



Draw Procedures for the UEFA Preliminary Draw for the FIFA World Cup 26™

Qualification for the FIFA World Cup 26™

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SLOT ALLOCATION

The slot allocation for UEFA for the FIFA World Cup 26™ is 16 teams.

PARTICIPATING TEAMS

The 55 UEFA member associations. In case of ongoing suspension of Russia, there will be one additional group of four teams, and the draw pots will be adjusted accordingly.

PRELIMINARY COMPETITION FORMAT

In the new structure of UEFA's national-team competitions, the revamped European qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup 26 ("EQ") and the expanded UEFA Nations League 2024/25 ("UNL") coexist in the international windows of March and June 2025.

The EQ group stage runs from March to November 2025 (ten matchdays during five international windows) and consists of 12 qualifying groups of four or five teams. The groups of five teams start the EQ campaign in March 2025, and the groups of four teams start in September 2025, such that all groups finish the group stage in November 2025.

While all 55 UEFA member associations eventually enter the EQ group stage, 24 of them first continue in the UEFA Nations League in March 2025 by participating in the UNL 2024/25 quarter-finals ("UNL QF") or the UNL promotion/relegation play-offs ("UNL PO") in March 2025. Further, the four winners of the UNL QF advance to the UNL finals in June 2025.

To allow the parallel scheduling of EQ and UNL matches in March and June 2025, several conditions must be implemented for the allocation of teams to either groups of four or five teams. The teams in groups of four are available for UNL matches in March and June. One out of the five teams in a group of five can use its two rest days to be available for UNL matches in March.

Therefore, draw conditions must be implemented to be able to allocate teams to either a group of four or a group of five. Compared to previous EQ draws, the reinforced intertwining between the EQ and UNL entails a significant increase of competition-related conditions. Each draw pot may only contain a maximum number of teams with draw conditions. To avoid any deadlock situation, it may be necessary to adjust the draw pots to ensure that teams with competition-related conditions can be allocated to either groups of four or five, as required.

As for previous EQ cycles, group-stage matches are played according to the traditional league format of home and away matches and the "week of football" concept. Matches will be scheduled based on the international match windows, which allow the scheduling of two matchdays spread over six days from Thursday to Tuesday. The UEFA administration will publish the EQ fixture list following the qualifying draw.

COMPOSITION OF DRAW POTS

To draw the 12 groups of four and five teams each, five draw pots will be formed. Pots 1 to 4 will each contain 12 teams and the remaining seven teams will be in Pot 5.

The allocation of teams to the five pots will be announced by FIFA after consultation with UEFA after the conclusion of the UNL league phase on 19 November 2024 and ahead of the EQ draw. The following rules apply:

Pot 1: The eight UNL quarter-finalists (“UNL QF”) are seeded in Pot 1, irrespective of their rank in the FIFA/Coca-Cola Men’s World Ranking applicable for the draw.

The UNL QF participants will be represented by placeholders for the EQ draw. Each placeholder represents either the winner or the defeated team of a QF pairing. The UNL QF pairings will have been drawn in advance by UEFA on 22 November 2024.

The four remaining teams of Pot 1 are the best-ranked teams of the FIFA/Coca-Cola Men’s World Ranking that are not involved in the UNL QF.

Pots 2-5: The teams not allocated to Pot 1 will, in principle, save for the necessary pot adjustments, be allocated to pots 2-5 according to the FIFA/Coca-Cola Men’s World Ranking.

- Pot 2: contains the next 12 best-ranked teams in the FIFA/Coca-Cola Men’s World Ranking;
- Pot 3: contains the following 12 ranked teams in the FIFA/Coca-Cola Men’s World Ranking;
- Pot 4: contains the following 12 ranked teams in the FIFA/Coca-Cola Men’s World Ranking;
- Pot 5: contains the remaining seven teams in the FIFA/Coca-Cola Men’s World Ranking.

Depending on the number of teams in each pot that need to be available to play in the UNL promotion/relegation play-offs in March 2025, draw pot adjustments may be required (see section on potential draw pot adjustments below).

Potential draw pot adjustments

Twenty-four teams will join the UNL QF or promotion/relegation play-offs (“UNL PO”) in March 2025 and need to be free to play those matches. Should a given draw pot include more UNL PO teams than the maximum number of EQ groups able to contain such teams, a draw pot adjustment must be made.

