

Study shows Euros, AFCON players faced racist, homophobic abuse online

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More than half of all players in finals of Euros and AFCON received some form of abuse online, majority of abuse was homophobic, racist

New York, June 20 (RYC)-- More than half of all players at the finals of last year's European Championship and the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) in February were subjected to discriminatory abuse online, a report published by global football governing body FIFA has revealed.

The independent report used artificial intelligence to track more than 400,000 posts on social media platforms during the semi-final and final stages of the two football competitions and found the majority of abuse to be homophobic, 40 percent, and racist, 38 percent.

England's Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka, who are Black, were bombarded with online abuse after missing their penalty shots in a shoot-out against Italy which settled the July 11 European Championship final after the game finished in a draw. A substitute player from Egypt was the most abused player at the AFCON finals this year, the report found.

"Our duty is to protect football and that starts with the players who bring so much joy and happiness to all of us by their exploits on the field of play," FIFA President Gianni Infantino said in a statement on Saturday.

"Unfortunately, there is a trend developing where a percentage of posts on social media channels directed towards players, coaches, match officials and the teams themselves is not acceptable, and this form of discrimination – like any form of discrimination – has no place in football," he said.

The report added that abuse on Twitter was constant across the period of the study while Instagram abuse was "event driven" – such as losing a final – and more than 75 percent of comments on the platform included emojis.

In advance of the World Cup starting in Qatar in November, FIFA said it would work with players' body FIFPRO to implement a plan to protect teams, players, officials, and supporters from abuse on social media during international tournaments.

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