



Comparison of Salary Status and Facilities Paid to Iranian Premier League Football Referees and Selected Countries of the World

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DOI: [10.22034/sms.2001.144027.1516](https://doi.org/10.22034/sms.2001.144027.1516)

Received: 06.07.2025

Revised: 01.02.2026

Accepted: 06.03.2026

Available online: 21.03.2026

Keywords:

Comparative Study, Salary, Financial and Welfare Support, Professional leagues, Football Referees, Brady Model

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to compare the salary, facilities, and benefits paid to referees in the Iranian Premier League and selected countries around the world based on the Brady model. The research was qualitative with a comparative approach. Ten countries were purposively selected from all continents and geographically located, and were considered as the matching location based on their national standing and higher professional league level. Data obtained through content analysis of collected documents, as well as interviews via email and WhatsApp with experts in the target countries, were collected, categorized, and interpreted using George Brady's four-stage model. The research results showed that Iran pays the lowest and Spain the highest wages to their referees. Referees of all countries are covered by accident insurance. All countries (except Iran, Brazil and Morocco) pay monthly salaries for their full-time referees. The countries of Brazil, England and America consider different salaries for referees according to the levels of refereeing and also the level of experience of referees. The highest level of payment is related to America. The only Italian Serie A league where all referees and assistant referees are full-time. In general, Iran's referees in various sectors (such as salary, welfare support) do not have suitable conditions compared to other countries, and this issue can harm the growth process of refereeing. Therefore, it is necessary to follow the successful experience of those countries in order to overcome the prevailing problems and move towards professionalization in refereeing.

How to Cite This Article:

Dolatyari, E., Kalantari, F., Gharekhani, H., & Poursoltani, H. (2026). Comparison of Salary Status and Facilities Paid to Iranian Premier League Football Referees and Selected Countries of the World. *Journal of Sport Marketing Studies*, 7(1): 34-51. [10.22034/sms.2001.144027.1516](https://doi.org/10.22034/sms.2001.144027.1516)

1. INTRODUCTION

Football is one of the most popular sporting events worldwide and generates more revenue than any other sport (Rasooli et al., 2015). In particular, football may be considered one of the greatest phenomena in terms of attracting hundreds of thousands of spectators of all ages and genders (Rahimi Klour & Naghavi, 2025). This globally popular sport is not only a social phenomenon but also a massive economic industry. According to Deloitte (2023), the European football market alone generated more than €28 billion in revenue during the 2021–2022 season. These revenues depend on multiple factors such as club brand value, sporting performance, fans, media, and global economic conditions (Gammelsæter, 2022). Due to its extensive economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions, football has become a global phenomenon. Within this framework, human resources active in this field—from players and coaches to support staff and especially referees—play a key role in maintaining the quality, fairness, and professionalism of competitions (Louvet & Campo, 2019). Referees, like players and coaches, are considered one of the main and influential pillars in organizing sporting events, particularly in top-tier leagues. However, they are exposed to even greater pressure and emotional intensity. This group bears one of the most difficult and important responsibilities under the Referees Committee and, ultimately, the Football Federation (Dolatyari et al., 2025).

In professional football, wages play a crucial role in attracting, retaining, and influencing the performance of individuals involved in the game. Although players and coaches typically receive substantial salaries (both in Iran and globally), referees in many countries still earn relatively modest wages. This significant disparity not only reflects the economic priorities of leagues and federations but may also have wide-ranging consequences for the quality and integrity of football. In many European and South American leagues, the average annual salary of professional referees does not exceed \$100,000, whereas top-

tier players sometimes earn more than \$10 million per year. Even mid-table team coaches often earn between \$1 million and \$5 million annually (Andreff, 2022).

Therefore, the substantial income gap between referees and other influential actors on the field represents a structural inequality within football. Ultimately, this gap may reduce the attractiveness of refereeing as a profession for new talents, delay qualitative growth in officiating systems due to insufficient investment, disrupt competitive fairness as a result of unintentionally fatigued or demotivated referees, and lead to other significant consequences. In most developed countries, in addition to providing considerable payments and benefits such as accident insurance and retirement plans, the wage payment structure for football referees is designed with high transparency and standards, which largely reduces suspicions such as allegations of bribery.

Recent studies indicate economic disparities within the global refereeing system and regional inequality, such that referees in developing countries (such as Africa, Asia, and South America) receive salaries 10 to 15 times lower than those in European leagues (Haan & Koning, 2023). According to a report by the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (2024), the average salary of referees in the Iranian Premier League is lower than the regional average, which may affect their motivation and performance. Furthermore, in countries with high inflation rates (including Iran), the real value of referees' wages declines over a short period, directly impacting motivation and performance (Peeters et al., 2023).

The amounts paid to referees, considering inflation rates and other economic factors, are not comparable to global standards and indicate the lack of full professionalization of refereeing in Iran. In fact, even Iranian Premier League referees are semi-professional, and their income is limited to match fees. Ultimately, this situation leads to reduced quality, job burnout, and even exit from the profession (Ghasemi & Ahmadabadi, 2023).

