

World Cup 2026 : One competition, varying rules

In football, the rules of the game are known and applied uniformly to all players. For the AFP teams covering the World Cup, the tournament is kicking off today with vague and unfair rules on the reimbursement of professional expenses, and this is unacceptable to SUD.

The coverage of the 2026 World Cup had already caused a stir due to its budget being cut despite the increased number of teams and matches, and the fact that the competition is spread across three vast countries: Canada, Mexico, the United States. (Check out our February tract: 2026 World Cup: the art of spin)

Invited by the unions (and at the insistence of SUD) to explain the situation before the Works Council, AFP's director of Major Events acknowledged a 20% budget reduction for this year's World Cup compared to the 2022 edition, which was held in a compact area around the Qatari capital Doha. Many aspects of the organization of the coverage and the working conditions of employees were discussed at this Works Council meeting in April, but not the issue of expenses.

It has long been customary for journalists sent on assignment to cover a major event (World Cup, Olympics, Tour de France, etc.) to receive a per diem (a daily allowance) to reimburse their professional expenses. This system is more convenient because it spares journalists the collection of receipts – a distraction from fulfilling their mission.

No per diem for locals

However, in order to save money, AFP decided to reduce the number of special correspondents covering this World Cup and instead rely heavily on staff already based in these countries. Around sixty such journalists are being mobilised to cover matches, sometimes over several days, just as special correspondents would.

And imagine our surprise when we discovered that staff covering events in their base city (and there are many of them) would not receive a per diem as do special correspondents coming from France or elsewhere. These AFP employees will not only be denied the per diem allowance, but the Agency also informed them that it will not even cover their meals in stadiums or the teams' base camps on the grounds that they are working on their home turf. This strict policy applies to both staff with local contracts as well as expats with French contracts.

This scandalous situation prompted SUD to mobilize the intersyndicale (the group of French trade unions), to call out management and demand equal treatment for all employees, irrespective of their contract and base city. The allocation of per diem

allowances to journalists in their base cities is all the more justified given that it was implemented for the 2024 Olympic Games, where even journalists returning home to Paris in the evening received an allowance of €50 per day.

The French trade unions (with the support of the Guild in the US) demanded that – at the very least – all journalists and technicians covering the World Cup be reimbursed for their meal expenses, considering the very long and tiring workdays they will be facing, stuck in stadiums where FIFA charges exorbitant prices.

During the Works Council meeting on May 22nd, management acknowledged the unequal treatment and finally agreed that staff would at least be reimbursed for their meals upon presentation of a receipt. Phew!

Savings at the expense of employees

That should have settled the matter. But when SUD sought written confirmation we got more confusion than clarity. Two emails later, and with the competition set to get underway, there are still unclear areas. For example, there has been no definitive indication journalists based in Canada and Mexico will have meal expenses covered. And management has also said it will apply the terms of the US contract for journalists operating in their base city that doesn't cover meals.

Management seems intent on stalling and wearing down the unions' patience. This attitude could lead one to conclude that they actually intend to cut costs at the expense of certain employees covering the World Cup.

The situation is all the more confusing given that SUD has learned in the meantime that journalists working on certain desks dedicated to the World Cup, particularly photo and video in Paris, Bogota, and Hong Kong, will be receiving per diems, as will desk workers in Los Angeles despite being subject to the Guild's rules. Go figure!

SUD therefore once again calls for meals to be compensated for all employees covering the 2026 World Cup, whether they are technicians or journalists, and irrespective of their contract and base city. We also demand management publish a document listing the competitions where the per diem system is in effect and clearly sets the conditions under which it is granted.

Management tried to give the impression – particularly during the debate over reforming mobility conditions when it faced a no-confidence vote – that it wants to reduce the inequalities in treatment throughout the network. However its actions indicate the opposite: it creates new injustices by granting benefits to some but not others, and by maintaining a lack of transparency. SUD rejects this situation and will continue to oppose it vigorously.

Paris, June 11, 2026

SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)

The logo for SUD (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy) is written in a stylized, red, cursive font. Below the main text, the words "AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE" are written in a smaller, red, sans-serif font.