



Women's Rugby World Cup 2025

FULL TOURNAMENT: ANALYSIS REPORT

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PROTECTING PROFESSIONAL RUGBY PLAYERS & MATCH OFFICIALS WOMEN'S RUGBY WORLD CUP 2025

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INTRODUCTION

World Rugby has partnered with Signify Group and its artificial intelligence service Threat Matrix to identify, investigate and provide ongoing support in relation to online abuse and threats received throughout the Women's Rugby World Cup. The monitoring period covers 21st August through 29th September 2025.

The service was in operation across X (formerly Twitter) Instagram, Facebook and TikTok, to protect any players at the Women's Rugby World Cup or any World Rugby Match Officials targeted. This covered over 40+ languages and identified abuse or threat based on text, with layered word, image, emoji and phrase categorisation / detection.

The service encompassed:

- Targeted online abuse and threat
- Levels and categorisation of abuse and threat, including gravity of offences, sources and identification of tactics
- Immediate notification to World Rugby of any identified (fixated) threat / inappropriate approaches
- Expediting abusive or threatening content take-down / sanctioning of account holders – where platform community guidelines are evidenced to have been broken
- Unmasking of abusers to enable action by World Rugby and / or prosecution by law enforcement

Throughout the tournament, 1,189 posts and comments were identified as abusive, targeting 45 different accounts. Those affected included 13 players, 14 World Rugby officials and 18 official teams or tournament accounts.

The most targeted categories of abuse were **General Abuse** (23.1%), **Bodyshaming** (21.1%), **Transphobia** (14.1%) and **Sexism** (10.3%).

The **1,189 abusive posts / comments** detected during the monitoring period were sent from **1,051 individual accounts**.

53.6% of all detected abuse was present on Instagram. 23.4% was detected on X, while on Facebook and TikTok the abuse detected represented 16.6% and 6.4% of total abuse respectively.

All detected abusive posts / comments have been reported to the appropriate platforms and further investigations into the most egregious abuse have been completed or are ongoing ([see page 5](#)).

ANALYSIS

45

Total accounts targeted

440,340

Posts / comments analysed

14,439

Posts / comments flagged by Threat Matrix AI and reviewed by analysts

1,189

Posts verified as abusive following Threat Matrix review



637



279



197



76



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REAL WORLD ACTION

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REAL-WORLD ACTION AND INVESTIGATIONS

Throughout the tournament, Signify's Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) investigations team have conducted investigations into abuse meeting the required threshold.

OSINT investigations prioritised accounts sending abusive or threatening content which was categorised as Tier 2 and Tier 3 following the in-house triage and risk assessment process.

Across the tournament, Signify's OSINT team has investigated **17 unique accounts** where abuse linked to the account met the investigation threshold.

Following initial investigations and further risk assessment and prioritisation, **8 accounts have been positively identified** for action so far. These individuals were identified as residing in **Belgium (1), France (2), UK (1), New Zealand (1) and US (3)**.

Of the 8 positive IDs so far, 2 have already been shared with World Rugby for action:

- These 2 cases correspond to two individuals who sent abusive private messages on Instagram to two Match Officials.

The abuse shared by these individuals did not meet the threshold for referral to law enforcement. However, tailored recommendations on next steps have been provided, including checking ticketing databases for previous and any upcoming matches, as well as considering providing the offenders with educational sessions and / or behavioural warnings.

Investigations are still ongoing and case packs for any further identified individuals will be shared in due course.

17

Abusive accounts meeting the investigation threshold

8

Positive IDs*

*Investigations are ongoing so final total numbers may increase.