In fact, the quality of referees' performance has a direct impact on match outcomes as well as on the credibility of sporting competitions (Mohammadfam et al., 2021). This issue makes it essential to pay attention to various factors influencing referees' performance, including training, experience, psychological pressure, and—most importantly—job satisfaction and compensation systems (Schnieder et al., 2023; Azizi et al., 2022). Although football has become a multi-billion-dollar industry in today's world, the economic structure of refereeing has not developed proportionately with the growth of the sport. Referees play the role of guarantors of fairness on the field, yet the structure of payment, salaries, and support provided to them remains very limited compared with players and coaches (Helsen & Plessner, 2022).

Various domestic and international studies have shown that a fair payment system, proportionality between rewards and level of responsibility, and job security are among the key factors influencing referees' job satisfaction and reducing psychological burnout (Ghasemi & Shojaei, 2021; Taylor et al., 2020). Conversely, the absence of coherent economic policies in some countries has led to referee migration, decreased motivation, and increased human error (Collignon & Sultan, 2023). Other evidence also suggests that the imbalance between referees' high level of responsibility and the rewards they receive may result in long-term motivational decline (Nazari et al., 2023).

A comparison of referees' financial conditions with those in countries that have professional officiating systems shows that Iranian Premier League referees earn significantly less than their counterparts in other reputable leagues worldwide. In Iran, referees are paid only on a per-match basis, and the amount they receive is considerably lower than that of players, coaches, and other stakeholders. In contrast, in England, Premier League referees receive a fixed salary based on experience and, in addition, are paid match fees for each game they officiate.

Another issue distinguishing Iranian football refereeing from that of developed countries (such as England, Spain, Italy, Germany, etc.) relates to employment structure. All Iranian Premier League referees have their own primary occupations; therefore, refereeing is considered merely an extracurricular activity, a secondary profession, or a personal interest for them. They are not formal employees of the federation and do not have an official job position within it. As a result, they do not benefit from salary security, pensions, retirement insurance, or other welfare benefits, and the federation or referees' committee may terminate cooperation with them at any time.

In contrast, in some developed football nations where refereeing is pursued fully professionally, referees are considered federation employees and retire from officiating as a formal career. Under such conditions—financial security, health insurance, and social security during employment and retirement—refereeing is no longer regarded as a side activity but as a primary occupation. Consequently, referees are more likely to plan for improving the quality of their performance, and federations and referees' committees are also in a stronger position to hold them accountable for poor officiating when necessary, and vice versa.

In some countries, such as England, where part-time referees are used alongside full-time (federation-employed) referees, payments to referees are comparable to the incomes of pilots, managers, and IT engineers in that country (Office for National Statistics, 2023).

Given the importance and sensitivity of referees' roles in ensuring the proper conduct of sporting competitions, numerous studies have examined referees across various dimensions and variables, including the following:

Zarif et al. (2015), through a five-dimensional analysis of the problems faced by Iranian Premier League referees, found that referees encounter significant challenges in four major dimensions: economic, security-related, cultural, and educational. The findings indicated that economic and cultural issues were particularly severe.

Similarly, Saidi-Kian et al. (2015) identified the low level of salaries and benefits as the most critical occupational challenge for Iranian football referees.

Ramzaninejad et al. (2017), in examining referees' job satisfaction, reported that job instability and inadequate compensation systems were among the main factors contributing to dissatisfaction. Rafiei et al. (2018) found that, from the referees' perspective, the most influential inhibitory factors affecting officiating performance included, in order of importance: match-day factors, external factors, cultural factors, match timing, and job-related and wage factors.

Asadollahi et al. (2023), investigating the role of advertising on referees' uniforms in the Iranian Premier League and its impact on television viewers' brand awareness, demonstrated that all components of brand awareness showed significant improvement after two months from the start of the league. Ershadi et al. (2023) reported that managerial, technological, human, material, and financial resources, respectively, had the highest priority in influencing the quality of football refereeing in Iran.

Dolatyari et al. (2025), in a comparative study of Iran's refereeing structure with selected countries from Asia, Oceania, and Europe, concluded that among the countries examined, Iran had the lowest level of referee compensation, while England had the highest. Furthermore, unlike Iran, the other countries employed full-time referees receiving fixed monthly salaries.

Webb (2022) reported that England was among the first countries in the world to introduce full-time referees in its Premier League. In addition, referees in lower divisions (the Select Group), considered as a feeder system for the Premier League, were also formally employed.

According to research conducted within the Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB), a 30% increase in professional referees' salaries led to an 18% reduction in controversial match errors (Janssens et al., 2022). Similarly, Samuel (2023) found that countries implementing referee professionalization systems (such as England and

Germany) reduced error rates and achieved greater financial stability for referees.

Simmons (2023) demonstrated that low referee income increases vulnerability to external pressures and potential corruption, particularly in countries with weak systematic oversight.

Finally, Gomes et al. (2024) showed that central referees, due to their primary role in match management, experience higher physical and physiological loads and engage in more high-intensity activities compared to assistant referees.

