





BY FANS FOR FANS

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INTRODUCTION

The FSA is pleased to publish the results of our first comprehensive survey which documents the attitudes and experiences of football fans across a wide range of issues throughout the women's game.

We have periodically conducted a National Supporters Survey over the past decade, which has included fans of the women's game, but as our work in this area has grown exponentially over the past few years we felt the time was right to direct our focus to the unique issues that affect fans of the women's game in their own survey.

The result is our first attempt to capture a comprehensive picture on everything from fans' matchday experiences to thoughts on the new broadcast deal with Sky Sports and the BBC; views on how clubs engage with their fanbase to on-the-pitch issues and competition structure, and everything in between.

We wanted to sample the biggest cross-section of the supporter base as possible, and so our survey was open to anyone who supports a team in the women's game, from

the Super League to the National League and beyond, as well as those who are followers of the women's game in general; from season ticket holders to occasional TV watchers.

Our aim is to repeat this survey in future years which will help us benchmark and track changing attitudes on key issues, as well as keeping up to date with new developments specific to the women's game as they arise.

The results of this survey will not only help inform the FSA's campaigning and work in women's football, but this research will also give us a valuable insight into what matters in the minds of fans on a huge range of issues.

Our thanks go to the FA and the fans who helped us in shaping the survey, and to Alamy for the images in this document.



"This survey has highlighted some significant issues that are important to supporters, and we will use the findings to support the progress that is already being made by the FSA in the women's game, as well as to identify the focus for new areas of work.

"We will work with key stakeholders across the game, alongside the members of the FSA's women's game network and our Fans for Diversity campaign, to ensure that topics such as discriminatory behaviour and increasing the diversity among the fanbase are tackled.

"The recently announced independent review into the women's game will be pivotal to a number of these areas of work, and we will strive to ensure that supporters are comprehensively engaged in this process throughout."

Deborah Dilworth, FSA women's game network manager

DEMOGRAPHICS

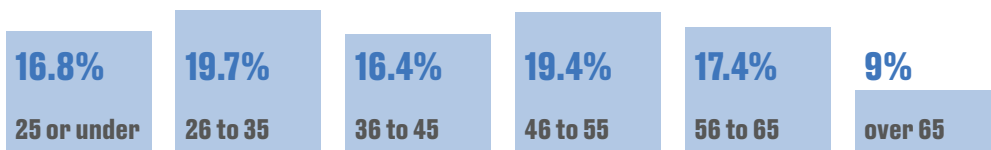
WHO COMPLETED OUR SURVEY?

The survey ran online from 7th February until 7th March 2022, and was completed by 2,156 fans throughout the women's game.

Supporters from 49 of the 51 clubs which make up the top four tiers of the pyramid - Women's Super League (WSL), Championship, and the National League Northern and Southern Premier Division - were represented, with respondents from clubs further down the system giving their feedback, too.



STAT: The age profile of our respondents was also evenly split across age groups



ETHNICITY

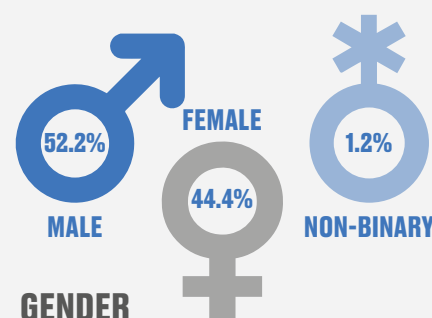


In terms of ethnicity, the vast majority of respondents identified as White British, with 80% identifying as wholly or partly as being from that ethnic background.

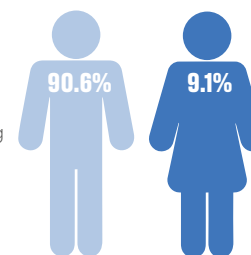
A further 9.9% identified as White (other), with White Irish accounting for 2.9% of respondents.

Of those respondents from non-white ethnicities, 1.6% identified as being wholly or partly Indian, 0.9% came from each of Caribbean and African backgrounds and 0.7% identified as Chinese. 2.2% of fans preferred not to give their ethnicity.

The gender of our respondents was largely evenly split. The remainder either self-identified as another gender, or preferred not to give a response.



