

# The unfairness of the UEFA Euro 2020 qualifying

László Csató\*

Institute for Computer Science and Control, Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA SZTAKI)  
Laboratory on Engineering and Management Intelligence, Research Group of Operations  
Research and Decision Systems

Corvinus University of Budapest (BCE)  
Department of Operations Research and Actuarial Sciences

Budapest, Hungary

25 October 2019

## Abstract

The qualification for the UEFA European Championship 2020 is strongly connected to the inaugural season 2018-19 of the UEFA Nations League. The latter competition divides the 55 UEFA national teams into four leagues of different strength.

We find that being a top team in the lowest-ranked League D can substantially increase the probability of qualification for the UEFA European Championship 2020 compared to being a bottom team in League C. The reason is that the chance of direct qualification is negligible for these teams, but the qualifying play-offs guarantee at least one place for the best four teams of each league.

This can undermine credibility as the current rules might punish stronger performance in certain matches, and create incentives for strategic manipulation. The Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) is encouraged to reconsider the format of qualifications to eliminate the unfair advantage enjoyed by the top teams of UEFA Nations League D.

*Keywords:* OR in sports; fairness; football; simulation; tournament design

*MSC classes:* 62F07, 68U20

*JEL classification number:* C44, C63, Z20

The talk is based on the following paper:

- Csató, L. (2019): The unfairness of the UEFA Euro 2020 qualifying. <https://arxiv.org/abs/1905.03325>.

---

\* E-mail: [laszlo.csato@uni-corvinus.hu](mailto:laszlo.csato@uni-corvinus.hu)