More recently, Dolatyar et al. (2025) conducted a comparative study on the status of Iranian referees relative to Brazil, Spain, and the United States. The findings indicated that Iran pays the lowest and Spain the highest referee salaries, while Spain and the United States both employ full-time referees.

A review of the research background on the study variables, both domestic and international, indicates that although football refereeing has received some attention in scientific research, comparative studies—especially in the field of professional football refereeing and particularly regarding referees' salaries and benefits—are considered relatively new and have largely been neglected by previous researchers. Most prior studies have focused on various topics other than comparative analyses in this specific area of football officiating. Therefore, the need for comprehensive research—particularly comparative studies involving developed countries from different continents—has become increasingly evident, so that lessons from successful nations can help pave the way for improvement in the refereeing sector.

Several important issues also motivated the researcher to conduct this study. These include the lack of professionalization in refereeing compared with professional players and coaches (i.e., lack of job security), the unfavorable livelihood conditions of referees, and the low and disproportionate wages of Iranian Premier League referees compared with players and coaches. Additional concerns involve referees' dissatisfaction with their social welfare status, the absence of retirement insurance coverage during their officiating careers,

the limited number of financial sponsors supporting referees, and the lack of a referees' union to pursue financial issues and defend their rights. Beyond these matters, further concerns include suspicions of financial corruption in refereeing and the potential role of intermediaries in influencing competition outcomes, particularly in Premier League matches (especially regarding promotion and relegation of teams).

Professional sport reflects the economic, social, and cultural structures of each country, and differences in these structures lead to variations in payment systems, insurance, and job support across different areas of sport—including football refereeing (BBC Sport, 2023). In this context, football referees, as a key part of competition management systems, enjoy a structured and professional status in many countries, whereas in others their situation remains semi-professional or dependent on temporary decisions by football federations (Deutsche Welle, 2021). In Iran, despite significant improvements in refereeing quality and the international presence of some referees, the payment system and supportive benefits for Premier League referees still face inconsistencies and shortcomings. Low wages relative to the competition level, lack of comprehensive medical and retirement insurance, and limitations in welfare and educational support are among the main challenges. These deficiencies not only affect referees' job satisfaction and motivation but may also lead to reduced officiating quality, increased job burnout, and even withdrawal from the profession (Alimoradi et al., 2025).

In contrast, in leading football nations such as England, Germany, Italy, and Spain, refereeing systems are managed based on advanced economic and organizational models in which transparent payment structures, employment stability, health insurance, and performance-based bonuses form essential components of referees' welfare systems (SportBible, 2023; UEFA, 2022).

Within this framework, Brady's model can serve as an appropriate theoretical basis for the comparative

analysis of refereeing structures across countries. The present study seeks, by applying this model and conducting a comparative analysis of Iran's football refereeing system with those of selected countries, to identify structural similarities and differences and to explain the underlying economic and organizational factors behind them. The research focuses on examining referees' salaries, insurance, benefits, welfare facilities, and professional support. Through a realistic approach, it aims to present a clear picture of the current situation in Iran and its gap with more advanced European systems, ultimately seeking to answer the following question:

“What similarities and differences exist between the salaries, facilities, and benefits provided to Iranian Premier League football referees and those of referees in top leagues of selected countries worldwide, and how can these differences be explained based on the dimensions of Brady's model?”

The findings of this study can provide a scientific basis for reforming payment policies and occupational welfare systems for football referees in Iran and contribute to the professionalization of refereeing and the enhancement of organizational justice in the country's sports sector.

2. Methodology

The present study is descriptive–analytical in nature and qualitative in terms of implementation. It was conducted using a comparative research approach through document content analysis.

The sample examined in this study consisted of ten countries, selected based on geographical distribution: Iran and Japan (Asia), Australia (Oceania), the United States (North America), Morocco (Africa), Brazil (South America), and England, Spain, Italy, and Germany (Europe). It is worth noting that, due to Europe's higher level of development in football compared with other continents, multiple European countries were included.

The selected countries were chosen based on their national football standing and the professional level of their leagues, according to rankings and

evaluations from reputable sources (such as FIFA, the International Federation of Football History & Statistics, and TeamForm), as well as their level of football development within their respective continents. These countries were therefore considered appropriate geographical units for comparison. Since football referees are primarily engaged in officiating domestic league matches rather than international games, the professional league level served as the main reference point for analysis.

In line with the study's objectives and research questions, data were collected through the following methods:

Expert Interviews

1. Interviews were conducted with 32 specialists and experts in football refereeing in the target countries (identified in the study footnotes), all of whom are decision-makers, officials, or key stakeholders in national refereeing systems. These interviews were carried out via email and WhatsApp. Detailed demographic information about the participants is presented in Table 1. The

interviews aimed to clarify information—particularly regarding salaries and benefits—which in some countries is confidential and rarely published. Additionally, face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with officials from the Referees Committee of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

2. Library and Documentary Sources These included official documents, books, scientific journal articles, theses, and dissertations.

3. Online and International Information Sources Data were also gathered from reputable global websites and databases, including the official FIFA website, continental confederation platforms, referees' association websites, official refereeing statutes of selected countries (available through federation portals), and interviews published by credible media outlets.