This demographic split compares starkly with our 2017 National Supporters Survey, completed by more than 8,500 supporters largely of the men's game, where the respondents were overwhelmingly male, outnumbering women tenfold (90.6% were men, just 9.1% were women).



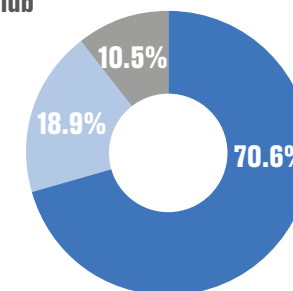
The FSA's Women's Game Strategy Document highlights three core principles around diversity and inclusion

- Equality, diversity and inclusion are at the heart of what we do and who we are.
- Work with Fans for Diversity on activities across the women's game.
- Empower fans of the women's game to protect and harness the inclusive and friendly fan culture that currently exists.

- One in ten (10.7%) respondents said that they considered themselves to have a disability. This compares with just 4.5% of respondents in our National Supporters Survey in 2017.

STAT: Split of fans who identified their support for a club

- were fans of WSL clubs
- were fans of Championship clubs
- were fans of National League clubs and below



PARTISANSHIP

One of the main aims of the survey was to see how the supporter culture in the women's game manifests itself. Building on an established core of supporters who have followed women's football for decades, the growth of the game in the past ten years or so means it has attracted a range of new supporters from different routes - some coming from an existing background in supporting men's teams, and others who have come directly to women's football.

Discovering the various ways in which fans support their teams will give the FSA valuable insights and help to further understand some of the issues supporters face in women's football.

Firstly, we wanted to establish if the level of partisanship seen in the men's game replicated itself in women's football.



Perhaps unsurprisingly, the five most-supported teams in terms of our respondents were Arsenal, Chelsea, Manchester City, Liverpool and Manchester United, who not only have large followings in the men's game, but who ended the season in the top four spots in the WSL and champions of the Championship.

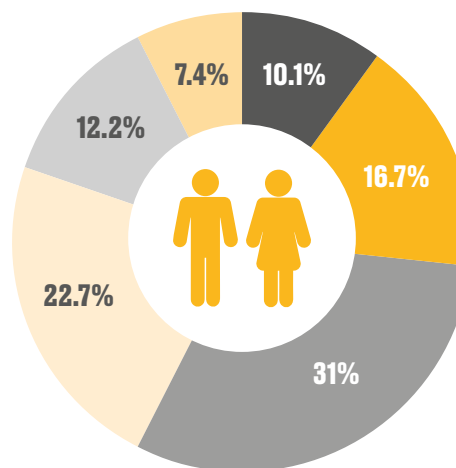
STAT: Which of the following best describes you?

57.8% I am a fan of one particular women's team only

23.4% I am a fan of more than one women's team

18.8% I am a general fan of women's football without supporting a particular team

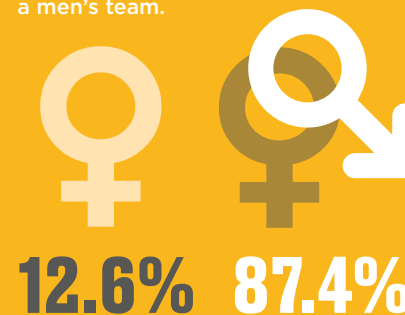
STAT: Which of the following options best describes you as a football supporter?



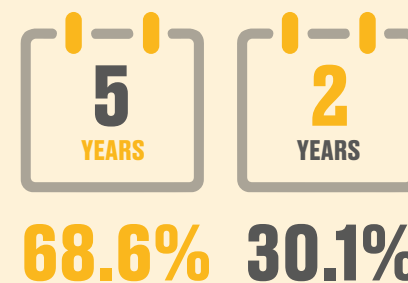
- I only support my women's team
- I support my women's team first, but also follow a men's team
- I support my women's and men's teams equally
- I support my men's team first, but also support my women's team
- I support a men's team, and follow women's football generally
- I am a general football fan

TWO SIDES

While there is a significant proportion of fans who only support teams in the women's game (one in eight, or 12.6%) the vast majority of our respondents (87.4%) said they also supported a men's team.