The situation and need for draw pot adjustments can only be determined after the last UNL league phase matches in November 2024. The adjustment mechanism shall follow these principles:

- A pot swap shall be conducted between the lowest-ranked UNL PO participant of the pot in question, and the highest-ranked compatible team of the lower pot.
- The same procedure applies if an additional swap is necessary in the same pot, or in another pot.

Any draw pot adjustment(s) will be announced by FIFA after consultation with UEFA ahead of the EQ draw.

The draw pots can be summarised as:

POT 1	POT 2	POT 3
UNL QF winner* UNL QF winner* UNL QF winner* UNL QF winner* UNL QF defeated team* UNL QF defeated team* UNL QF defeated team* UNL QF defeated team* Pot 1 team Pot 1 team Pot 1 team Pot 1 team	Pot 2 team Pot 2 team Pot 2 team Pot 2 team Pot 2 team Pot 2 team Pot 2 team Pot 2 team Pot 2 team Pot 2 team Pot 2 team Pot 2 team Pot 2 team Pot 2 team	Pot 3 team Pot 3 team Pot 3 team Pot 3 team Pot 3 team Pot 3 team Pot 3 team Pot 3 team Pot 3 team Pot 3 team Pot 3 team Pot 3 team Pot 3 team Pot 3 team Pot 3 team

POT 4	POT 5
Pot 4 team Pot 4 team Pot 4 team Pot 4 team Pot 4 team Pot 4 team Pot 4 team Pot 4 team Pot 4 team Pot 4 team Pot 4 team Pot 4 team Pot 4 team Pot 4 team	Pot 5 team Pot 5 team Pot 5 team Pot 5 team Pot 5 team Pot 5 team Pot 5 team Pot 5 team

**UNL QF winner = placeholder for UNL quarter-final winner*

**UNL QF defeated team = placeholder for UNL quarter-final defeated team*

DRAW CONDITIONS

To be able to issue a schedule compliant with the coexistence of EQ and UNL in March and June 2025 which is fair for the participating teams, fulfils the expectations of our commercial partners and ensures with a high degree of probability that the fixture can take place as scheduled, several draw conditions apply for “competition-related reasons”, “prohibited team clashes”, “winter venue restrictions” and “excessive travel restrictions”.

When a draw restriction occurs or is anticipated to occur, the computer used to assist with the draw will indicate the group available for the drawn team.

It must be noted that the number of options available to a team depends not only on the team's own attributes and those of the teams already drawn, but also on the attributes of the other teams still to be drawn. Therefore, the computer calculations need to anticipate all possible scenarios and prevent any deadlock situation.

Competition-related reasons

To allow the parallel scheduling of EQ and UNL matches in March and June 2025, the following conditions are implemented for the allocation of teams to either groups of four or five:

Pot 1: the four UNL QF winners must be drawn into a group of four.

Pot 1 teams which are not involved in the UNL QF or play-offs may have to be drawn in groups of five. Indeed, depending on the distribution of the UNL PO participants across pots 2, 3 and 4, it may be necessary to add additional conditions to Pot 1 teams in order to ensure that in addition to groups of four, one or more groups of five are made available to contain UNL PO teams drawn from the subsequent pots.

Pots 2, 3 and 4: the UNL PO participants from these pots are in priority allocated to groups of four.

In case one of the pots contains more UNL PO participants than the total number of groups of four, UNL PO teams will be allocated to the group(s) of five able to contain such UNL PO team;

Pot 5: the teams of Pot 5 are drawn into groups of five. If UNL PO participants are part of Pot 5, these must be allocated to groups of five able to contain such UNL PO team.

Additional competition-related reasons

Teams not involved in UNL matches in March 2025 may need to be drawn into groups of five to ensure sufficient EQ groups are able to contain UNL PO teams drawn from the same pot as the team(s) in question or from a subsequent pot.

Any need for such additional draw condition(s) will be announced by FIFA after consultation with UEFA ahead of the EQ draw.

