



**BRIEFING**

# The 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia: Sponsorship and human rights

**SWED  
WATCH**

Swedwatch is an independent not-for-profit organisation that conducts in-depth research on the impacts of businesses on human rights and the environment. The aim of the organisation is to contribute towards reduced poverty and sustainable social and environmental development through research, encouraging best practice, knowledge-sharing and dialogue. Swedwatch has six member organisations: Afrikagrupperna, the Church of Sweden, Diakonia, Fair Action, Solidarity Sweden-Latin America and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation.



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## Executive summary

The 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia will take place during a severe human rights crisis. Recent reports outline violations of human rights that range from restrictions on fundamental freedoms and crackdowns on human rights defenders, to adverse impacts directly associated with the World Cup. Laborers working on World Cup sites have experienced severe labour rights violations such as unpaid wages and unsafe working conditions. At least 21 workers have allegedly died while working on Russian World Cup sites as of April 2018.<sup>1</sup>

Recent reporting is in line with extensive information on the human rights situation in Russia over the last few years. Human rights violations specifically associated with major sports events in Russia were highlighted by several actors more than four years ago – when Russia hosted the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

The worlds of sports and business are closely linked, and a massive sporting event such as the 2018 FIFA World Cup would not be possible in its present form without corporate sponsorship on the national and international level. When a company enters a sponsorship agreement with a national sports association it connects the company's products and/or services with any championships that the national teams play in. Consequently, these events become part of the company value chain.

According to the United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), a company should act on the human rights impacts linked to its products or services through its business relationships. Thus, the responsibility that comes with a business deal regarding sports sponsorships is no different than that associated with sourcing a product or supplying a service.

This briefing elaborates on the corporate responsibility in the context of sports sponsorship, by reviewing measures taken by sponsors of the Swedish Football Association (SvFF) to address human rights impacts associated with the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the concept of “know and show” in the UNGPs, outlining that companies should be aware of, and report on, how their operations impact human rights, only seven out of the 13 corporate sponsors of SvFF that Swedwatch contacted took part in the survey conducted for this briefing paper.

Research findings indicate that since 2014, progress has been made among sponsors primarily at policy-level. However, despite well-documented human rights risks and impacts associated with the 2018 World Cup, considerable gaps exist between companies' policy and practice.

Companies must take concrete action on the human rights risks and impacts in their value chains. For sponsors of sports associations, the responsibility to respect human rights includes using their influence to help prevent and mitigate specific impacts. This could include, for example, collaboration with other sponsors to increase leverage on these issues.



In 2022, the FIFA World Cup will be played in Qatar where the severe human rights violations against migrant workers tasked with constructing stadiums, hotels and training facilities are well-known.<sup>3</sup> Provided that Sweden qualifies for this championship, Qatar will constitute a serious test for corporate sponsors with regards to addressing their human rights impacts.

## Recommendations

### To corporate sponsors of national sports associations

- Conduct proper mapping and analysis of the actual and potential human rights impacts associated with championships in which the national teams are taking part.
- Act on the findings of this mapping, for example by encouraging the sports associations to raise the identified human rights impacts with its international counterparts.
- If the company has insufficient influence over the national sports association, it should seek to increase its leverage by cooperating with other sponsors regarding human rights issues.
- Ensure that the company has a policy for human rights that extends also to the sponsorship activities and work to ensure that the sponsored organization also has a human rights policy.
- Consult on these issues with affected stakeholders or credible civil society actors, such as human rights defenders, academics, unions, and independent expert resources.
- Communicate the activities and results of this process in accordance with the concept of “know and show,” as outlined in the UNGPs.

# 1. Introduction

When the 2018 FIFA World Cup is played from the 14<sup>th</sup> of June to the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, the world's top national teams will face off in twelve stadiums across Russia. Several million fans are expected. Hosting the World Cup is an enormous financial undertaking as not only sports arenas must be constructed but also related infrastructure such as airports, hotels, roads and transportation.

