has also fallen considerably from 36 (1.53%) in last year's report to just three (0.38%).

Analysed and suspicious matches by year played



Percentage of suspicious matches by year played



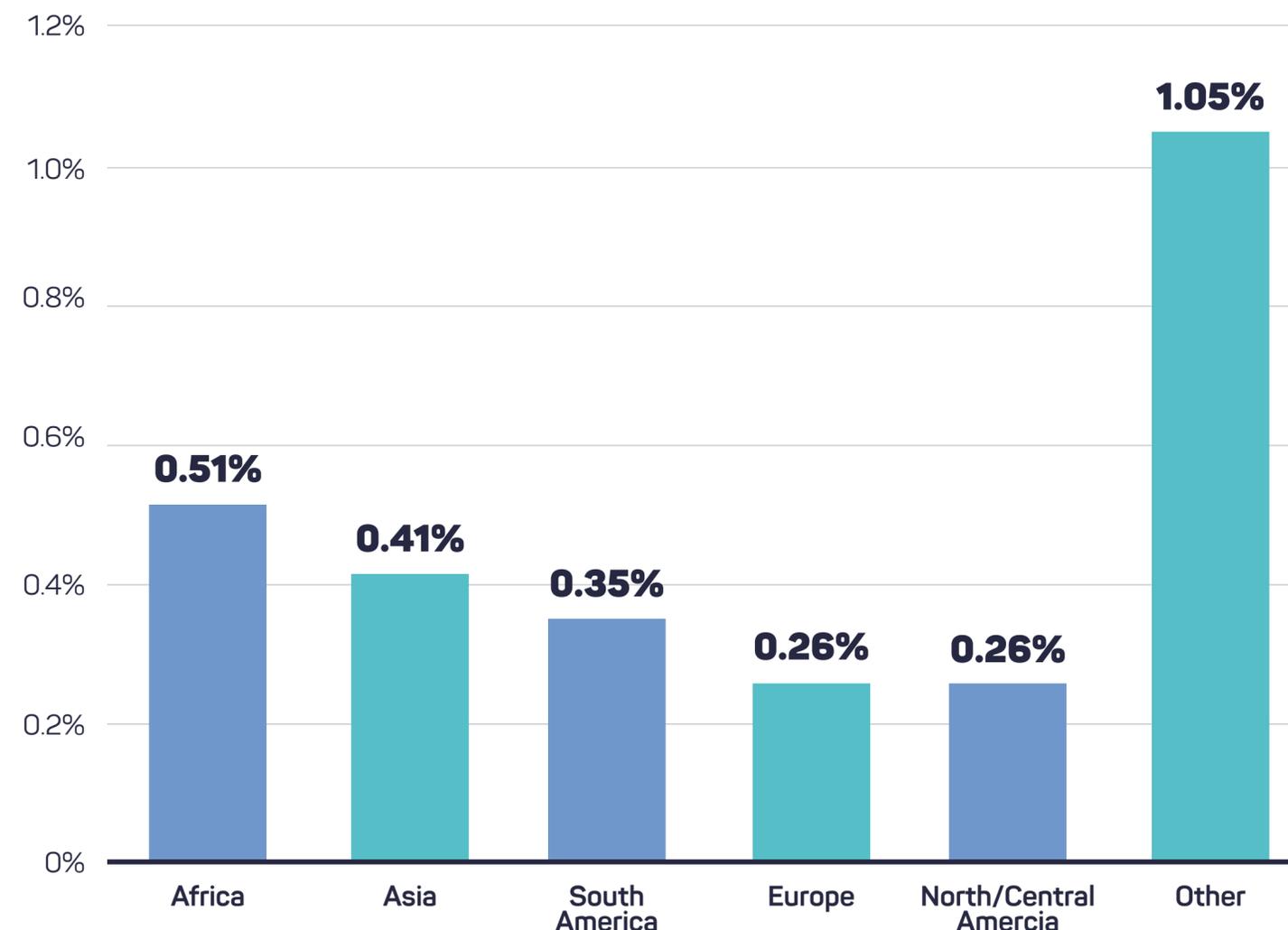
SUSPICIOUS MATCHES BY CONTINENT

- 0.51% of the 1,368 competitive domestic matches analysed in Africa were suspicious, the highest percentage of any continent and overtaking Asia for the first time.
- Six of the seven suspicious African matches were played in the same country, a significant reduction from the 20 suspicious matches identified in the same country in 2019.
- 19 of South America's 24 suspicious matches were played in the same country, the highest of any individual nation.
- Only two clubs from this South American country featured in more than one suspicious match. One of these clubs featured four times.

- Well over half of all analysed matches were played in Europe, but only 0.26% were suspicious, a lower percentage than any continent other than Oceania.
- The six North/Central American suspicious matches were played across just two different Central American countries.
- The proportion of suspicious 'Other' (international or non-competitive) matches was more than double that of any individual continent.

MATCHES ANALYSED BY CONTINENT		SUSPICIOUS MATCHES BY CONTINENT	
Europe	36,171	Europe	93
South America	6,883	Asia	25
Asia	6,109	South America	24
Oceania	2,526	Africa	7
North/Central America	2,313	North/Central America	6
Africa	1,368	Other	62
Other	5,926	Total	217
Grand Total	61,296		

Percentage of suspicious matches by continent



SUSPICIOUS MATCHES BY CONTINENT

North/Central America is the only continent to register its highest number of suspicious matches so far, though the overall proportion remains below the global average at **0.26%**.

NORTH/CENTRAL AMERICA

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Suspicious Matches	5	4	4	6
No. of matches monitored	2,427	2,979	4,226	2,313
% of suspicious matches	0.21	0.13	0.09	0.26

SOUTH AMERICA

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Suspicious Matches	28	24	19	24
No. of matches monitored	6,573	7,333	9,760	6,883
% of suspicious matches	0.43	0.33	0.19	0.35

The number of suspicious South American matches has risen for the first time despite the number of matches analysed falling significantly. Both the number and proportion of suspicious matches were back in line with 2018 levels.

There is a significant drop in the number of suspicious European matches with both total number and proportion of suspicious matches analysed down by more than half on those played in 2019.

EUROPE

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Suspicious Matches	237	227	248	93
No. of matches monitored	31,812	35,441	46,405	36,171
% of suspicious matches	0.75	0.64	0.53	0.26

AFRICA

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Suspicious Matches	1	5	21	7
No. of matches monitored	1,316	1,922	2,255	1,368
% of suspicious matches	0.08	0.26	0.93	0.51

In 2019, **20** of the 21 suspicious African matches were played in the same country. Successful action by authorities on match fixing in this country came before the improvement seen in 2020. Despite this, Africa overtakes Asia with the highest % of suspicious matches for the first time.

Just **0.41%** of all Asian matches analysed in 2020 have been identified as suspicious, a third of the 2019 proportion.

ASIA

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Suspicious Matches	68	69	90	25
No. of matches monitored	5,094	7,280	7,308	6,109
% of suspicious matches	1.33	0.95	1.23	0.41

OCEANIA

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Suspicious Matches	3	1	0	0
No. of matches monitored	2,055	2,393	2,805	2,526
% of suspicious matches	0.15	0.04	0.00	0

No suspicious matches were seen in Oceania for the second year running.