GROWTH



The growth of the supporter base in the women's game is clear to see from our results - two-thirds of our respondents (68.6%) said they had begun supporting their team in the last five years, with just under a third of fans (30.1%) having started following in the last two years.

MATCHDAY ATTENDANCE

GOING TO THE GAME

Having established who our respondents are and the teams they support, the next step is to examine their matchgoing habits, and the overwhelming majority of our respondents were matchgoing fans.

Three-quarters of them **(75.6%)** said that they will have attended at least one home game in the 2021-22 season.

Almost half the respondents **(46.1%)** attend at least half their side's home games, with just over a third **(36.9%)** holding season tickets.

This high level of attendance is set against a backdrop of fans not typically coming from the same communities in which their clubs are based.

More than a third of fans surveyed **(34.9%)** live more than 50 miles away from their home club's stadium, and just one in five **(20.9%)** live within five miles.

STAT: Who do you typically attend home games with?

32.8% Friends

29.8% By myself

23.2% Partner

17.7% Child

16.6% Other family member

11.3% Parent

7.3% With a supporters group





BARRIERS TO ATTENDANCE

For those who can't afford to attend all their side's home games, we wanted to find out what the main barriers to greater attendance were.

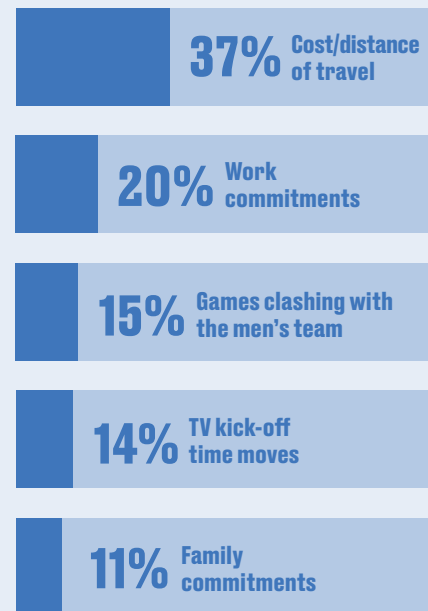
We asked those who did not attend every home game for the three biggest obstacles to increased attendance from a list of options.

Reassuringly, safety is not an issue preventing further attendance. **89.5%** of respondents agreed with the statement **'I feel safe attending women's football'**, with less than **1%** disagreeing.

*!@#!@

While fewer than 1% of fans reported abusive chants as a major barrier to greater attendance, one in seven (**13.9%**) responded that they had noticed an increase in the amount of homophobic, racist or sexist language at the match in recent years.

STAT: The greatest barriers to attendance are:



AWAY FROM HOME

When it comes to following their side away from home, the majority of our respondents are still matchgoers – almost two-thirds of whom (**61.8%**) will have attended at least one away game this season.

The majority of fans will attend between one and five matches, but one in four fans (**25.3%**) will attend at least half of them, with **13.8%** counting themselves as ever-resents away from home.

Fans reported much the same barriers to attendance at away games as at home fixtures – cost/distance of travel, work commitments, clashes with the men's team's matches – but there are ways in which clubs could help encourage away attendance.

More than one in ten fans rated the timeliness of ticket details being announced (**12.6%**), ease of purchase of away tickets (**15.3%**) and the information provided on away tickets (**18.3%**) as either poor or very poor.

The lack of organised travel to away fixtures is problematic for some fans.

STAT: AWAY TRAVEL

Only **13.2%** of fans said their club arranged away travel for fans, and around one in five reported travel organised by an official (**22.1%**) or independent (**20.3%**) supporters' group. Almost two-thirds of fans (**60.3%**) reported no organised away travel at their club.



There's no consensus on away fan segregation at women's games – a third are in favour (**32%**) four in ten (**42%**) are not in favour with a quarter undecided. There was also a similar split with regards to allocated seating – one-third (**34%**) were in favour, with a similar proportion (**29%**) against.

REFEREEING



ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT



Football fans are characterised, whether fairly or unfairly, as only ever being too happy to moan about refereeing decisions, but concern for the standard of refereeing was one of the areas that stood out in our results.

More than half our respondents disagreed with the statement 'the standard of refereeing is acceptable in women's football', and more than a quarter (26%) strongly disagreed with it.