The preparations for, and staging of, such a major sports event thus spur huge investment that can create jobs, improve infrastructure, and develop urban areas. However, despite these potential economic and social benefits, massive sports events have also been associated with severe adverse impacts on human rights such as forced evictions, labour violations and restrictions of free speech.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of the FIFA World Cup in Russia, such impacts on human rights include severe labour rights violations which, according to recent reports, have included the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers and caused 21 deaths on World Cup construction sites to date.<sup>5</sup>

In assessing how to address actual and potential human rights impacts associated with an event such as the World Cup, it is important to consider the responsibility inherent in corporate sponsorship – a partnership where companies seek to strengthen its brand and create new business opportunities by sponsoring either the event itself or an international or national sports association.

When John Ruggie, former UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Business and Human Rights, developed recommendations on how the International Football Association (FIFA) should embed respect for human rights across its operations, it was explicitly stated that corporate sponsors should make an active contribution to human rights.<sup>6</sup>

When a company enters into a sponsorship agreement, it makes the sports event in question part of its value chain and becomes linked to human rights impacts associated with it.<sup>7</sup> According to international frameworks on business and human rights, this linkage makes a company responsible for addressing human rights risks and mitigating impacts associated with the business activities.

This briefing paper outlines what steps, if any, the corporate sponsors of the Swedish Football Association (SvFF) have taken to act on their responsibility to respect human rights. However, conclusions and recommendations can be applied also to international sponsors of sports organizations.

## 2. Methodology

The focus of this briefing paper is the adverse human rights impacts associated with the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia and the extent to which business actors sponsoring SvFF live up to their responsibilities under the United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).



In 2014, Swedwatch released two reports that elaborated on the responsibility for human rights in the context of sports sponsorship. The first of these reports, *De olympiska kränkningarna*, investigated measures taken by corporate sponsors of the Swedish Olympic Committee to address human rights impacts associated with the winter olympics in Sochi.<sup>8</sup> The second report, *Mänskliga rättigheter på halis*, focused on measures to address impacts associated with the world championship in ice hockey held in Belarus.<sup>9</sup> The findings of these two reports revealed that the corporate sponsors in question lacked the necessary processes to identify potential risks of adverse human rights impacts as well as the processes to mitigate and address such impacts. The findings and conclusions of the 2014 reports provided the starting point for this study.



The present briefing paper is the result of research performed by Swedwatch from February to June 2018. This includes the analysis of answers to a questionnaire sent to corporate sponsors of SvFF regarding their work on human rights in their sponsoring activities. The questionnaire, based on new research and past findings and recommendations, was distributed to selected sponsors with the assistance of SvFF and the answers were analysed in the context of the UNGPs.

Findings include an overview of the extent to which companies have met their responsibilities to identify and manage risks as well as to mitigate adverse human rights impacts connected to their sponsorship of SvFF and, in extension, the FIFA World Cup in Russia. The paper notes areas for improvement and highlights actors that have taken more proactive measures. Analysis can be found in section 6: *Analysis and conclusions*, on page 14.

The companies selected for review represent 13 major corporate sponsors of SvFF, active in a wide range of sectors. The main sponsor is the state-owned gambling company **Svenska Spel**. **Adidas** is the official sports-equipment supplier, and the other corporate partners are **Coca-Cola**, **Folksam**, **Ica**, **Intersport**, **Scandic**, **Sportbladet**, **Swedbank**, **Volvo Car Sweden**, **Carlsberg**, **Fabege** and **SJ**. Exclusive suppliers and other partners are not included in the study.<sup>10</sup>

Of the identified companies, seven answered the questionnaire. Adidas, the main equipment supplier, declined to participate. Three weeks after receiving the ques-

tionnaire, the company explained that answering the questions was not possible within the given timeframe. The real estate company Fabege also declined to participate, stating that questions did not seem relevant as the company had not discussed these issues. The remaining four companies did not respond to multiple phone and email requests made by Swedwatch.