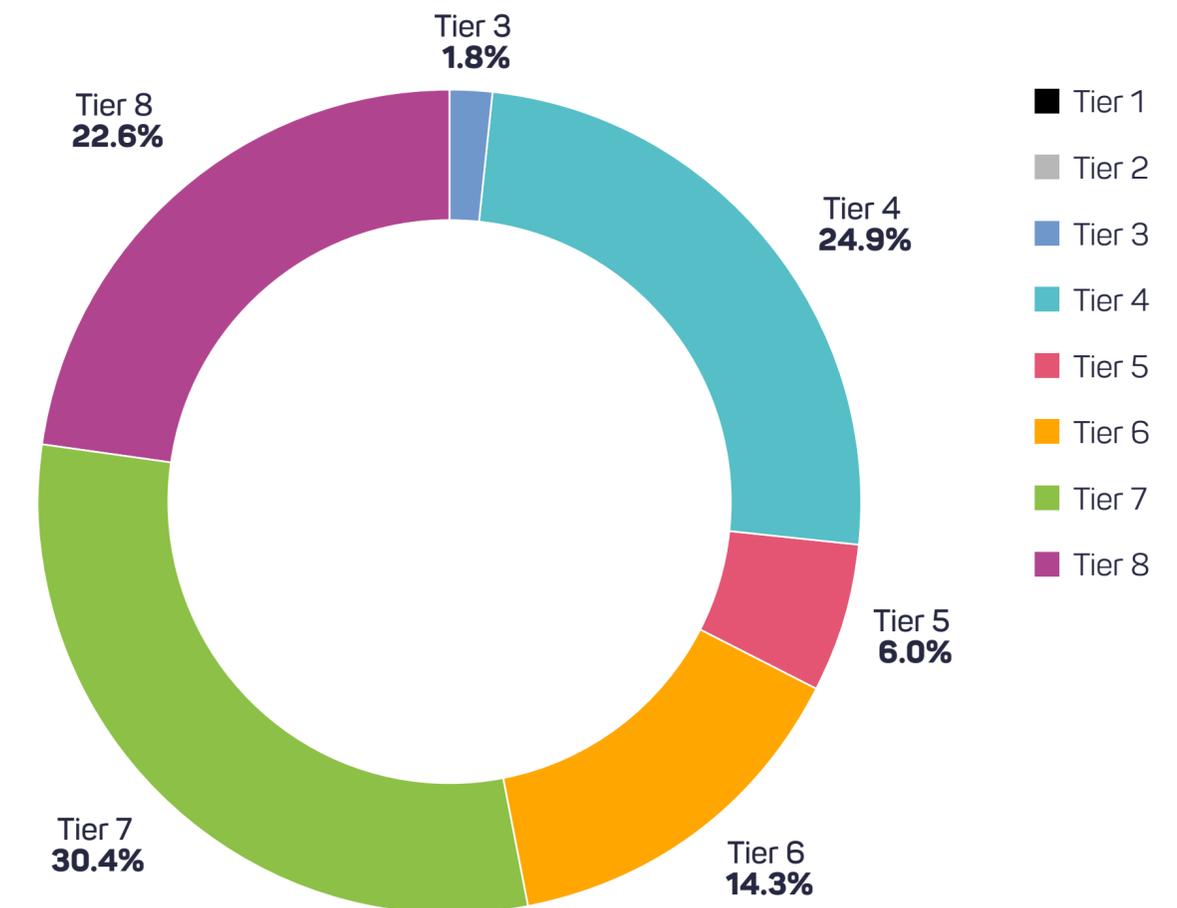
SUSPICIOUS MATCHES BY TIER

- Tiers relate to betting market levels which sometimes, but not always, correlate to football tiers.
- Tier 1 represents high maximum stakes per bet. World Cup matches and elite level competitions would generally be included in Tier 1, whilst Tier 8 matches are at the bottom end of this scale.
- Congested fixture programmes, such as Saturday afternoons in Europe, can have a significant effect on how competitions are tiered. Competitions can be tiered both on their prominence and the timings of the matches played.
- For example, leagues in Asia may have a higher than expected tier status due to fewer competitions in the betting market space at the times these matches are played.

TIER	MATCHES ANALYSED	SUSPICIOUS MATCHES	% SUSPICIOUS
1	1,461	0	0.00%
2	1,839	0	0.00%
3	3,999	4	0.10%
4	8,414	54	0.64%
5	3,766	13	0.35%
6	12,556	31	0.25%
7	10,983	66	0.60%
8	18,278	49	0.27%

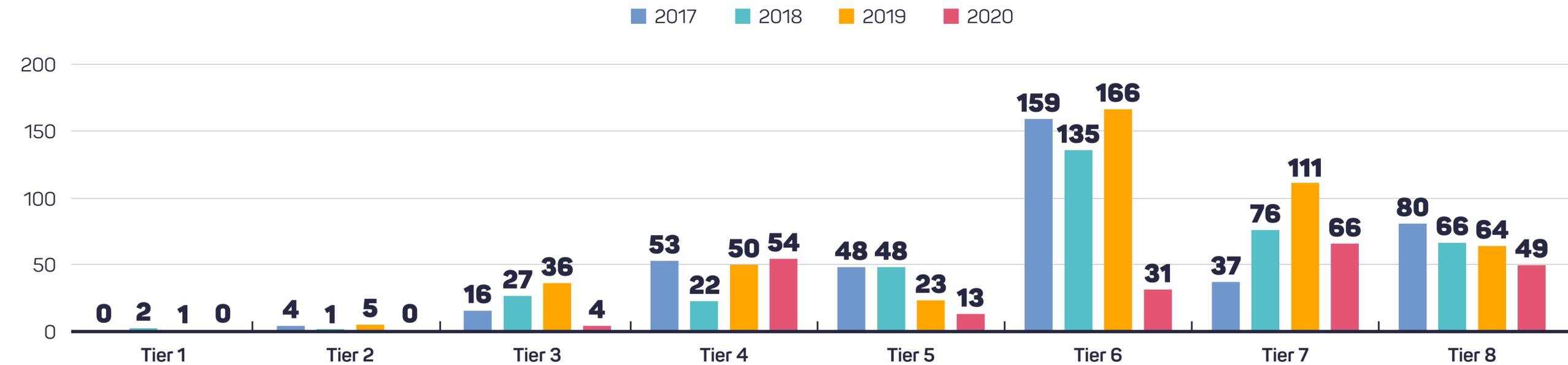
- Suspicious surrounding the highest profile matches continue to be extremely rare, with no matches analysed in Tiers 1 or 2 in 2020 deemed suspicious, and only four (0.1%) of those in Tier 3.
- Tier 4 has the highest proportion of suspicious matches from the total analysed, predominantly caused by the high number of friendly matches that fall into this category.
- There has been a decrease in the percentage of suspicious matches identified in Tiers 5 and 6 but an increase for Tiers 7 and 8, which account for more than half of all suspicious matches played in 2020.

Tier of suspicious matches played in 2020



SUSPICIOUS MATCHES BY TIER

Suspicious matches by tier: year-on-year comparison



TIER	SUSPICIOUS MATCHES 2017	SUSPICIOUS MATCHES 2018	SUSPICIOUS MATCHES 2019	SUSPICIOUS MATCHES 2020
1	0	2	1	0
2	4	1	5	0
3	16	27	36	4
4	53	22	50	54
5	48	48	23	13
6	159	135	166	31
7	37	76	111	66
8	80	66	64	49

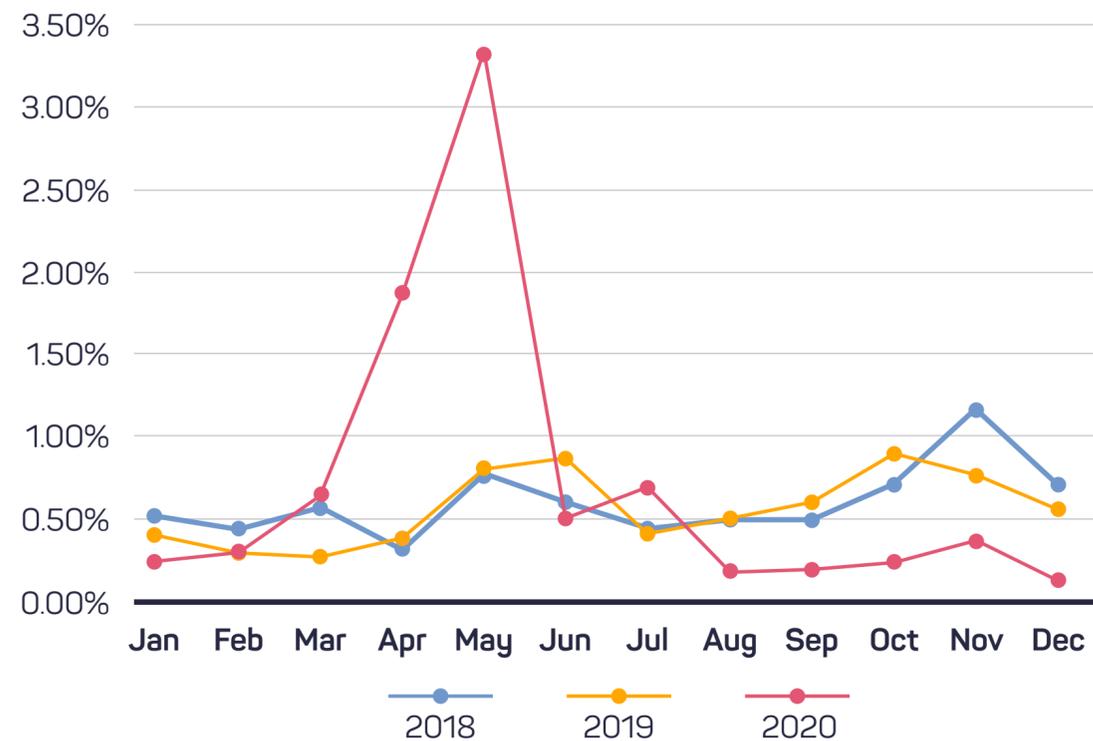
- Perhaps the most striking trend in match tiers is the decrease in suspicious matches identified in Tier 6, which contains several historically problematic competitions. This has improved greatly in 2020, often appearing to be the result of action taken by football associations and/or law enforcement.
- There is also a decrease in the number of suspicious matches identified in Tier 3. Only one domestic match analysed across the top three tiers has been assessed as suspicious, suggesting the highest profile competitions present the lowest concerns.
- Tier 5 sees a decrease in suspicious matches for the second consecutive year.
- For the first time, Tier 7 has the highest number of suspicious matches. The two domestic leagues with the highest number of suspicious matches are both in Tier 7.



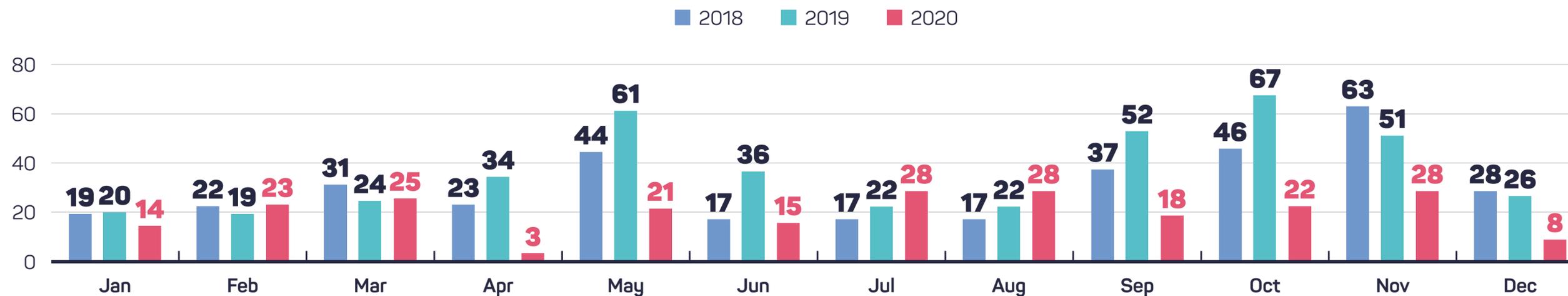
SUSPICIOUS MATCHES BY MONTH

- In January and February 2020, before COVID-19 began to significantly impact global football calendars, the number of suspicious matches is similar to the same period in previous years, with 37 matches in 2020 compared to 41 in 2018 and 39 in 2019.
- Most domestic competitions began to be suspended during March, though there was still one more suspicious match than in 2019, with nine suspicious friendly matches in the final week of the month.
- With little football played in April or May, the number of suspicious matches is notably down on previous years. However, the 21 suspicious matches identified in May account for more than 3% of all matches analysed that month. This is by far the highest proportion of any single month since the start of 2018. A likely explanation for this is the proportional increase in friendly matches played that month, as 18 of the 21 suspicious matches in May were friendlies.
- The number of suspicious matches identified in July is also higher than previous years, with one domestic league featuring eight suspicious matches played during that month.
- From August, despite domestic schedules beginning to return to a level closer to normality, the number of suspicious matches identified is still considerably below that of previous years. This remained the case throughout the autumn, even when some weeks contained busier schedules than the corresponding week in 2019, owing to the completion of previously cancelled fixtures.