After collection, the data were categorized and analyzed according to George Z. F. Bereday's four-stage comparative model, as follows:

Table 1. Demographics of the interviewed experts (persons)

| International referees | | Iranian referees working in leagues in other countries | Iranian Premier League observers | Department Chair and Iranian Football Referee Committee | Chairman of the Committee of Referees from Other Countries | Total number of interviewees |
|------------------------|-----------------|--|----------------------------------|---|--|------------------------------|
| Iran | Other countries | | | | | |
| 17 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 32 |

A. An interview via WhatsApp with the Head of the Referees Committee of Spain (who also serves as the Head of the FIFA Futsal Referees Committee)

B. Communication between an Iranian international assistant referee and an Italian international referee, as well as direct contact between the researcher and an Iranian referee residing in Italy (via WhatsApp)

C. An email interview with an Iranian-born referee serving as Head of the Referees Committee in the United States

D. An interview via WhatsApp with an Iranian-born international referee residing in Australia

E. An interview with an Iranian Premier League referee currently residing in Canada, who facilitated communication with Japanese and Australian referees in Malaysia and transmitted information to the researchers

F. Telephone interviews with Iranian refereeing officials and international referees, along with in-person interviews at the Iranian Football Federation with the Head of the Refereeing Department

1. Description Stage

The researcher describes the phenomena under study based on evidence and information obtained from various sources, including direct observation, document analysis, and existing reports.

2. Interpretation Stage

This stage involves a thorough examination and analysis of the information described in the first stage. The goal is to provide an objective, systematic, and realistic explanation of the characteristics of the specific context or issue under study.

3. Juxtaposition Stage

At this stage, the information obtained and analyzed in previous stages is classified and organized. By placing data side by side, a framework is created that facilitates clearer and more accurate comparison of similarities and differences in the next stage.

4. Comparison Stage

This is the final stage of comparative research. Here, the research problem—previously explored in earlier stages, particularly in the juxtaposition stage—is examined in detail based on similarities and differences. The study’s research questions are also answered at this stage.

Table 2. Number of FIFA members at the level of selected continents and countries

| Row | Continent Name | Number of Members at Continent Level | Selected Countries |
|-------|----------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Asia | 46 | Japan – Iran |
| 2 | Europe | 55 | England-Spain-Italy-Germany |
| 3 | North America | 35 | America |
| 4 | South America | 10 | Brazil |
| 5 | Oceania | 11 | Australia |
| 6 | Africa | 54 | Morocco |
| Total | | 211 Member | 10 Country |

3. Findings of the Research

In this section, in order to answer the research question, the preliminary information of the selected countries is first described. The data are then categorized, juxtaposed, and compared in a table, and finally, the similarities and differences among the geographical units of comparison are presented.

Research Question:

What is the status of salaries, facilities, and benefits provided to Premier League referees in the countries under study? What are their similarities and differences?

Iran

Findings showed that in Iran, Premier League football referees are paid solely on a per-match basis, and no fixed salary is defined for them. In fact, within the structure of the Iranian Premier League, there are no full-time referees or assistant referees. Payments per match are as follows:

Referees: 10,000,000 Tomans (approximately \$89)

Assistant referees: 6,400,000 Tomans (approximately \$57)

Fourth officials: 5,500,000 Tomans (approximately \$49)

Regarding insurance, referees are only covered by accident insurance provided by the federation. They are also required to personally obtain sports accident insurance in order to participate in sporting activities. Other types of insurance, including retirement insurance, are not available. Additional benefits such as referees’ charitable funds or referees’ unions for addressing their professional issues are not common in Iran.

Australia

In Australia’s A-League, a central referee receives \$1,500 per match, while an assistant referee receives \$900 per match. Among 14 central referees and 28 assistant referees, only four central referees are full-time salaried employees who receive monthly pay. The rest are paid per match and have no formal employment relationship with the federation. Referees are covered by accident insurance and may purchase medical insurance at their own expense. Since most referees are not full-

time, only the four full-time referees (about 11%) receive mandatory retirement contributions. Australia does have a referees' union, consisting of retired referees and all active A-League referees, which follows up on their professional matters.

Japan

In Japan's J-League 1, central referees earn \$1,000 per match, while assistant referees receive \$500 per match. Out of 22 central referees, 14 are full-time, along with 4 of the 44 assistant referees. These full-time referees receive both match fees and monthly salaries, averaging \$80,000 annually in fixed income. The remaining referees are paid per match and have no formal employment relationship. Referees are covered by accident insurance, and injured referees may receive salary payments for up to two months from the federation. Full-time referees also have retirement insurance. Japan has an active referees' association composed of experienced referees that follows up on financial, family, and professional concerns.

England (Premier League)

The English Premier League offers the highest base payments in Europe. Professional referees receive annual salaries ranging from \$52,500 to \$225,000, depending on experience and role. In addition, match fees range from \$1,100 to \$2,600 per game. Elite referees such as Michael Oliver and Anthony Taylor may earn up to \$330,000 annually. Additional benefits include professional insurance, travel expenses, and bonuses for international matches. Referees may also access optional public accident insurance and mandatory supplementary accident insurance arranged by the referees' association. England also has a long-established referees' union and charitable support funds.