Swedwatch has not conducted in-depth interviews or screenings of policies of the participating companies. Swedwatch has not reviewed SvFF efforts on human rights with regards to dialogue with the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA).

**Table 1.** SvFF sponsors contacted for the study

Company	Status
Svenska spel	Participated
Folksam	Participated
Swedbank	Participated
Scandic	Participated
Volvo Car Sweden	Participated
Ica	Participated
SJ	Participated
Intersport	Did not reply
Sportbladet	Did not reply
Carlsberg	Did not reply
Coca-Cola	Did not reply
Adidas	Declined to participate
Fabège	Declined to participate

### 3. Background

Russia is hosting the FIFA World Cup during what Human Rights Watch (HRW) calls “an unrelenting human rights crackdown”.<sup>11</sup> The Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) states that increasing state repression in Russia is mainly due to the introduction of new legislation and an increasingly politicized justice system – which is rapidly shrinking the available space for civil society.<sup>12</sup> Violence against human rights defenders and opposition politicians is on the rise, as is the number of people convic-



ted for political reasons. The right to demonstrate has been curtailed, and new laws to combat treason and terrorism are used to silence critics of the government.<sup>13</sup>

Findings regarding human rights risks associated with major sporting events, and how they relate specifically to Russia, are not new. In 2014, HRW highlighted the human rights risks associated with staging sports events in Russia four years ago, when the nation hosted the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. The findings included labour rights violations such as unpaid wages, excessive working hours and harsh treatment of foreign migrant workers.<sup>14</sup> The organization also criticized corporate sponsors of the Olympics for not speaking out regarding rights abuses.<sup>15</sup>

Many of the issues raised in 2014 are still relevant in Russia today – particularly in connection with preparations for the FIFA World Cup. According to HRW, workers at stadium construction sites face delayed and/or unpaid wages, work in freezing temperatures without sufficient protection, and employers' failure to provide work contracts required for legal employment.<sup>16</sup>

To date, at least 21 workers have died building the facilities for the 2018 FIFA World Cup – highlighting the lethal labour conditions faced by the workers, many of them migrants from other parts of Russia or former Soviet republics.<sup>17</sup> According to reports in the media and by human rights organisations, migrant workers from North Korea have worked on construction of the World Cup venue in St Petersburg, where they reportedly worked under slave-like conditions.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, workers who have raised concerns regarding labor conditions or who have actively participated in strikes have reported threats and experienced retaliation. Workers at several construction sites have also been prevented by security guards from speaking to HRW researchers, one of whom was reportedly detained by police when trying to interview workers at the sites.<sup>19</sup>

In June 2017 FIFA launched its new human rights policy along with a commitment to respect internationally recognized human rights.<sup>20</sup> However, the organization is yet to ensure that this policy is properly implemented in the Russian context, especially with regards to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Russia is a party. The convention states that everyone has the right “to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work.”<sup>21</sup> Several conventions of The International Labour Organization (ILO), including those ratified by Russia, also relate to the payment of wages and occupational health and safety.<sup>22</sup>

Generally, trade unions play an active role in ensuring protection from labour rights violations, but this has not been reflected in the Russian context. According to the Swedish organization Union to Union there is a widespread suspicion towards trade unions in Russia.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the civil society organization Freedom House states that trade union rights, while legally protected in theory, are limited in practice. Employers often ignore collective-bargaining rights and the largest labour federation cooperates with the government.<sup>24</sup>

In 2013, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) reported that Russia had adopted temporary legislation that would allow FIFA and its partners, including

Russian and multinational companies, to set working conditions outside the framework of Russian law – effectively depriving tens of thousands of Russian and migrant workers of basic legal protections.<sup>25</sup>