Prohibited team clashes

Based on the UEFA Executive Committee decisions valid at the time of the draw, the following teams cannot be drawn into the same group:

- Armenia / Azerbaijan
- Gibraltar / Spain
- Kosovo / Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Kosovo / Serbia
- Kosovo / Russia (if applicable)
- Ukraine / Russia (if applicable)
- Ukraine / Belarus

The following draw condition applies:

If a clash occurs or could occur, the team drawn is placed in the first available group in numerical order as indicated by the computer.

Winter Venue Restrictions

Several countries have been identified as venues with a high or medium risk of severe winter conditions. In order to minimise the risks of matches being negatively affected or even not being completed or played, a maximum of two such countries can be drawn into the same group.

The following draw condition applies:

If a team of the list is or could be drawn into a group which already contains two such teams, that team is placed in the first available group in numerical order, as indicated by the computer.

*Iceland and the Faroe Islands have been identified as venues with the highest risk of severe winter conditions. To limit the disruption to the group-match scheduling, these two teams shall not be drawn into the same group.

The following additional draw condition applies:

If Iceland or the Faroe Islands are or could be drawn into a group which already contains the other team in question, that team is placed in the first available group in numerical order as indicated by the computer.

<i>Belarus**</i>
<i>Estonia</i>
<i>Faroe Islands*</i>
<i>Finland</i>
<i>Iceland*</i>
<i>Latvia</i>
<i>Lithuania</i>
<i>Norway</i>
<i>Russia***</i>
<i>Ukraine**</i>
<i>** not applicable if hosting matches on neutral ground</i>
<i>*** if applicable</i>

Excessive travel restrictions

Twenty country pairs have been identified with excessive travel relations. To minimise the teams' travel burden, a maximum of one such pair can be drawn into the same group. The following table shows the restrictions, applicable both ways:

<i>From / To</i>	<i>To / From</i>
Andorra (Barcelona, ESP)	Kazakhstan (Astana)
England (London)	
Faroe Islands (Tórshavn)	
France (Paris)	
Gibraltar (Gibraltar)	
Iceland (Reykjavik)	
Malta (Valletta)	
Northern Ireland (Belfast)	
Portugal (Lisbon)	
Republic of Ireland (Dublin)	
Scotland (Edinburgh)	
Spain (Madrid)	
Wales (Cardiff)	

<i>From / To</i>	<i>To / From</i>
Gibraltar (Gibraltar)	Azerbaijan (Baku)
Iceland (Reykjavik)	
Portugal (Lisbon)	
Armenia (Yerevan)	Iceland (Reykjavik)
Cyprus (Larnaca)	
Georgia (Tbilisi)	
Israel (Tel Aviv)	

The following draw condition applies:

If a team of the list is or could be drawn into a group which already contains two such teams, that team is placed in the first available group in numerical order as indicated by the computer.

DRAW PROCEDURE

The draw starts with Pot 1 and then continues with Pot 2 until Pot 5. Each pot is emptied entirely before proceeding to the next pot.

- As a rule, and for each pot, the teams drawn are allocated in ascending numerical order from Group 1 to Group 12.
- Since Pot 5 only contains seven teams, these teams are drawn into the fifth positions in groups 6 to 12.
- When a draw condition applies or is anticipated to apply, the team drawn is allocated to the next available group.

Group 1
Pot 1 team Pot 2 team Pot 3 team Pot 4 team

Group 2
Pot 1 team Pot 2 team Pot 3 team Pot 4 team

Group 3
Pot 1 team Pot 2 team Pot 3 team Pot 4 team

Group 4
Pot 1 team Pot 2 team Pot 3 team Pot 4 team

Group 5
Pot 1 team Pot 2 team Pot 3 team Pot 4 team

Group 6
Pot 1 team Pot 2 team Pot 3 team Pot 4 team Pot 5 team

Group 7
Pot 1 team Pot 2 team Pot 3 team Pot 4 team Pot 5 team

Group 8
Pot 1 team Pot 2 team Pot 3 team Pot 4 team Pot 5 team

Group 9
Pot 1 team Pot 2 team Pot 3 team Pot 4 team Pot 5 team

Group 10
Pot 1 team Pot 2 team Pot 3 team Pot 4 team Pot 5 team

Group 11
Pot 1 team Pot 2 team Pot 3 team Pot 4 team Pot 5 team

Group 12
Pot 1 team Pot 2 team Pot 3 team Pot 4 team Pot 5 team