Germany (Bundesliga)

Bundesliga referees earn fixed annual salaries between \$46,000 and \$197,000, depending on role and experience. Match fees range from \$3,300 to \$7,800 per game. Full-time referees are covered by medical and professional liability insurance provided by the German FA. Support includes

treatment for injuries, psychological counseling, physiotherapy, free sports equipment, training facilities, travel and accommodation coverage, and seasonal performance bonuses.

While English referees may earn higher salaries, Germany offers a more structured and socially supportive welfare system.

Spain (La Liga)

Professional referees in La Liga earn up to \$197,000 annually in fixed salary. Central referees receive approximately \$5,500–\$5,900 per match. Additional bonuses are awarded for European competitions, El Clásico matches, and outstanding performance. Referees receive health and accident insurance, and full-time referees have retirement insurance.

Italy (Serie A)

Serie A referees earn between \$66,000 and \$184,000 annually, depending on experience and role. Match fees are about \$5,000 for referees and \$1,840 for assistant referees. Benefits include travel expenses, officiating apparel, accident and health insurance, and international match bonuses. Though match payments are slightly lower than in Spain or Germany, the system is balanced and structured.

Brazil

In Brazil's Serie A, referees receive about \$1,100 per match, and assistant referees about \$740. There are no full-time referees, and no fixed annual salary exists. Referees are treated as self-employed and have no formal employment relationship. Insurance coverage is minimal, limited mainly to basic accident insurance, with optional life and liability insurance.

United States (MLS)

In Major League Soccer, referee payments follow a tiered scale based on experience (Levels 1–4). Match fees range from \$565 to \$875 for referees, with assistants and fourth officials earning proportionally less. Professional referees in the top category receive approximately \$55,000 annually. Full-time referees are employed by the federation

and receive accident, health, and retirement insurance. Assistant referees, however, are not full-time and are paid per match.

Morocco

In Morocco's top professional league, referees earn about \$320 per match, and assistant referees about \$213. There are no full-time referees and no annual salaries. Insurance coverage is limited to basic accident insurance, with no retirement or broader welfare benefits observed.

Table 3. Juxtaposition of salary, facilities and benefits paid to referees in the top leagues in the countries studied

| Row | Country | Referees and assistant referees' salaries (Dollar) | | | | How to pay | | | Number of full-time referees and assistant referees | | Job | | Insurance type | | |
|-----|-----------|--|--|------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---|-------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|---|---|
| | | Salary per game | | Annual salary | | full-time | | Part time | Referees | Assistant Referee | Single-job | Two jobs | Incidents | Retirement | Other |
| | | Referee | Referee assistant | Referee | Referee assistant | Basic salary: Monthly | Salary: After per game | Salary: After per game | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Iran | 89 | 57 | --- | --- | --- | --- | After every 10 weeks | --- | --- | --- | All | --- | --- | Sports insurance |
| 2 | Spain | 5500 to 5900 | 2600 | 157000 to 197000 | 78800 to 105000 | * | * | * | All 20 | All 40 | 0.0 95 | 0.0 5 | * | * | Health |
| 3 | Australia | 1500 | 900 | 65000 to 78000 | --- | * | * | * | 4 | --- | 0.0 20 | 0.0 80 | * | Only full-time referees (11%) are subject to mandatory retirement | Health insurance, at the referees' own expense. |
| 4 | Brazil | 1100 | 740 | --- | --- | --- | --- | * | --- | --- | 60 to 0.0 70 | 30 to 0.0 40 | Very limited | --- | Life and liability insurance |
| 5 | America | Based on level and experience 565 To 875 | Based on level and experience 225 to 495 | 55000 | --- | * | * | * | All 31 | --- | 80 to 0.0 90 | 10 to 0.0 20 | * | * | Treatment |
| 6 | Japan | 1000 | 500 | 80000 | --- | * | * | * | 18 | 6 | 30 to 0.050 | 50 to 0.0 70 | * | * | --- |
| 7 | Morocco | 320 | 213 | --- | --- | --- | --- | * | --- | --- | 20 to 0.035 | 65 to 0.0 80 | Very limited | --- | --- |
| 8 | England | 2000 to 2600 | 1100 to 1300 | 150000 To 225000 | 52500 To 78800 | * | * | * | All 22 | All 28 | 0.0 95 | 0.0 5 | * | * | Full health insurance |
| 9 | Italy | 5000 | 1840 | 131000 to 184000 | 66000 to 92000 | * | * | * | 21 | --- | 55 to 0.0 70 | 30 to 0.0 45 | * | --- | Health |
| 10 | Germany | 6500 to 7800 | 3300 | 165000 to 197000 | 46000 to 59000 | * | * | * | All 24 | --- | 25 to 0.035 | 65 to 0.075 | * | --- | Health |