## 4. Sport sponsorship and human rights

In 2011, the UN Human Rights Council unanimously endorsed the United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) – 31 principles that make up the international standard to help prevent and address adverse human rights impacts associated with business activities. The principles clarify the roles of states and companies in ensuring that companies respect human rights in their business activities and through their business relationships.<sup>26</sup>

According to the UNGPs, the responsibility to respect human rights requires a company to “seek to prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are directly linked to their operations, products or services by their business relationships, even if they have not contributed to those impacts”.<sup>27</sup> This applies to all business relationships, including investments and sponsorships. Through sponsorship agreements with sports organizations, a sporting event can become part of the company’s value chain. Subsequently, the responsibility to address any adverse human rights impacts associated with the event in question extends to the sponsoring companies.

In order to comply with the UNGPs, a company should have a human rights due diligence (HRDD) process in place, which entails adopting policies and processes to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how it addresses its impacts on human rights.<sup>28</sup> In the context of sports sponsorship, HRDD requires that a company ensures that it has done everything possible to mitigate risks and prevent harm. It must also be transparent about the process, and ideally involve civil society, trade unions, experts, and others.<sup>29</sup>

If the company has the necessary leverage over the business partner to prevent or mitigate the adverse impact, the company should exercise it. If such leverage is lacking, there may be ways for the company to increase its leverage in order to prevent or mitigate adverse impacts.<sup>30</sup>

### FACT

#### **SvFF and CRD**

In March 2018 SvFF announced a cooperation with the non-governmental organisation Civil Rights Defenders (CRD) – where CRD will provide training and advice for SvFF staff and players on issues relating to human rights. According to information provided by SvFF and CRD, the two organisations will work together to raise awareness and support work being done with regards to ensuring respect for human rights.<sup>31</sup> As part of this cooperation CRD and SvFF arranged to meet the corporate sponsors in early May 2018 to inform them of the human rights situation in Russia, a meeting that several of the sponsoring companies stated that they would be attending.

The UNGPs also formulate the concept of “know and show”, outlining that companies have a responsibility to be aware of, and report on, how their operations impact human rights at all stages.<sup>32</sup>

The Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) has performed extensive research on sports sponsorship and corporate responsibility for human rights, highlighting that many companies have taken steps to respect human rights in their supply chains. However, these processes often focus on a company’s core operations, and do not necessarily address issues that can arise in connection with sporting events to which the company is linked through its sponsorships.<sup>33</sup>

According to IHRB, the close business relationship between sports associations and companies gives companies considerable leverage over these actors. But sponsors hold the greatest leverage when negotiating a contract with a sports association. Once the contract has been signed, many sponsors indicate that they have far less scope to make new demands or raise new expectations.<sup>34</sup>

However, the UNGPs apply across the entire lifespan of sponsor agreements and sports events. The Principles apply to all relationships between governments, government bodies, public–private partnerships, and companies.<sup>35</sup>

The government is ultimately obligated to protect human rights – irrespective of whether its activities are carried out under direct government control or outsourced to private companies.<sup>36</sup> However, the corporate responsibility to respect human rights exists independently of states’ ability and/or willingness to fulfil their own obligations.<sup>37</sup>

## 5. Sponsors of SvFF and their human rights due diligence

Seven out of the 13 companies that were contacted during the course of Swedwatch research answered the questionnaire provided. Analysis of the findings highlight the different approaches by sponsors and sheds light on their progress towards corporate responsibility for human rights in the sponsorship context.

Only two of the companies contacted, Svenska Spel and Swedbank, disclosed the yearly figures for their sponsorship agreement (approximately 4,1 million EUR and 300.000-500.000 EUR respectively). Others declined to answer, but SvFF has stated that the amounts range between 100.000 and 600.000 EUR yearly.