% of suspicious matches by month



Suspicious matches by month

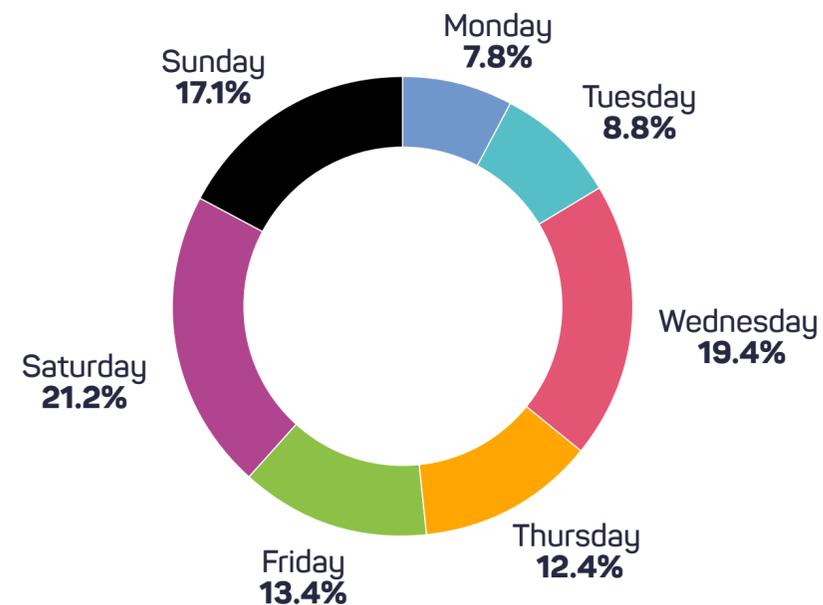




MATCH BREAKDOWN BY DAY

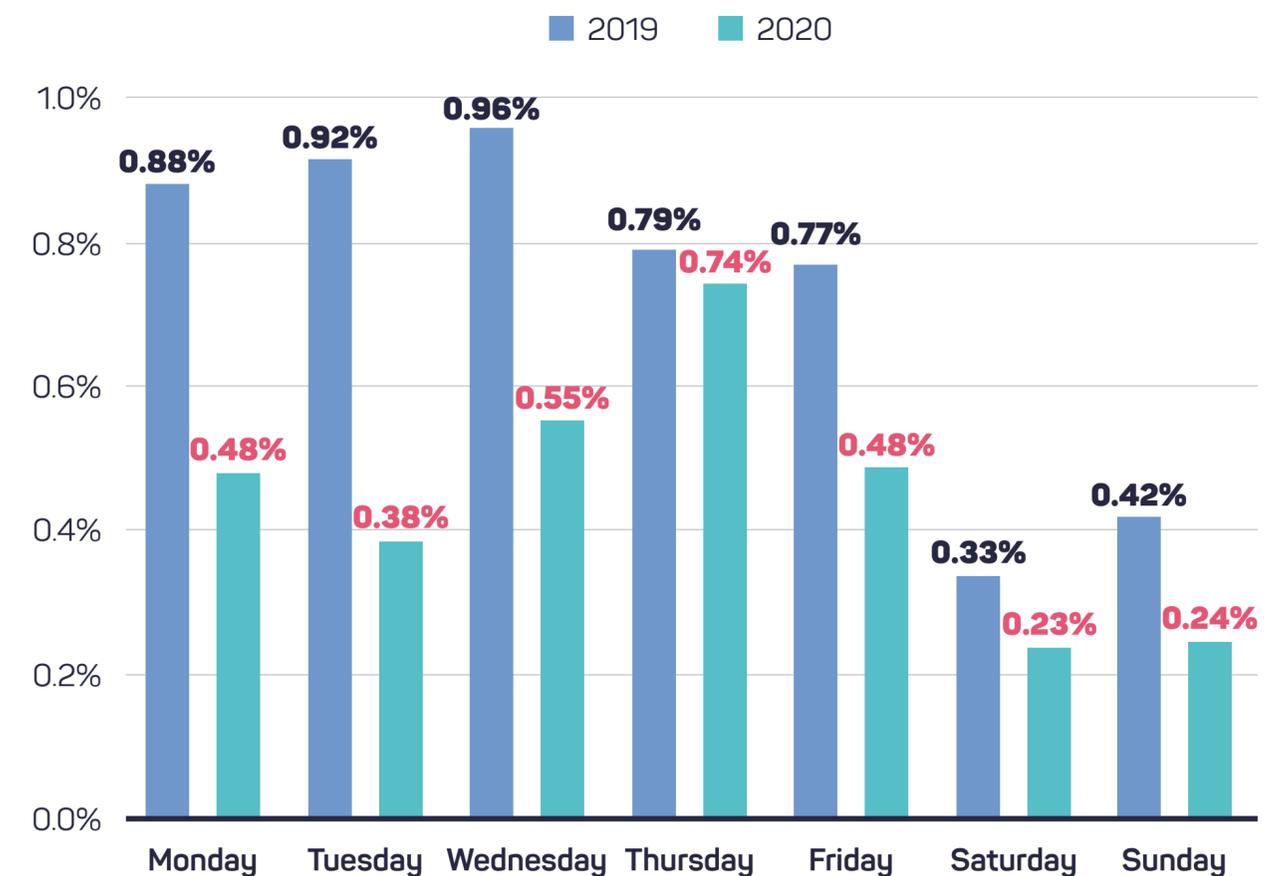
DAY	MATCHES ANALYSED	NUMBER OF SUSPICIOUS MATCHES	% OF SUSPICIOUS MATCHES
Monday	3,551	17	0.48%
Tuesday	4,987	19	0.38%
Wednesday	7,631	42	0.55%
Thursday	3,639	27	0.74%
Friday	6,003	29	0.48%
Saturday	19,831	46	0.23%
Sunday	15,654	37	0.24%

Breakdown of all 217 suspicious matches by day



- Last year, we highlighted the greater proportion of suspicious matches being played on weekdays. We attributed this to lower-tier matches taking a greater share of betting market liquidity than on weekends, when more higher-tier matches are available for betting.
- This trend continues into 2020, when Saturday and Sunday once again proportionately have the lowest number of suspicious matches.
- Thursday has replaced Wednesday as the day with the highest proportion of suspicious matches. The rate of suspicious matches played on a Thursday is more than three times that of Saturday or Sunday.
- Wednesday still sees more suspicious matches than Sunday, even though more than twice as many Sunday matches were analysed.

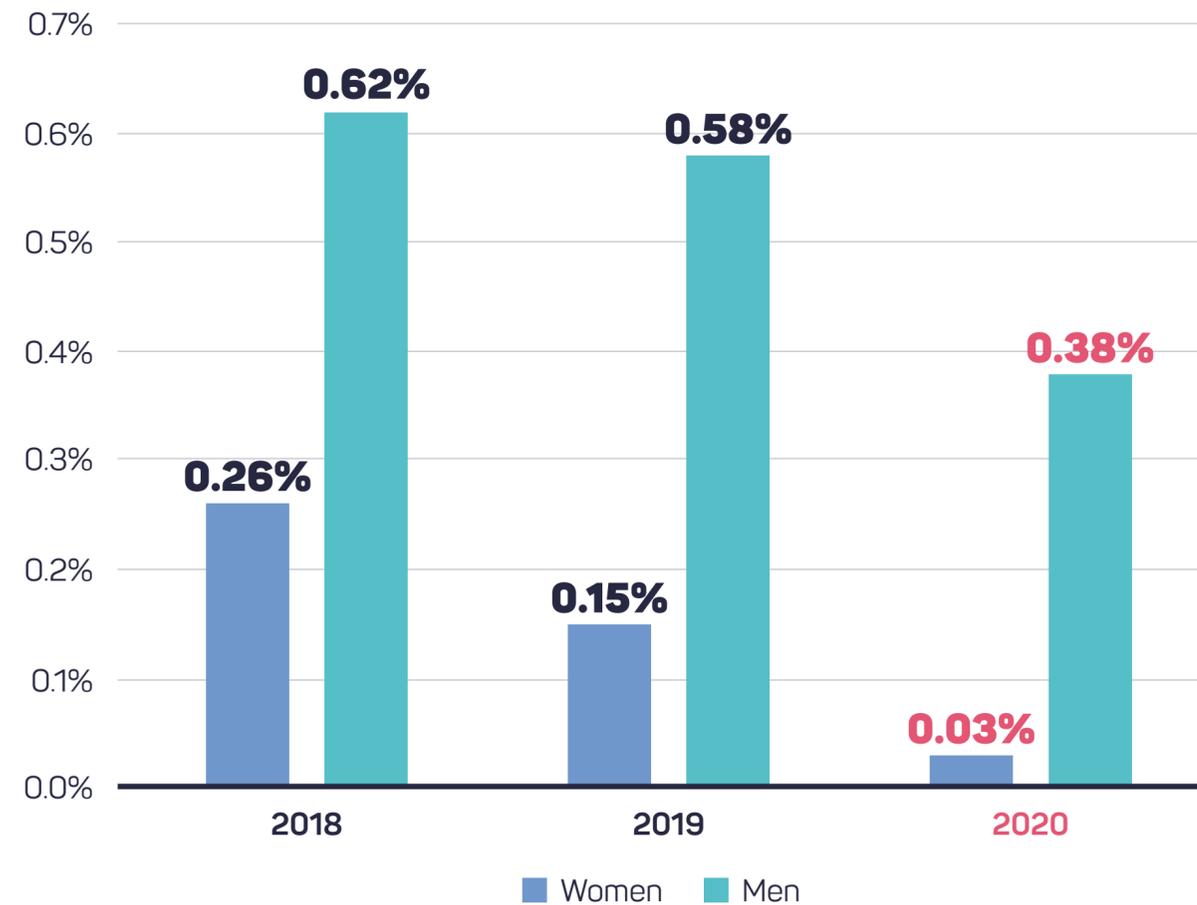
Percentage of daily analysed matches deemed suspicious



WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

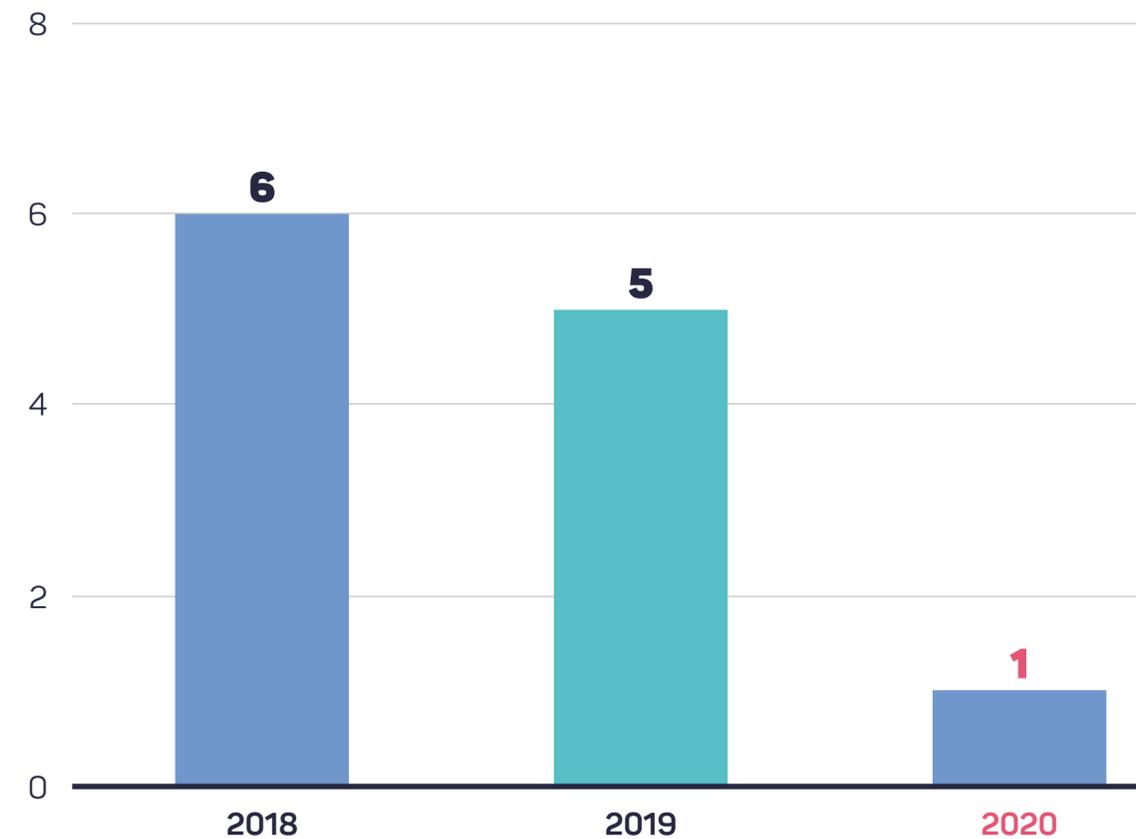
- The profile of women's football continues to grow and betting operators are offering a wider range of countries and competitions than ever before.
- Despite the interruptions caused by COVID-19, we have analysed 3,730 women's matches played in 2020, an increase of more than 10% on the previous year. However, there has been a 40% reduction in the number of women's national team matches analysed.
- Only one women's match has been identified as suspicious, compared to five matches played in 2019 and six matches played in 2018.

Percentage of suspicious men's and women's matches



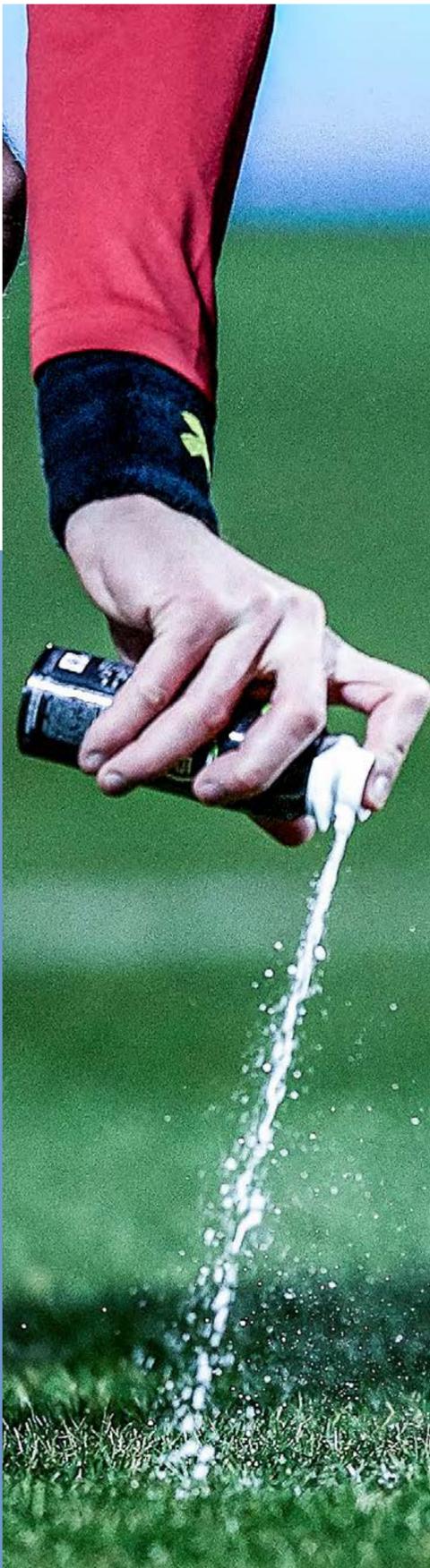
- This accounts for just 0.03% of all women's matches analysed in this year's report - representing less than 10% of the equivalent figure for the men's game.
- Last year, all five suspicious women's matches involved national teams, whereas this year the only suspicious women's match was a domestic game played in Asia.
- Overall, the rising levels of betting interest and opportunities in the women's game does not appear to have resulted in more integrity issues.