Only a very small minority - just one in twenty (5.8%) of fans - strongly agreed that the standard was acceptable.

How best to fix the problem? There were varying levels of support for the ideas proposed which could help improve the situation.



The option with the strongest level of support was for the professionalisation of referees. Almost nine in ten fans - **87.6%** - were in favour of full-time refs, with only **4.7%** against the idea.



There was strong support, too, for the idea that women's football would benefit from goalline technology. Three-quarters of fans (**74.3%**) were in favour of the technology, while just one in ten (**10.4%**) were opposed.

VAR

When it came to the suggestion of VAR, however, there was less clear-cut support that this would fix the perceived issues with officiating.



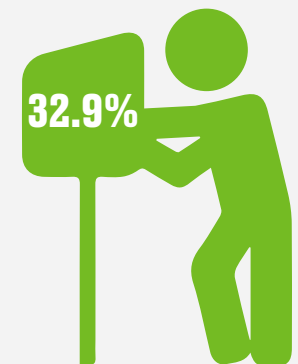
While there was general backing for its introduction, with half our respondents (**50%**) agreeing

that they would be in favour of its introduction, this compares with a more sizeable majority of fans who agreed that they'd like to see 'trials of video referees for game-changing decisions' (**74.6%**) in our National Supporters Survey in 2017, before the introduction of VAR in the upper levels of the men's game.

Once fans had seen its implementation, views quickly crystallised against it. In the largest survey of its kind polling more than 33,000 fans in 2021, **95%** of fans who had experienced VAR in-stadium found it had made watching football less enjoyable.

Only **26%** said they supported the continued use of VAR, and only **13%** said that it had improved the accuracy of refereeing decisions.

Notwithstanding the experiences seen in the men's game, any move to install VAR in the women's game would likely prove controversial as things stand, as a third of fans (**32.9%**) in our survey said they disagreed with its introduction.



ME AND MY CLUB



The relationship between a fan and their club takes many forms – from buying tickets and contacting them with queries through to all the various ways fans interact with club staff and infrastructure on a matchday.

No club will ever get things perfect every time, but our survey offers a good general insight into trends in the women's game, while also providing us with some specific club-level data that we can report back to our member fan groups to take up with their own clubs.

The reassuring news is that clubs on the whole scored positively when it came to the majority of interactions that they have with their fans.

In responding to fan queries, of those who've had interactions with their club, two-thirds (**64.6%**) rated their club as either good or very good at responding to fan queries, while just **14.6%** rated their club negatively.



There is confidence among fans in the women's game that their clubs would deal with matchday issues or complaints. Almost two-thirds (**60.9%**)

stated they were very or somewhat confident that their club would take their problem seriously, as opposed to just **8.8%** who didn't have confidence in their complaint being dealt with.



More than three-quarters of our respondents (**77%**) said that their club

offered good or very good value for money, while similar proportions felt positively about the ease of ticket purchasing (**70.1%**) and service time (**68.1%**) offered by their club.



72% agreed there was a vibrant fan culture at their club



51% said their club should do more to promote environmentally friendly practices on matchdays



41% said their club should do more on increasing diversity and inclusion

Where there is more room for improvement, however, is in regards to merchandise – less than half of fans (**44.5%**) thought the range of merchandise was good or very good. Only a third (**33.2%**) thought it offered good value for money, with **17.1%** rating it poor or very poor.



Less than half of fans (**42.7%**) rated the public transport accessibility of

their home stadium positively, while only a third (**36.9%**) rated the parking positively. Improvements in getting fans to the stadium could pay dividends with bigger crowds, but two thirds of respondents (**64.8%**) agreed that despite this their club does a good job in attracting fans.

INTERNATIONAL



This year is a huge one for international football in the UK, with the Women's Euro 2022 taking place in England in July. Having established the relationship between our respondents and their clubs, we thought this would also be an ideal time to survey fans on their thoughts on the international game.



Most of our respondents identified that they supported a national team – only **7.9%** said they didn't support any national team – with England

unsurprisingly topping the charts among our respondents with **75.1%** identifying their support for the Lionesses. The numbers broadly match those in the men's game, where one in ten (**10.7%**) fans in our 2017 National Supporters Survey told us they didn't follow any national team.