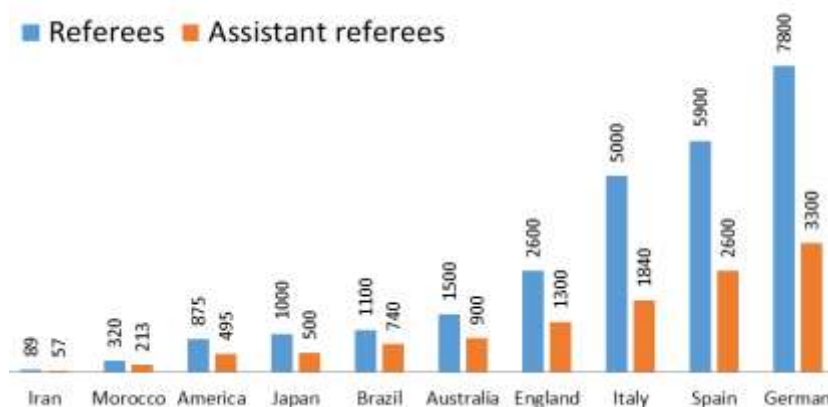


Chart 1. Comparison of referees and assistant referee’s salaries in selected countries (Dollar)

Comparative comparison

According to the juxtaposition made in the table above, which is based on the countries studied, the similarities and differences are examined separately for each variable. So that in this section, variables such as: "Number of full-time referees", "Salary rate (per game)", "Annual fixed salary" and "Facilities and amenities

provided (such as insurance and social protection)" have been examined in order to determine the similarities and differences in areas such as: "Level of professionalization", "Job security" and "Institutional support for referees" in different countries.

Table 4. Similarities and differences in the salary, facilities and benefits paid to referees in the top leagues in selected countries

| Variable of interest | Similarities |
|--|--|
| The status of salaries, facilities and benefits paid to referees in the top leagues | A. Except for Iran, Brazil and Morocco, all countries have fixed annual salaries for their full-time referees. |
| | B. Referees from all countries are covered by accident insurance. |
| | C. Only Morocco, Iran and Brazil have not been able to make any of their referees (including the referee and assistant referee) full-time. |
| | D. Among the countries studied, Brazil, England, Spain, Germany, and the United States pay different salaries to referees based on their level of refereeing and experience. |
| | E. The England, Japan, the United States, Australia, and Spain pay pension insurance for their full-time referees. |
| | F. In all countries, referees are paid after the competition is over. |
| | G. All countries (except Iran) also have single-job referees. |
| | H. Countries that have full-time referees pay them a monthly base salary, and referees also receive a fee for judging each match after the game. |
| | Differences |
| | A. Australia and England are two countries that provide referees with supplementary or medical insurance at their own expense. |
| B. The highest level of salary (there are 4 levels) is for referees in the United States. | |
| C. Germany is the only country that pays its referees and assistant referees the highest in the world. | |
| D. Among the selected countries, Iran is the only country that pays the lowest wages to its referees and assistant referees. | |
| E. Iran is the only country where none of its Premier League referees are single-job. | |
| F. Among the selected countries, the lowest annual payment to arbitrators is in the United States and the highest is in the England. | |
| G. Australia has the least (4) and the United States has the most (31) full-time referees at the highest level of | |

their league.

H. Among the selected countries, only Spain, Japan and England have been able to employ full-time assistant referees in addition to referees.

I. The largest number of full-time assistant referees belongs to Spain.

4. Discussion and conclusion

In the modern era, professional football has moved beyond being merely a sport and athletic competition and has emerged as a revenue-generating industry as well as a global social phenomenon. One of the key manifestations of this phenomenon is the organization of competitions in the form of professional leagues, which play a crucial role in achieving the intended objectives of the sport.

In a highly popular sport such as football, referees hold a pivotal position and, alongside players and coaches, are considered one of the main pillars of any competition. In this regard, the presence of specialized, experienced referees with minimal financial and livelihood concerns is an undeniable necessity. Without proper attention to refereeing, and solely through the development of players, coaches, and managers, comprehensive progress in a country's football system cannot be expected, as these elements are interdependent and interact in an inseparable manner.

Given the research topic, the central question is:

Which approach or combination of approaches can best contribute to the quantitative and qualitative development of referees in terms of salaries, facilities, and benefits in top-tier professional football?

Answering this question without considering existing requirements and contextual factors—such as economic, social, political, and cultural conditions, as well as evolving public needs and preferences over time—would not lead to accurate problem identification or effective solutions.

This study examined and compared the wages, facilities, and welfare provisions of top-division football referees in Iran and selected countries worldwide, based on Bereday's comparative model. The selected countries included:

- a. United States (North America)
- b. Brazil (South America)

c. Iran and Japan (Asia)

d. Australia (Oceania)

e. Morocco (Africa)

f. Spain, England, and Italy (Europe)

Through data collection, classification, juxtaposition, monitoring, and comparison, the study identified similarities and differences in refereeing systems across these countries.