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SCOPE + COVERAGE

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SCOPE + COVERAGE

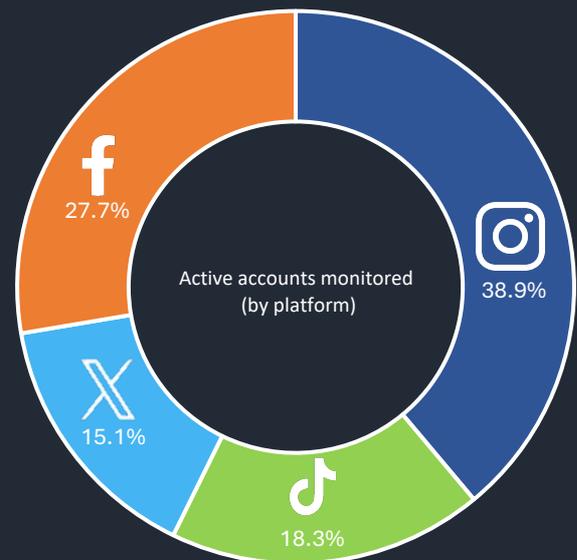
The Threat Matrix service is focused on:

- **Monitoring** – of public accounts and mentions for abusive, discriminatory or threatening content.
- **Investigation & Action** – where content was detected and verified, it was actioned by World Rugby and Signify. Captured abusive content was shared with platforms, and evidence of content that passes the threshold of criminal activity / hateful communications was shared with law enforcement (via World Rugby) to support real-world action.
- **Wellbeing of Individuals** – the central goal of these services was to protect the players and Match Officials from abuse, allowing them to focus on the tournaments and giving them the assurance that abusers were being held to account.

ACCOUNTS MONITORED

The monitored social media accounts covered included:

- 516 players, 97 Match Officials, 16 team accounts, 1 presenter, 16 coaches / managers, each with at least one social media profile on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok or X.
- 2 active tournament / organisation official accounts across all platforms.



A BESPOKE PROCESS: BUILT FOR SPORT



Build a proactive net around Match Officials and players: AI scan for abuse of Match Official's / player's accounts across social media platforms.



Proactively identify accounts used by abusers at scale - using a combination of AI tech and the nuance of security and intelligence experts.



Unmask abusers using specialist Open-Source Intelligence forensic tools to **de-anonymise and identify abusers to an evidential standard.**



Report abusive accounts to social media platforms and Law Enforcement, removing the expectation on Match Officials / players to report abuse.



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MONITORING + REPORTING

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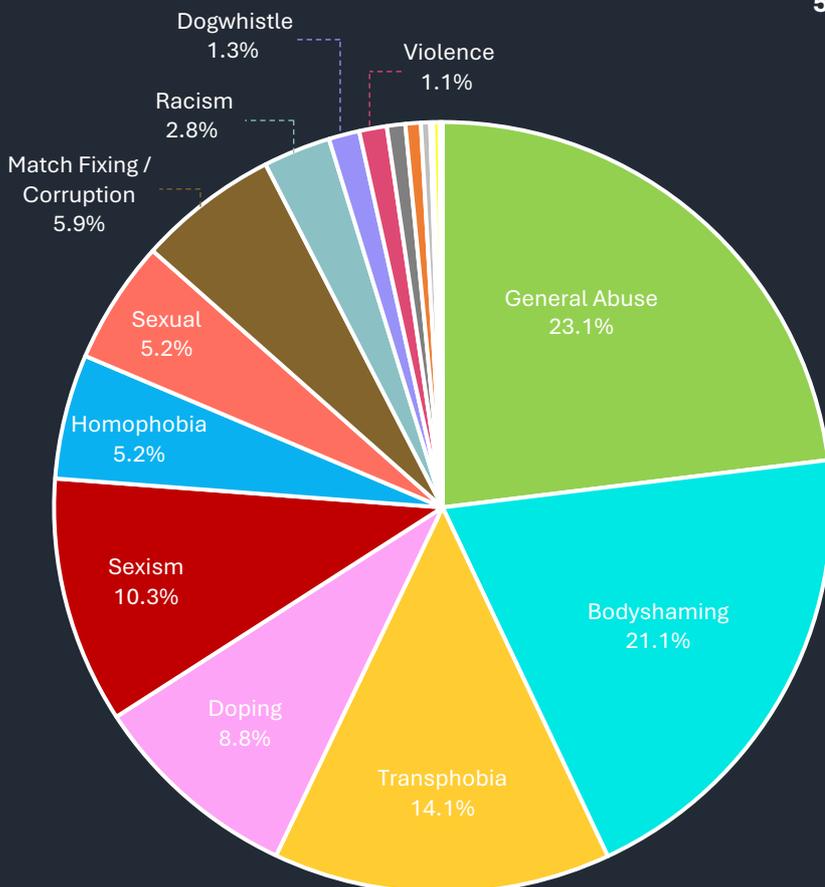
BREAKDOWN OF FINDINGS