Suspicious women's matches year-on-year comparison

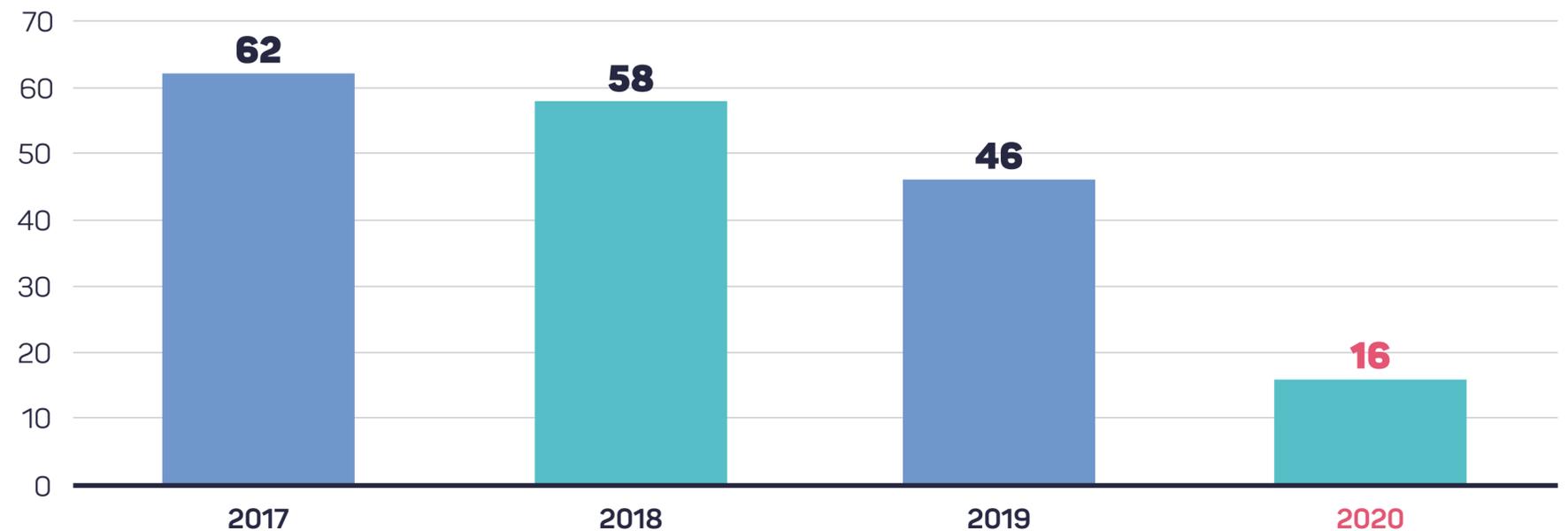


YOUTH FOOTBALL

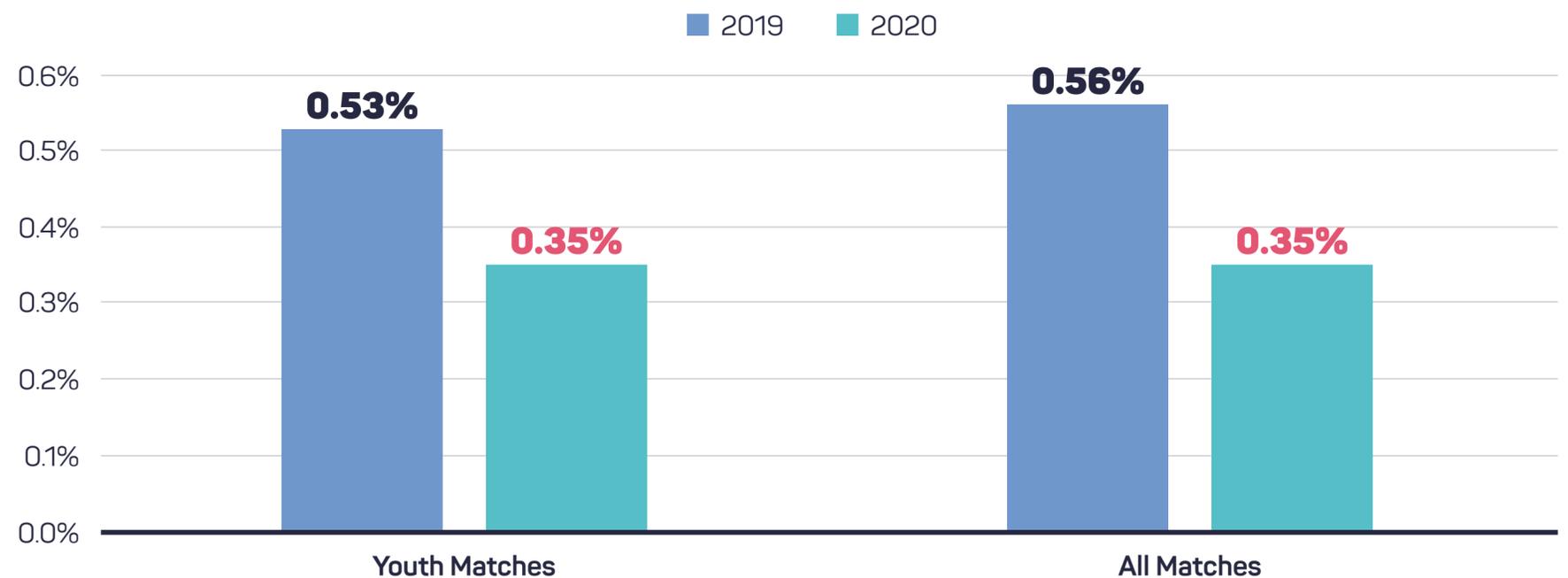
- The COVID-19 pandemic had a greater impact on the 2020 calendar for youth football (up to and including Under 23 level) than for senior football.
- This meant the number of youth matches analysed was 4,552, down from 8,644 the previous year.
- Even allowing for the reduction in games, there is still a lower proportion of analysed matches found to be suspicious, with 0.35% in 2020 compared to 0.53% played in 2019.
- This is the third successive year that the proportion of suspicious youth matches has fallen.
- In last year's report, 28 of the 46 suspicious youth matches emanated from just two European leagues, both with historical integrity issues. This year's report features only eight matches from these two leagues. Whilst it is clear that problems in these leagues persist, there are signs of improvement even allowing for the reduced number of fixtures.
- No other league saw more than one suspicious youth match.
- The number of suspicious matches played in one national youth league has fallen from five in 2019 to zero in 2020. However, there were three suspicious friendly youth matches played in that country during 2020, suggesting the reduction in numbers could be attributed to the disruption to their league calendar rather than an alleviation of the problem.



Suspicious youth matches by year



Proportion of suspicious matches by year



NATIONAL TEAM AND INTERNATIONAL CLUB MATCHES

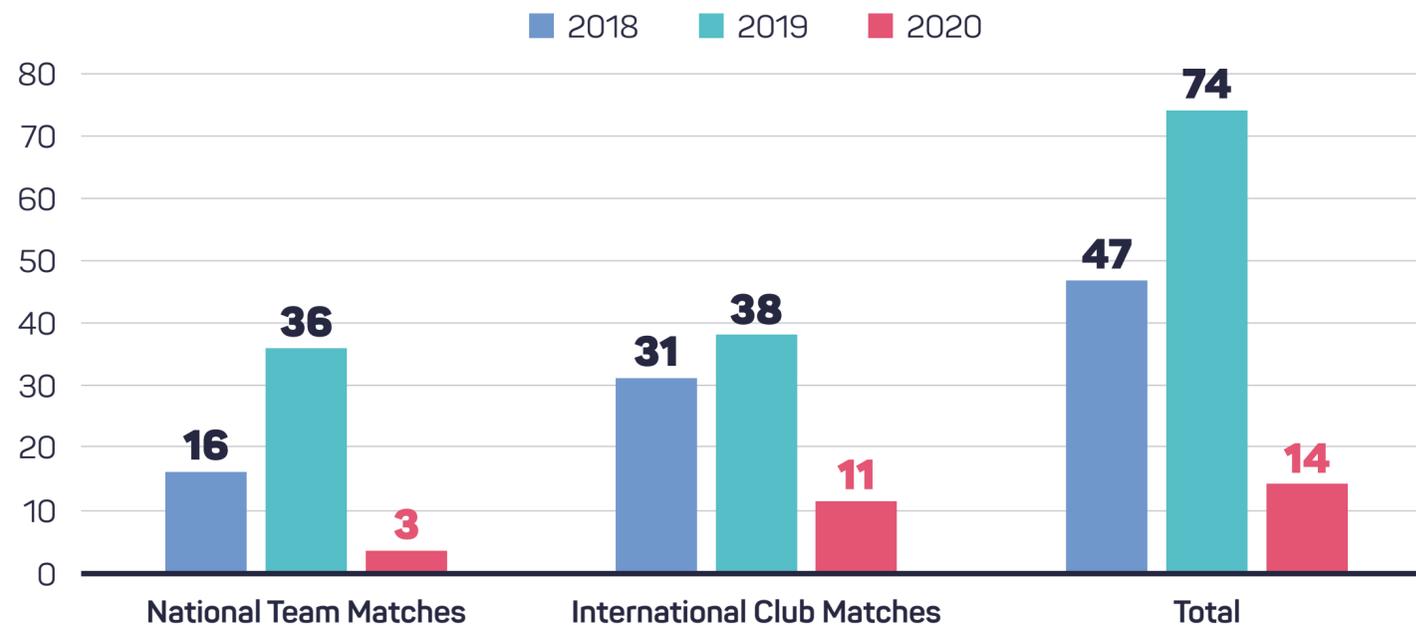
National Team Matches

- For the purposes of this report, “international matches” refer to both matches played between national teams and those in competitions open to clubs from different countries.
- COVID-19 negatively impacted the number of international matches played during 2020: we have analysed 782 national team matches, which is a third of the total number analysed in last year’s report.
- Only three suspicious national matches have been identified in 2020, which compares to 36 suspicious matches in last year’s report.
- Last year, the proportion of suspicious national team matches was almost three times that of all matches combined. This year sees greater alignment, with 0.38% of all national team matches being assessed as suspicious compared to the overall total of 0.35%.
- Of these three suspicious national team matches in this year’s report, two were played at youth level and the other was a friendly. No country features more than once this year.

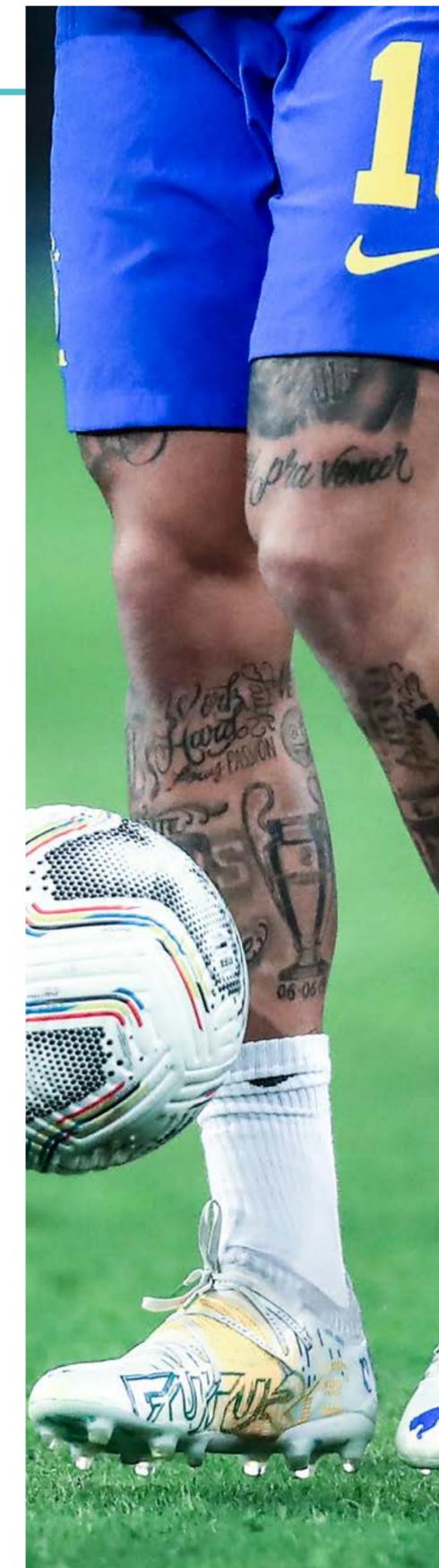
International Club Matches

- Although only 11 international club matches have been identified as suspicious in this year’s report (compared to 38 in last year’s report), it is important to factor in the reduction in fixtures. The actual proportion of suspicious matches is 0.90%, which is higher than last year’s 0.65% figure.
- Five suspicious international club matches identified in this year’s report form part of the same competition, although this is still a decrease on the 12 suspicious matches we identified played in 2019. No club features more than once.
- Overall, the proportion of suspicious international football matches is 0.70%, which compares to 0.90% and 0.96% in the previous two years.