All seven companies outlined that they have policies for human rights that include their sports sponsorships. Each company also referred to the recently launched cooperation between SvFF and CRD, where CRD will act as an advisor on human rights issues and provide training to staff and players.<sup>38</sup>

## 5.1 Svenska Spel

The state-owned gambling company Svenska Spel is the main sponsor of SvFF. According to Svenska Spel, the company has special guidelines for sponsorships and human rights that clarify what is expected of those entering into an agreement with the company.

The company stated that it has been in dialogue with SvFF regarding potential adverse human rights impacts in connection with the World Cup in Russia, and that it has also engaged with two other actors (Swedwatch and the business network CSR-Sweden).

Svenska Spel stated that it had conducted its own mapping of human rights risks in Russia to identify the most severe human rights issues. According to the company, similar mapping is done for all events that its sponsored partners participate in and is based on information from Amnesty International and the MFA. According to Svenska Spel, a company with sports sponsorships always has an opportunity to either try to influence a business partner on human rights or terminate the cooperation.

The company stated that a sponsor should work to ensure that countries with a good human rights record host events, and that the companies supplying products and services to the events are contributing positively with regards to human rights. If the host nation does not live up to this standard, Svenska Spel expects the sponsored organisation to draw attention to the situation.

## 5.2 Folksam

The Swedish insurance company Folksam states that it has a separate sponsorship policy as well as a sponsorship council that is responsible for sustainability issues connected to sports sponsorships. The company reported that it has engaged in dialogue with SvFF on human rights in connection with the World Cup in Russia.

Furthermore, according to Folksam, the company has conducted its own analysis of the human rights situation in Russia based on information from the Swedish government. Folksam decided not to take part in a trip that SvFF is arranging for the sponsors to the World Cup in Russia due in part to the human rights and democratic rights situation in Russia.

According to Folksam, sports and respect for human rights can – and should – unite. Folksam states that a sponsor can take the opportunity to put pressure on sports associations to make this happen, for example by developing an “event codex” that sets a minimum human rights standard for countries that host events.

### 5.3 Swedbank

Swedbank, one of Sweden's largest banks, stated that it has performed its own analysis of the human rights situation in Russia but did not provide any details of this analysis or of its findings. Furthermore, the company states that it has engaged in dialogue with SvFF on human rights issues connected to the World Cup in Russia and, like Folksam, decided not to take part in the upcoming SvFF trip.

According to Swedbank, sponsoring companies can have only very limited influence over human rights issues. However, by asserting its opinions on the issues, there can still be potential for change.

### 5.4 Scandic

The hotel chain Scandic states that it has not performed any analysis regarding adverse impacts on human rights associated with the World Cup in Russia. The company has, however, engaged in dialogue with SvFF regarding these issues and has declared that the work being done by the SvFF on human rights is sufficient.

According to Scandic, the company cannot assert influence in countries where major sports events are held. It confirmed the company will support its sponsored partners wherever a championship takes place. Scandic also asserted that sponsors of a national sports association have very few opportunities to influence human rights issues.

### 5.5 Volvo Car Sweden

According to national sales company Volvo Car Sweden, the company is in continuous dialogue with SvFF on human rights issues. The company has not conducted any risk mapping regarding human rights associated with the World Cup. Instead, it is awaiting information from SvFF and CRD.

The company stated that it has not been in touch with any other actors or organisations regarding human rights. According to Volvo Car Sweden, the company's business partners, by partaking in major sports events, continuously push an agenda shared by both parties; together, they have an opportunity to positively influence these matters.

### 5.6 Ica

Supermarket chain Ica has not conducted any mapping of the potential impacts on human rights that might arise as a result of the World Cup in Russia. Nor has it engaged in dialogue with SvFF, or any other actors, on these issues.



At the time of writing, the company awaits a meeting that SvFF is arranging with the sponsors and CRD. Ica reported that it will actively engage in dialogue with other actors on these issues during this meeting. The company acknowledged that human rights are important, and that it has the necessary influence to underpin positive change regarding human rights in the context of major sports events.