While there was still a strong base of matchgoing support among our respondents, the numbers for international teams were understandably lower than for club sides.



STAT:

Four in ten (41%) respondents had not attended an international game previously; 12% had attended once and just over a third (38%) said they were occasional attenders of international fixtures.



More fans engaged with their national team on TV, however – a third (**33%**) said they watched all games that were broadcast, with a further **39%** saying they watched most games.

THOUGHTS ON THE EUROS



With **100** days to go until the Euros, UEFA announced that almost half of the tournament's **700,000** tickets had already been sold, which has broken the record for ticket

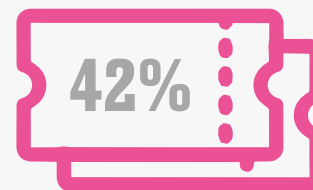
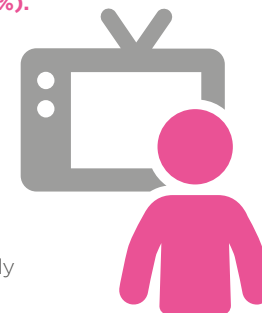
sales for a Women's Euros. The final at Wembley sold out in less than an hour.

That excitement is matched by respondents to our survey.



Notwithstanding those who have already bought or are planning to buy tickets, two-thirds of respondents said they were planning to watch as much of the Euros as possible on TV (**67%**).

Around one in ten fans (**9%**) said they would watch the matches involving their own national team, and less than **5%** said they would probably or definitely not watch any of it.



STAT:

Almost half our respondents (42%) had already bought tickets for matches at the Euros, with a further one in five (20%) saying they planned to.



OTHER INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

While the Euros is big news, there are other topics relating to international football that we wanted to poll supporters on, however.

Unlike the England men's team, the Lionesses have habitually played their international games at stadiums around the country. With the growth in attendances at national team fixtures, we wanted to gauge fans' thoughts on whether that practice should continue or if attendances should be maximised at the biggest stadiums.



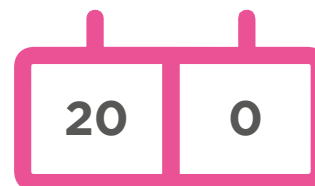
There was broad support for a commitment for England to play games around the country rather than at Wembley – **73%** were in favour, with just 10% opposed.

When it comes to those qualifiers played around the country, there has been debate surrounding the quality of the opponents in recent years.



The disparity in quality between the elite nations and those who are further behind in their development of the game has led to some very one-sided results.

There was strong support (**73%** of respondents agreeing) with the statement that results such as England's 20-0 win over Latvia and 10-0 win over San Marino demonstrated the need for pre-qualifiers for smaller nations ahead of the World Cup and Euros.



For more on the FSA's work ahead of the Euros follow @FreeLionesses on Twitter, where we will be sharing all of our fans' embassy news along with the other plans for supporter interaction around the tournament.

TV, BROADCAST AND MEDIA

This season saw the onset of a landmark new TV deal in women's football, with record investment and unparalleled levels of visibility for the sport.



The three year deal will see Sky Sports broadcasting up to **44 live games**, and a further **22** on BBC, with a guaranteed minimum of **18** being shown on BBC One and BBC Two.

As we approached the end of the first season of the new TV deal, we were able to poll supporters on its effects, their views of the coverage, as well as get an idea on how supporters see the coverage of the game in the wider media.

AN IMPROVED PICTURE



The increased visibility has been matched with a positive reaction from supporters to the overall coverage of the sport.

Four out of five respondents (**81.5%**) agreed that the coverage has been better than before, with just **1.5%** feeling that the coverage has been worse.

As a result of the improvements and increased availability, fans are watching more football than before.

The improvements in fans' opinions of the broadcast media have been mirrored more widely across print, online and radio, as well. Almost two thirds of fans (**61.8%**) stated that the coverage of the women's game in the wider media has been better than before, while a third (**34.9%**) find it the same as before.



STAT: Almost two thirds of fans (**60.7%**) are watching/streaming more football than before; a third are watching the same as before (**34.5%**) and just **4.9%** are finding themselves watching less.