Number of suspicious international matches



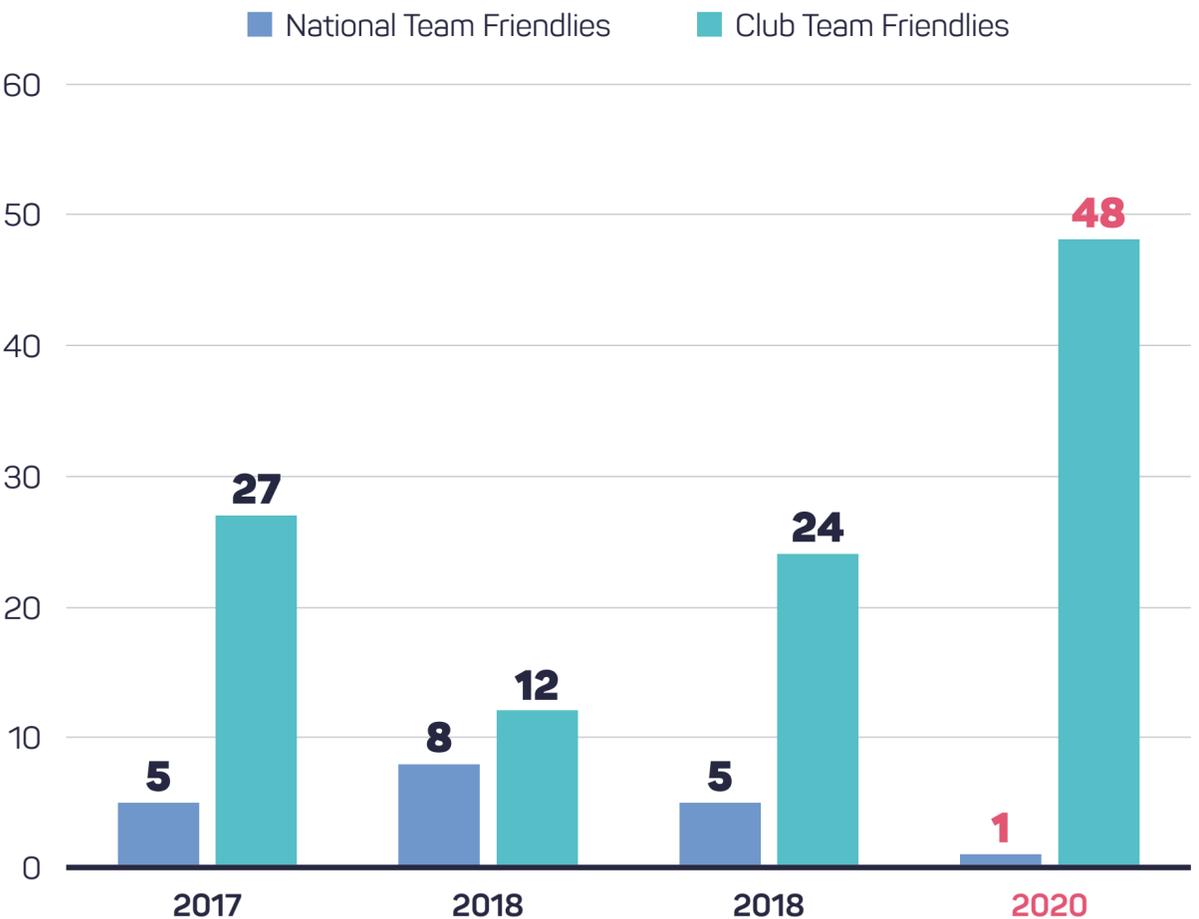
% of suspicious international matches



FRIENDLY MATCHES

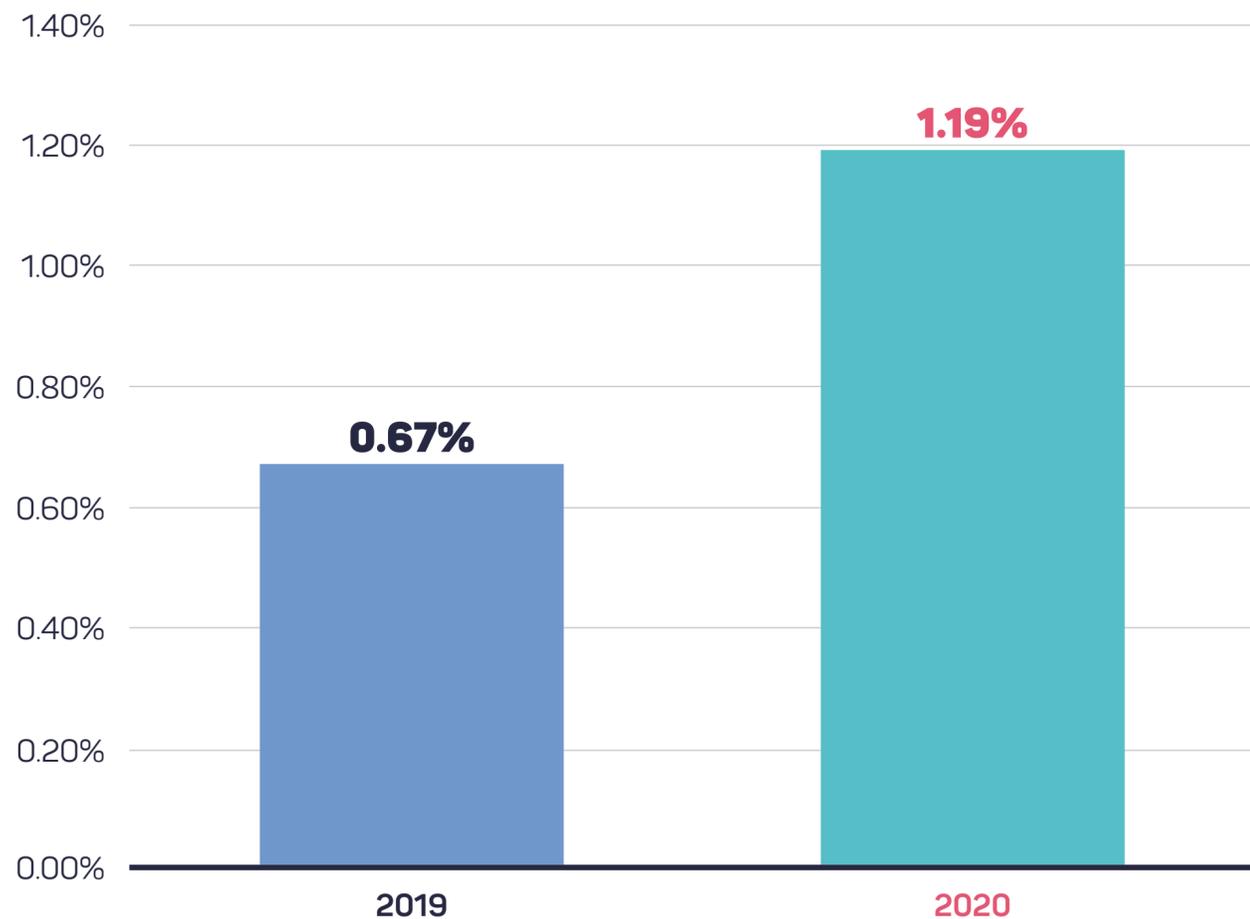
- In spite of the pandemic affecting 2020 football fixtures, we have analysed only 5% fewer friendly matches played in 2020 compared to 2019. This is because a number of clubs opted to play friendly matches whilst their respective domestic competitions were suspended.
- The number of suspicious club friendly matches has doubled from 24 in last year's report to 48 this year.
- 34 of these 48 suspicious matches involve teams from just three different countries. These countries have all had high numbers of suspicious competitive matches in previous years, particularly at youth level.

Suspicious friendly matches by year



- 18 of the 48 suspicious club friendly matches took place in May, when very little competitive football was being played, allowing for a greater share of the betting market. Of these, 16 were played in just two countries.
- A club from one of these countries was involved in five suspicious friendly matches, three of which took place during the same week.
- Overall, the percentage of suspicious friendlies has increased from 0.67% to 1.19% year-on-year.