## 5.7 SJ

The government-owned passenger train operator SJ states that it has engaged in dialogue with SvFF regarding impacts on human rights associated with the World Cup in Russia. However, the company has not mapped actual or potential human rights impacts associated with the event.

SJ states that it will take part in a meeting that SvFF is arranging with CRD, but its view is that the sponsors of a national football association have little possibility of influencing the human rights impacts associated with an event such as the World Cup in Russia.

The company argued that this is especially true for SJ, since its activities are clearly limited to Sweden. It suggested that the sponsors of FIFA should take action since these companies are more clearly connected to the World Cup.

## 6. Analysis and conclusions

A partnership with a national football team is a strategy for a company to increase its visibility and ultimately create business value through sports events. But this economic opportunity entails a responsibility, through the nature of the business relationship, to address human rights impacts associated with such events. The findings in this paper indicate that there are still considerable gaps between policy and practice, with regards to managing human rights impacts associated with sports events.

This is especially clear in Russia, where the dire human rights situation is well known, and where the human rights impacts connected with preparations for, and staging of, major sports events have been well documented.

While an in-depth analysis of how each of the surveyed companies is managing the human rights risks connected to their sport sponsorships is beyond the scope of this briefing paper, many lessons can be learned from analysing the information provided by the companies and matching these against information readily available on human rights risks specific to the World Cup in Russia.

One aspect to consider is that only seven out of thirteen companies took part in the survey. As the UNGPs are not legally binding, a company is not under obligation to disclose information about its HRDD process. However, the concept of “know and show” entails the expectation that a company should account for how it is addressing human rights risks to interested parties.<sup>39</sup>

Analysing the replies and comparing them to the findings from previous Swedwatch studies on sport sponsorship and human rights reveals that there has been progress in recent years. In the 2014 reports, no companies had human rights policies that extended to their sport sponsorships. But today, all seven companies that agreed to participate in the study claim to have implemented policies and/or codes of conduct for human rights, including in relation to their sport sponsorships.

Three of the companies have mapped human rights risks, a basic part of HRDD. The remaining companies refer to their business partner, SvFF, and the association's collaboration with CRD. But the responsibility to respect human rights cannot be outsourced to a business partner. Being aware of the human rights risks in one's own value chain is an essential element of respecting human rights.

Furthermore, for a business actor to comply with international standards on business and human rights, even the most ambitious and comprehensive risk analysis and mapping must lead to action. If a company identifies adverse impacts on human rights, it should be able to show that it has raised these issues with its business partner in order to prevent or mitigate these impacts.

Foregoing a trip to the sports event in question and citing the human rights situation as a reason for this, is one way to take a stand for human rights. However, if such a gesture is not accompanied by actual address of human rights risks, this becomes primarily a public relations move – an attempt to distance the company from a business relationship that links it to adverse human rights impacts.

When a company is mapping and addressing human rights impacts that it is linked to, it should consider consulting affected groups and other relevant stakeholders – or should draw on independent human rights expertise such as human rights defenders and others from civil society.<sup>40</sup>

But according to the results of Swedwatch's survey, only one of the sponsors, the main sponsor Svenska Spel, has been in touch with actors other than SvFF as a part of their HRDD. None of the companies that replied to the questionnaire has engaged in dialogue with other sponsors in order to share experiences, discuss human rights issues or increase their leverage over SvFF.

Regardless of the results of the cooperation between SvFF and CRD, the sponsors should assess the human rights risks independently of SvFF, and act on the findings by putting pressure on SvFF to prevent and mitigate these impacts, ideally by collaborating with other sponsors.

In 2022, the World Cup will be played in Qatar – a nation that has already faced serious criticism for human rights violations and labour rights issues connected to the migrant workers tasked with constructing stadiums, hotels and training facilities.<sup>41</sup> Provided that Sweden qualifies for this championship, Qatar will constitute a serious test for the Swedish sponsors where companies must assume responsibility for human rights impacts that they are linked to.

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