Full-Time Referees and Assistant Referees

The presence of full-time referees and assistant referees applies to some countries but not to others. Countries such as Spain, England, and Japan employ both full-time referees and assistant referees. Countries like Germany, Italy, Australia, and the United States utilize full-time referees, while countries such as Iran, Morocco, and Brazil largely lack full-time refereeing structures.

Field evidence and previous studies indicate that full-time professional referees provide substantial benefits to the sport. In recent years, the professionalization of refereeing, especially in football, has become one of the most significant structural reforms in global professional sports. Refereeing at the professional level is not only an operational component of competitions but also a decisive factor in competition quality, sporting justice, and public trust in results.

Technical Impact

The most significant impact of full-time referees is increased decision-making accuracy and reduced human error. Research by Webb & Rayner (2021) showed that professional referees, due to regular training, feedback, and video analysis, make approximately 25% fewer perceptual errors in key decisions such as offside calls or penalty awards. This aligns with a PGMOL (2023) report in England indicating that after implementing a full-time refereeing system, the rate of match-impacting errors decreased from 12% to below 5%.

Physical and Psychological Readiness

Bizzini & Dvorak (2020) found that full-time referees, training five to six sessions per week, demonstrate superior cardiovascular fitness and muscular endurance compared to part-time referees, leading to reduced fatigue and more accurate real-time decisions.

García & Martín (2022) reported that job security and professional focus among full-time referees reduced performance anxiety and occupational stress by approximately 30% compared with part-time referees who often juggle second jobs.

Human Resource Development

Professionalization promotes career stability and structured development pathways. The German Football Federation (2022) reported a 40% improvement in the performance of newly promoted referees within three years of formalizing 24 full-time Bundesliga referees.

Social and Economic Dimensions

Countries using full-time referees (e.g., England, Germany, Italy) show twice the level of public trust in refereeing impartiality compared to countries with part-time systems (2023 data). Greater trust enhances league attractiveness and investment.

FIFA's Refereeing Development Program (since 2019) encourages member associations to professionalize refereeing, emphasizing that continuous education, physical and mental health, and occupational focus are only achievable when refereeing is recognized as a fully supported profession (FIFA, 2022).

Overall, evidence shows that full-time refereeing improves technical quality, reduces errors, enhances referees' well-being, and strengthens the social and economic credibility of football.

Overall Comparative Findings (Iran vs. Selected Countries)

Iran shares certain similarities with some countries but shows major differences compared with leading football nations. Most refereeing challenges in Iran are related to these differences. Iranian referees face significant issues regarding:

a. Match fees

- b. Lack of fixed monthly salaries
- c. Absence of full-time contracts
- d. Inadequate pension insurance
- e. Lack of referees' unions

These shortcomings may negatively affect both the quantitative and qualitative development of refereeing. Therefore, adopting successful international models is essential.

Practical Recommendations

A. Financial Growth Strategy

Increase funding and attract governmental and private sector support to ensure financial, psychological, and job security for referees.

B. Scholarship Strategy

Provide financial support for referee education to attract talented individuals who might otherwise be excluded due to economic barriers.

C. Recognizing Refereeing as a Profession

Establish refereeing as a formal occupation with sufficient income, enabling referees to dedicate time to technical and physical development while reducing stress from secondary employment.

Welfare Facilities and Social Insurance

All studied countries provide referees with accident insurance during matches and travel. Additional benefits include:

- a. Life insurance (Brazil)
- b. Health insurance (USA, Australia – self-funded)
- c. Supplementary accident insurance (England – self-funded)
- d. Pension schemes (Australia 11%, Spain, USA, Japan)

England also maintains a Referees' Benevolent Fund (Dolatyari et al., 2025). Research by Alimoradi et al. (2025) highlights that inadequate insurance and rehabilitation prolong recovery and lead to early referee dropout.

In Iran and similar developing systems, refereeing is often managed with a cost-minimization approach rather than an investment perspective, reducing career attractiveness and job security. Domestic studies (Zare & Ahmadi, 2020; Hosseini & Kiani, 2021; Ebrahimi, 2020) confirm that

insufficient financial and insurance support reduces motivation and job satisfaction.

Salaries and Match Fees

Compensation strongly influences referee motivation, retention, and performance. In countries such as England, Spain, Italy, USA, and Japan, referees receive both match fees and fixed salaries. Studies (Janssens et al., 2022) found that a 30% salary increase reduced controversial decisions by 18%. German referees receive the highest match fees globally, while Iranian referees receive the lowest among the studied countries, and none are fully professional. This aligns with findings that low income increases vulnerability to pressure and potential corruption (Simmons, 2023). Poor compensation policies—whether due to mismanagement, restrictive regulations, or lack of sponsorship development—reduce both the quantity and quality of referees and ultimately harm league quality. The findings indicate that referees in Germany receive the highest match fees worldwide, which aligns with the reports of Murphy (2021), Dolatyar et al. (2025), and Marca (2025). Conversely, top-tier referees in the Iranian league experience a very different situation: not all are employed full-time, and they receive the lowest match fees among the selected countries. This result is consistent with Saidi-Kian et al. (2015), who identified low salaries and benefits as the primary occupational challenge for Iranian referees.