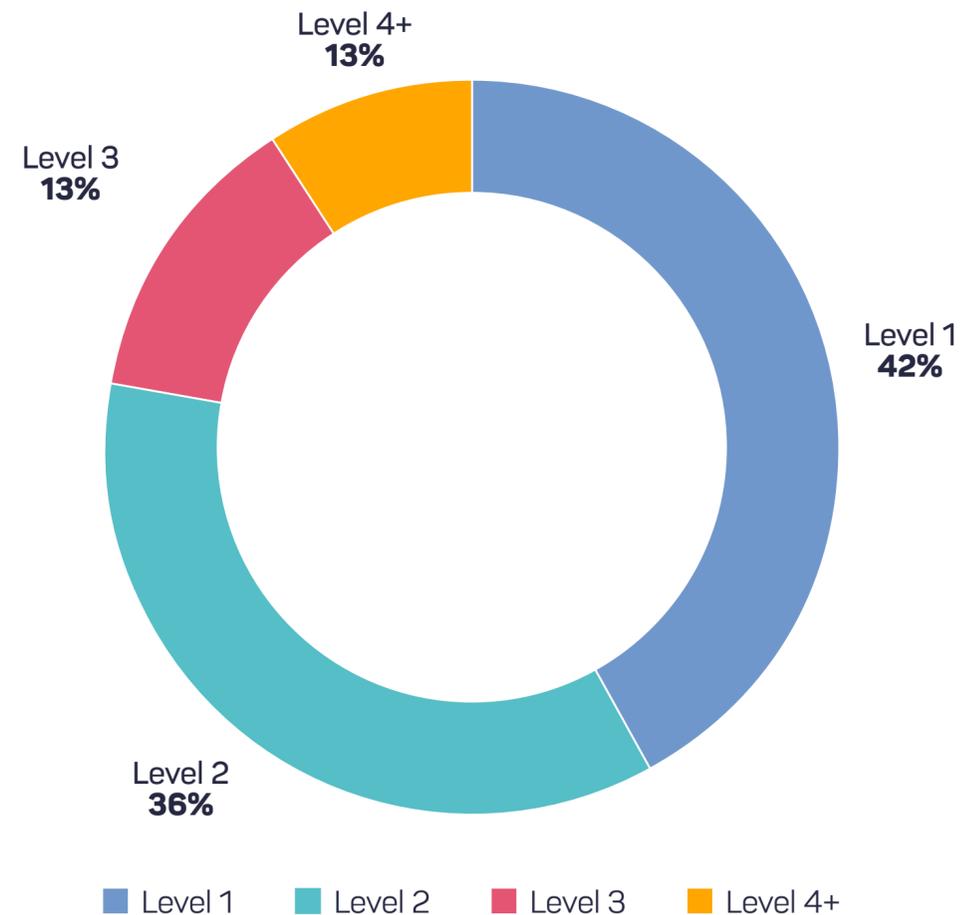
% Suspicious friendlies year-on-year



COMPETITION LEVELS

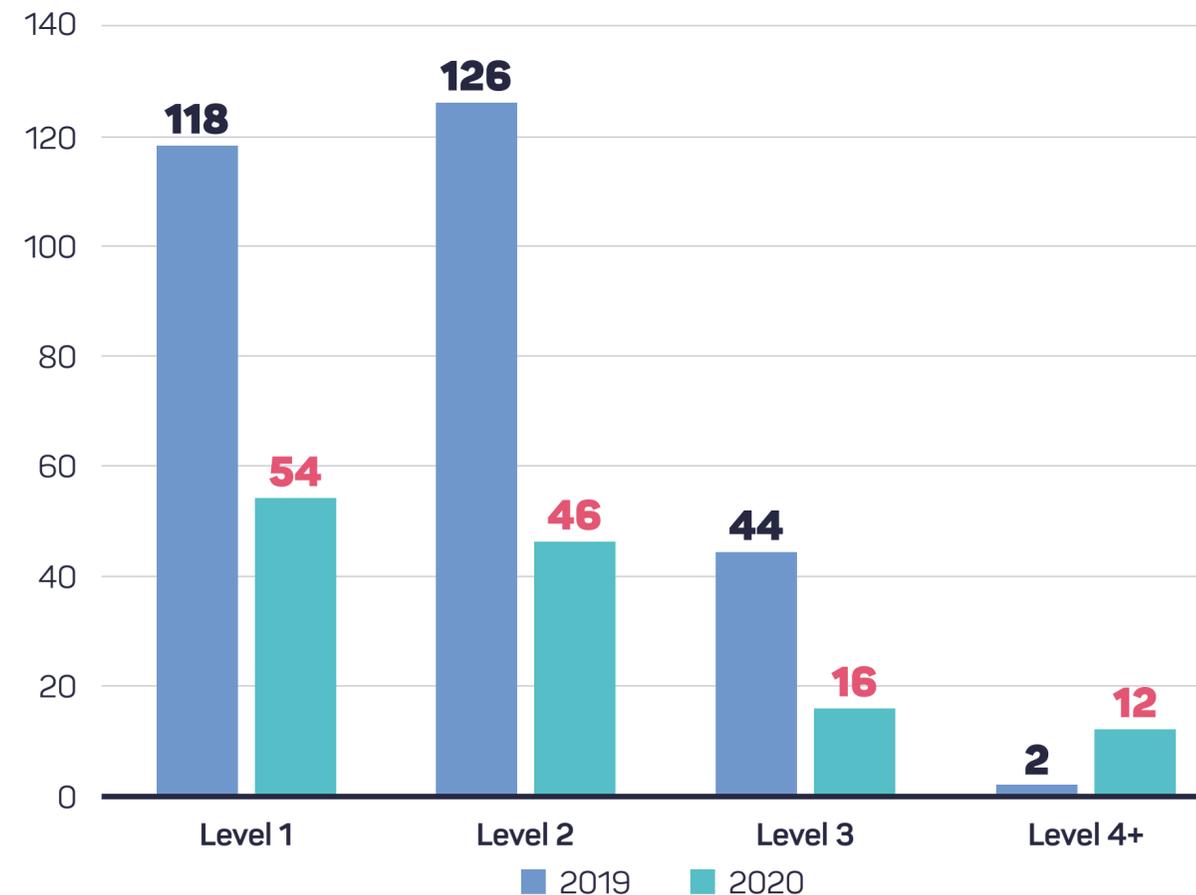
- 21 domestic league competitions feature three or more suspicious matches played during 2020.
- 12 of these are European leagues, three Asian, three South American, two North/Central American and one African.
- Of the 20 leagues with the highest number of suspicious matches, eight are at the highest level of competition (Level 1) in their country, which compares to seven in last year's report and ten the previous year.
- Nine of the 20 leagues are at the second highest level of competition (Level 2) in their country, and one is at Level 3. Two are youth leagues.

Suspicious league matches: competition levels



- There are a total of 100 suspicious matches in Level 1 and 2 competitions, which is a notable decrease from the 244 matches identified last year, even allowing for the reduction in the number of fixtures played in 2020.
- One top level league accounts for 13 of these matches, representing more than 10% of all matches in that competition during 2020.
- There is an increase in the number of suspicious matches at Level 4 and below, from two to 12. All 12 of these matches were played in the same country, suggesting this is a localised problem rather than a growing trend.