BROADCAST FOCUS

Just over half our respondents (52%) were Sky Sports subscribers or had watched WSL games on Sky Sports, while 91% had either regularly or occasionally watched BBC's women's football coverage.

Around one in seven of our respondents who had watched games on Sky Sports (14.6%) said that they had subscribed specifically because of Sky's women's football coverage, showing the immediate impact of the new TV deal.



When asked about the specifics of the broadcasters' output, there was a broadly positive reaction to both the Sky Sports and BBC coverage.

BBC rated slightly better on the main broadcast issues such as quality/knowledge of pundits and commentators, while Sky Sports scored slightly better on the amount of time given to pre-match and post-match coverage.

**44.5%
BBC**
**33%
SKY**

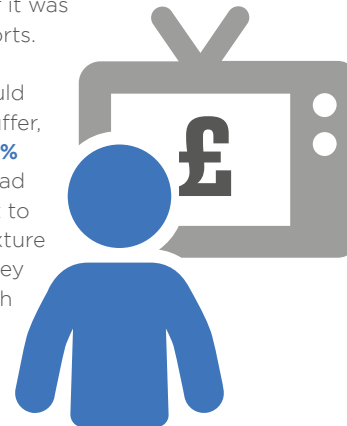
The main point of difference between the broadcasters was in terms of highlights packages – almost half of our respondents (44.5%) rated the ease of finding highlights programmes on BBC as very good or good, compared with just a third (33%) on Sky Sports, however.

THE PRICE OF SUCCESS?

Despite the huge positives to be gained from a wider audience, the introduction of greater TV coverage has come at a cost for some supporters.

Mirroring the complaints in the men's game, three quarters of fans (77.3%) say that TV has too much say in when games kick-off.

The cost is also felt personally and financially – almost half of respondents (45.3%) said they felt priced out of watching games as so much of it was on Sky Sports. Matchday crowds could begin to suffer, too, as 17.9% said they had chosen not to attend a fixture because they could watch it on TV.



STAT:
Despite the strong majority of fans reporting TV and wider media coverage as being better than before, only a quarter (26%) agreed that there was sufficient coverage of the game on mainstream media/TV, and similar (26.6%) said there was sufficient coverage of their team in local media.



OTHER STATS

This report is intended to give an idea of some of the key findings and themes from the responses to our survey; the overall dataset is much, much bigger of course, and gives us lots to work on.

Our questions took in a huge range of topics, and not everything fits neatly into the broad topics we've covered on the previous pages. Here are some other stats.

STAT: 88% agreed that the gap in prize money between the men's and women's FA Cups should be reduced.

Since our survey was published, the FA have announced that they will be making a huge increase in the prize fund for 2022-23, a ninefold increase to a total of £3m with a 'disproportionate' amount going to clubs in the early stages of the competition.



FUNDING AND FINANCE

Nine in ten fans - **89.4%** - agreed that there should be more money redistributed from the men's game to support the growth of the women's game, while **4.9%** were opposed.



When it comes to other methods of growing finances in the game, fans were more split. Four in ten fans (**41%**) agreed with the statement "Clubs should be allowed to attract investment/support as they see fit, even if this leads to a concentration of wealth at the top of the WSL"; almost as many fans (**34.7%**) were against, however.

WHAT ELSE DO FANS DO?

Our respondents aren't just supporters, but fill a variety of other roles in the game.

12.2% are also players, **7.3%** are coaches, **5.8%** are club volunteers and **1.7%** are referees.



MISCELLANEOUS

65% are in support of fan ownership in the women's game.

40% said accessibility to the players (eg to chat post-match) was an important part of their matchgoing, and **28%** said getting autographs/selfies were important.



CHARTING ITS OWN PATH?

There was less consensus on whether clubs and the women's game in general should.



28% agreed that women's teams should be independent from their men's equivalents, while **38%** were against the idea.

Women's games should kick-off away from 3pm to avoid clashes with men's football - **65%** in favour, **16%** against.

48% are in favour of the winter break in the women's game.

53% generally say that the women's game should chart its own path and avoid copying the formats/structures of the men's game.

WOMEN'S GAME STRATEGY

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