Moreover, the results correspond with Dolatyar et al. (2025) and Ghasemi & Ahmadabadi (2023), who highlighted that even Premier League referees in Iran are semi-professional, with income largely limited to per-match fees. Such conditions can lead to declines in refereeing quality, occupational burnout, and career withdrawal, which may stem from mismanagement, restrictive regulations, lack of managerial expertise in marketing and sponsorship, or inadequate policy decisions. These factors reduce the quantity and quality of capable referees and negatively impact the organization of low-incident matches and overall match quality,

ultimately affecting the refereeing committee and the football federation.

Facilities and Welfare Benefits (Insurance and Social Support)

In all countries under study, referees are provided with various insurance services. Referees in all selected countries are covered against accidents during officiating, travel between cities for matches, and similar contingencies. Notably, referees in Brazil also benefit from life insurance, while referees in countries such as the USA and Australia may obtain health insurance at their own expense. In England, referees can access supplementary accident insurance at their own cost. Moreover, in countries such as Australia (11%), Spain, the USA, and Japan, referees are provided with retirement insurance, emphasizing the significance of referee safety and economic security.

In England, additional facilities such as a referees' charitable fund also exist, as highlighted by Dolatyari et al. (2025). Similarly, Alimoradi et al. (2025), in their systematic review and meta-analysis of injuries among professional and amateur referees, emphasized that lack of structured support, adequate insurance, and rehabilitation programs can prolong recovery times and lead to early career exit, consistent with the present study.

In many countries, particularly in developing sports systems like Iran, governing bodies still approach refereeing from a cost-centered rather than an investment-oriented perspective. This results in a lack of economic attractiveness and job security for referees, causing many talented referees to leave the profession. Domestic studies similarly report that insufficient financial support, lack of proper insurance, and a cost-saving organizational mindset are key factors reducing referees' motivation and job satisfaction (Zaraf & Ahmadi, 2020; Hosseini & Kiani, 2022; Ebrahimi, 2021). International research also confirms that low economic valuation of referees correlates with increased attrition and reduced refereeing quality

(Dell & Gendron, 2021; Webb, Cleland, & O'Hara, 2020).

In contrast, countries such as Germany and England, which regard refereeing as a sustainable human capital investment and provide comprehensive support structures, achieve higher retention and professional development of referees. Hence, the persistence of a cost-centered approach in Iran limits qualitative referee development and jeopardizes the long-term sustainability of the refereeing system.

Recommendations for Improving Refereeing in Iran

The Iranian Football Federation could implement partial coverage of international referees' insurance costs to enhance job security, refereeing quality, and match outcomes. Additionally, the federation could pilot the full-time employment of a few experienced, top-level referees (preferably international) to assess its impact on referee commitment, job satisfaction, and overall refereeing quality.

Referees in Iran should ideally operate under a system that includes fixed salaries (monthly or annual), per-match fees, insurance, and other benefits, similar to a formal employment structure. This approach is crucial for attracting and retaining talent, improving referee performance, and ensuring accountability in expected areas (refereeing quality, physical readiness, participation in educational programs, etc.). Furthermore, full-time referees help prevent shortages in both quantity and quality, as observed in Spain, England, and Italy.

Proposed solutions can be categorized as:

Short-term solutions: Increasing referee salaries and match fees through sponsorship and financial support.

Long-term solutions: Establishing employment laws and regulations that recognize refereeing as a professional career, initially targeting international referees and assistant referees, in collaboration with government and parliamentary representatives.

Practical Recommendations

1. Financial Strategy: Increasing financial resources and support from governmental and non-governmental organizations can act as a driving force for referees. Adequate budgeting for the Premier League refereeing system can enhance referees' financial, psychological, and job security.

2. Scholarship Strategy: Refereeing education costs may deter talented individuals. Financial assistance, such as scholarships or fee reductions, can facilitate the recruitment of skilled referees.

3. Professionalization Strategy: Treating refereeing as a full-time profession ensures job security and adequate income, attracting more candidates to refereeing, similar to players and coaches. Considering referees need sufficient time to improve their technical and performance skills, treating refereeing as a secondary job may negatively affect performance. Reducing economic stress can directly enhance referee performance and ensure the quantity and quality of future referees.

Research Recommendations

1. Examine the effect of referee compensation on match accuracy and decision-making in professional leagues, including VAR usage and error rates.

2. Conduct a comparative study of insurance and retirement systems for referees in developed and developing countries to identify models for improvement in Iran.

3. Analyze the relationship between job security (contracts, insurance, fixed salary) and motivation using motivational models (e.g., Herzberg's two-factor theory or Vroom's expectancy theory).

4. Investigate the role of federations in professionalizing refereeing payment systems, comparing successful federations (e.g., Japan, Spain, England) with developing federations such as Iran.

5. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

6. Financing

Funding: This study was not funded by any university or organization.

7. Acknowledgements

The authors consider it their duty to sincerely express their appreciation and gratitude to all individuals who contributed to and supported the completion of this research. Their valuable cooperation and assistance are deeply acknowledged and appreciated.

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