Suspicious match competition levels: year-on-year



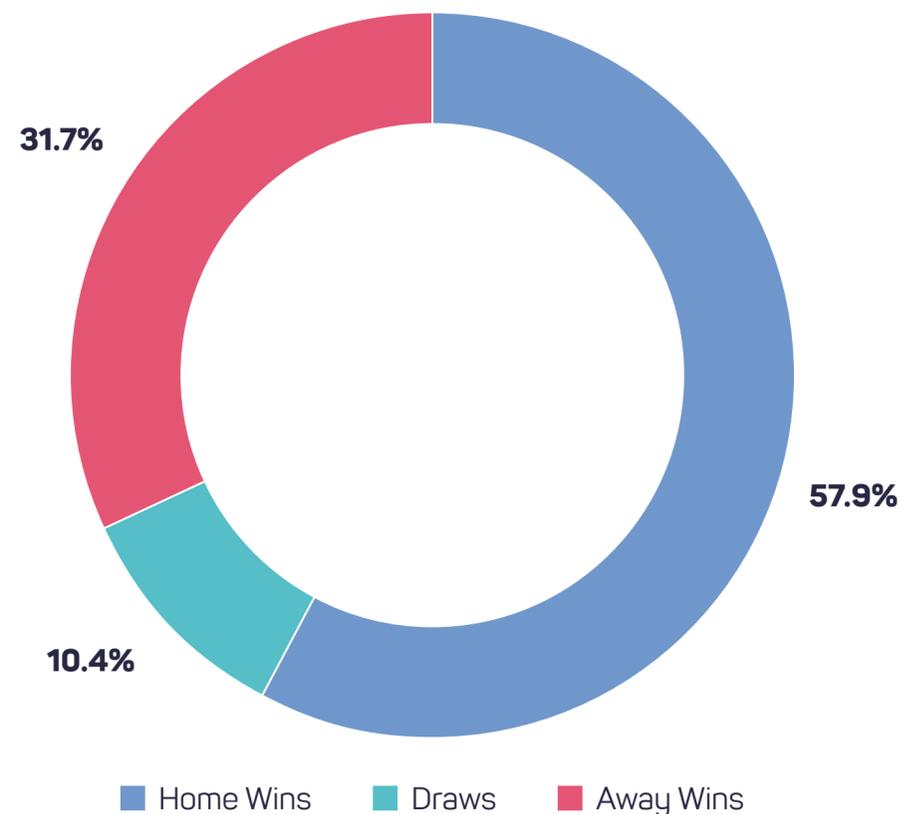


MATCH RESULTS ANALYSIS OF SUSPICIOUS MATCHES 2019-20

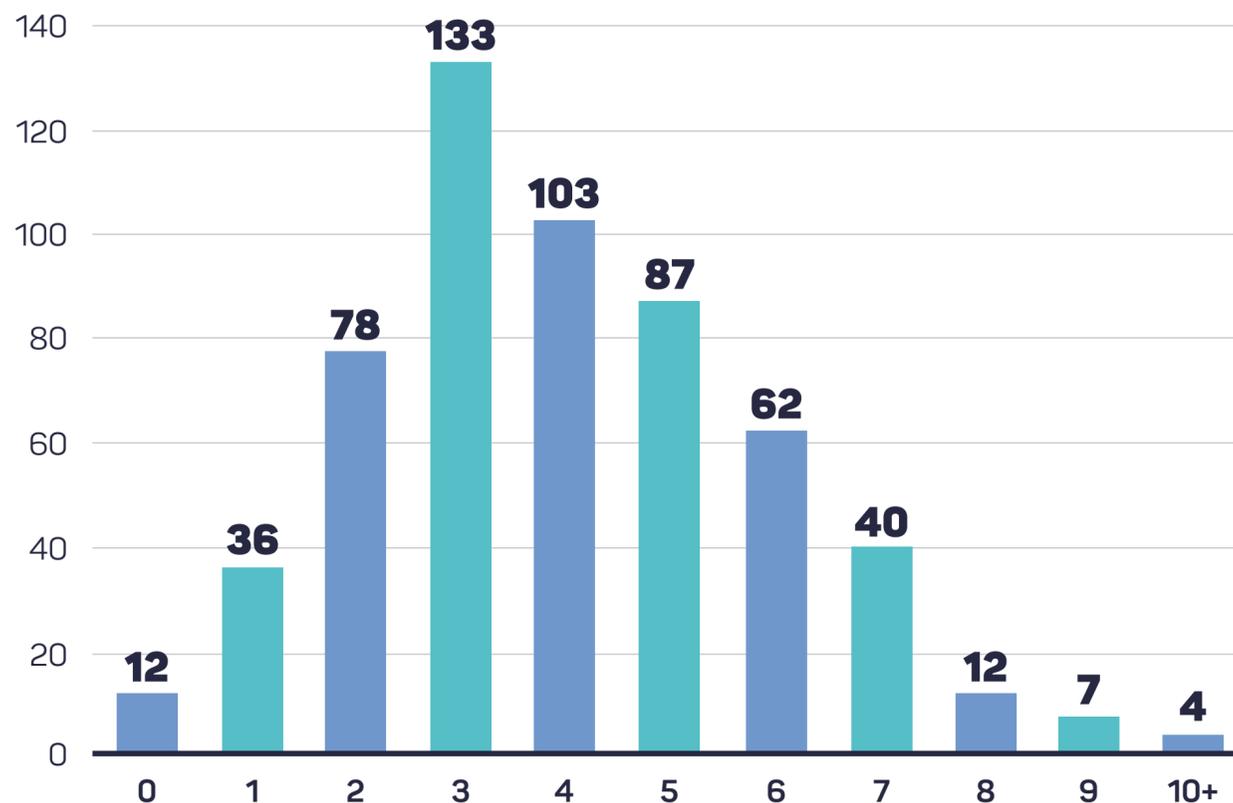
- In this section we examine the breakdown of results in the suspicious matches identified. In order to obtain a larger sample size, we have aggregated data from suspicious matches played in both 2019 and 2020.
- Final results of the matches have been analysed, although the focus of the suspicious betting may not always have been on full-time markets.
- Of these suspicious matches, 57.9% resulted in a home win, significantly higher than the 44.4% of home wins across all matches played in 2020 recorded in the Opta database.
- By comparison, 31.7% of the suspicious matches identified are away wins, below the 33.3% recorded in all matches in 2020.

- It is arguably easier for an away team to willingly underperform, as the home team would be under greater pressure from their own supporters and their performance would likely attract greater scrutiny.
- Draws are relatively under-represented, accounting for just 10.4% of all suspicious matches identified (compared to 22.3% overall in 2020). Only 2.1% of all suspicious matches finished goalless.
- The average number of goals scored in the suspicious matches identified is 3.99, considerably more than the average of 3.09 across all matches in the database for 2020. Higher scoring matches often provide the greatest opportunities to profit from betting markets, thanks to the multiple number of Asian Handicap or Total Goals lines offered throughout the match.

Suspicious matches by result



Suspicious matches by number of goals



THE EFFECTS OF ACTION TO COUNTER MATCH MANIPULATION

Football federations in multiple European countries have worked at confederation level on integrity education programmes, and also with their respective law enforcement agencies to initiate match-fixing investigations over the past two years. These appear to be bearing fruit with a number of positive results.

For example, one federation acknowledged a number of reports regarding suspicious matches and announced in 2019 that two of its clubs had been fined and relegated for match manipulation. On the same day it was also revealed that the police had launched investigations. The number of suspicious matches in this country has greatly decreased in this year's report.

In another European country, a significant number of suspicious matches played in 2019 featured in our report last year. A new president of that country's football federation was later elected, promising to tackle the problem of match manipulation. Following an investigation, it was later announced that 45 individuals, including players, coaches and club owners had been handed lifetime bans by the football federation. The country's second tier of football was also suspended pending further investigation. Only one suspicious match from this country forms part of this year's report.

A further country to have featured heavily amongst suspicious matches in this year's report has also taken positive steps towards combatting the problem, launching an investigation which has already seen a number of sanctions against clubs and individuals. It will be interesting to see the effects of these measures on the number of suspicious matches from this country featuring in future reports.





COVID-19: THE IMMEDIATE IMPACT

In last year's report, compiled during the early stages of the global pandemic at a time when most competitive football across the world had been suspended, we wrote:

"With the cancellation of many high-profile leagues, betting attention during lockdown focused on lower-profile leagues where football was still taking place. Leagues which had previously seen little global betting attention suddenly saw much more interest and higher betting volumes traded".

As the pandemic continued to take hold, we saw that this was the case. We had analysed 8,649 matches played in April 2019 in over 100 different countries, whilst in April 2020, at the height of the first wave of the pandemic, only 160 matches were played that form part of our analysis. Of these, 151 took place in just four countries, each of which had previously claimed only a tiny fraction of the global betting market.

In last year's report, we further stated that "this may have been seen to increase the risk of integrity concerns, though the smaller fixture programme would have allowed for increased scrutiny and tight control processes from operators to help combat this".

Of the previously mentioned 151 matches from April 2020 played in four countries, three have been assessed as suspicious, equating to 1.99%. This compares with 0.35% of all global matches analysed in 2020 being assessed as suspicious and 0.56% of analysed matches from 2019.

Whilst this may suggest an increased integrity risk in relation to higher betting turnover, it is important to note the sample size is limited and the number of suspicious matches is still relatively small. Furthermore, the country that played host to two of these suspicious matches has featured prominently in previous

reports, so this is clearly not a problem that has arisen in 2020. Other countries where fixtures suddenly became the focus of betting markets in 2020 saw no pattern of suspicious matches and it is likely that increased scrutiny would have been a factor in this.

We have seen in previous reports how the number of suspicious matches in a country can quickly increase once those looking to manipulate football matches for financial gain establish a foothold. However, there would have been increased challenges for a match-fixing organisation to assert itself in a country in 2020, given the sudden and unexpected way in which COVID-19 shifted the betting focus on to this small number of countries, as well as in light of the logistical problems caused by travel during the pandemic.

In last year's report we stated that "the greater number of friendly matches organised when lockdown eased and ahead of leagues re-starting presented additional opportunities for corruptors".

As seen in the 'Friendly Matches' section of this report, the number of suspicious club friendly matches doubled in 2020 compared to 2019, with the overall percentage of suspicious friendly matches rising from 0.67% to 1.19%. The majority of these matches took place during the spring months when most competitive leagues were suspended. However, most of these friendlies were played in three countries where the number of competitive suspicious matches decreased from 89 played in 2019 to 24 in 2020. When combining the suspicious friendlies and competitive matches in these countries the total for 2020 was still considerably below that for 2019.

COVID-19: THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS

There is little doubt that the disruption caused by the COVID pandemic has had a substantial negative impact on the finances of clubs across the globe. It is also likely that it will continue to do so in the coming years.

Whilst the fixtures calendar returned to normal or near normal in most countries during the autumn of 2020, the number of spectators permitted to watch the matches was still subject to restrictions over 12 months after the first wave of the pandemic. This has been a considerable blow for the vast majority of clubs that rely heavily on gate receipts as their primary source of income.

Additionally, there is also a concern that the adverse effect of the pandemic on businesses would lead to many making cutbacks with regard to advertising and sponsorship, which are also vital revenue streams for clubs and competitions around the world. Indeed, we stated in last year's report that "clubs and players experiencing financial hardships have frequently been a factor in previous match-fixing cases".

It might come as a surprise that the number of suspicious matches played during the latter months of 2020 was significantly down on previous years, despite the overall number of matches analysed increasing as previously suspended competitions caught up with postponed fixtures.

It is difficult to assess how big a part certain factors played in this. Some competitions ending early stopped opportunities for results trading, and the number of instances where teams with nothing to play for met teams who needed to win were greatly reduced. Ongoing investigations in several countries with historic integrity problems, logistical problems that would have beset potential corruptors, the reduction in the number of fixtures - all of these would have contributed to our findings to greater or lesser extents.

The long-term effects of COVID-19 on sports integrity are yet to be seen and whilst the decrease in suspicious matches this year is most certainly welcome, it is too early to say whether this will continue to be an ongoing trend, or whether it has been caused by a truly exceptional set of circumstances.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Stats Perform is the market leader in sports tech providing the most trusted sports data and the latest advancements in applying AI and machine learning to deliver better predictions for teams, sportsbooks and a more engaging broadcast, media and fan experience. The company collects the most detailed sports data to create new experiences across sports. Leveraging the richest sports database, Stats Perform enhances sports competition and entertainment through machine learning and computer vision to create advanced predictions and analysis – be that for digital and broadcast media with differentiated storytelling, tech companies with reliable and fast data to power their innovations, sportsbooks with in-play betting, integrity services for rights holders, or teams with first-of-its-kind AI analysis software.

At **Starlizard Integrity Services**, we help sports and enforcement agencies to confidently identify, investigate and prosecute suspected match-fixing. We are a specialist division who are dedicated to the fight against sports manipulation, using expert data analysis to distil what is happening on the pitch and in betting markets. We have over 100 analysts and a wide-spanning intelligence network, analysing matches globally, 24/7. Our high quality is represented by our ISO 9001 certification, but also reflected in our case track record. Above all, we believe in a future without sports corruption – because sports belong to everyone.



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