The chart below highlights the breakdown of detected and confirmed abuse by category during the Women's Rugby World Cup 2025.

General Abuse (23%), **Bodyshaming** (21%) and **Transphobia** (14%) were the top three targeted categories.

There was also a large volume of **Sexism** (10%) and **Doping** (9%) detected across the tournament.

BREAKDOWN OF ABUSE



SUMMARY INSIGHTS

- General Abuse was the largest category of abuse:** Over 23% of all detected abusive content fell into this category.
- Bodyshaming was the second most common form of abuse and was mainly directed at one player:** she was the target of more than 80% of these comments.
- Transphobic comments were also widespread throughout the tournament and again mostly targeted one player:** she received over 70% of this type of abuse.
- The official Rugby World Cup and England Women's Rugby accounts were the second and third most targeted profiles:** These accounts mainly received **General Abuse, Transphobic and Sexist** comments.
- Instagram is the platform where the majority of abuse was detected:** more than half (54%) of verified abusive posts / comments were from Instagram.

Less than 1%:
 Family (0.8%)
 Ableism (0.6%)
 Islamophobia (0.4%)
 Xenophobia (0.3%)
 Special Terms (0.1%)
 Political (0.1%)
 Antisemitism (0.1%)

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PLATFORM ANALYSIS

The Threat Matrix proactive monitoring service scanned 440,340 messages on X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Facebook and TikTok.

The system flagged 14,439 posts which have been through a two-stage human review process – of which 1,189 have been verified as discriminatory, abusive or threatening and been reported to platforms.

Key platform insights:

- Instagram had the highest volume of identified, targeted and abusive content (637).
- TikTok had the lowest volumes of identified, targeted and abusive content (76).

1,189

Verified instances of abuse or threat reported to platforms following Threat Matrix review



637

Reports to Instagram



279

Reports to X



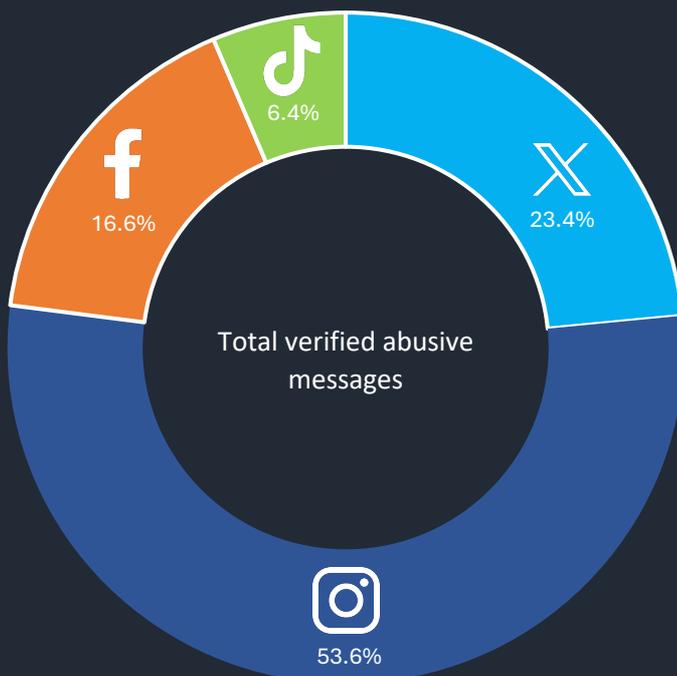
197

Reports to Facebook



76

Reports to TikTok

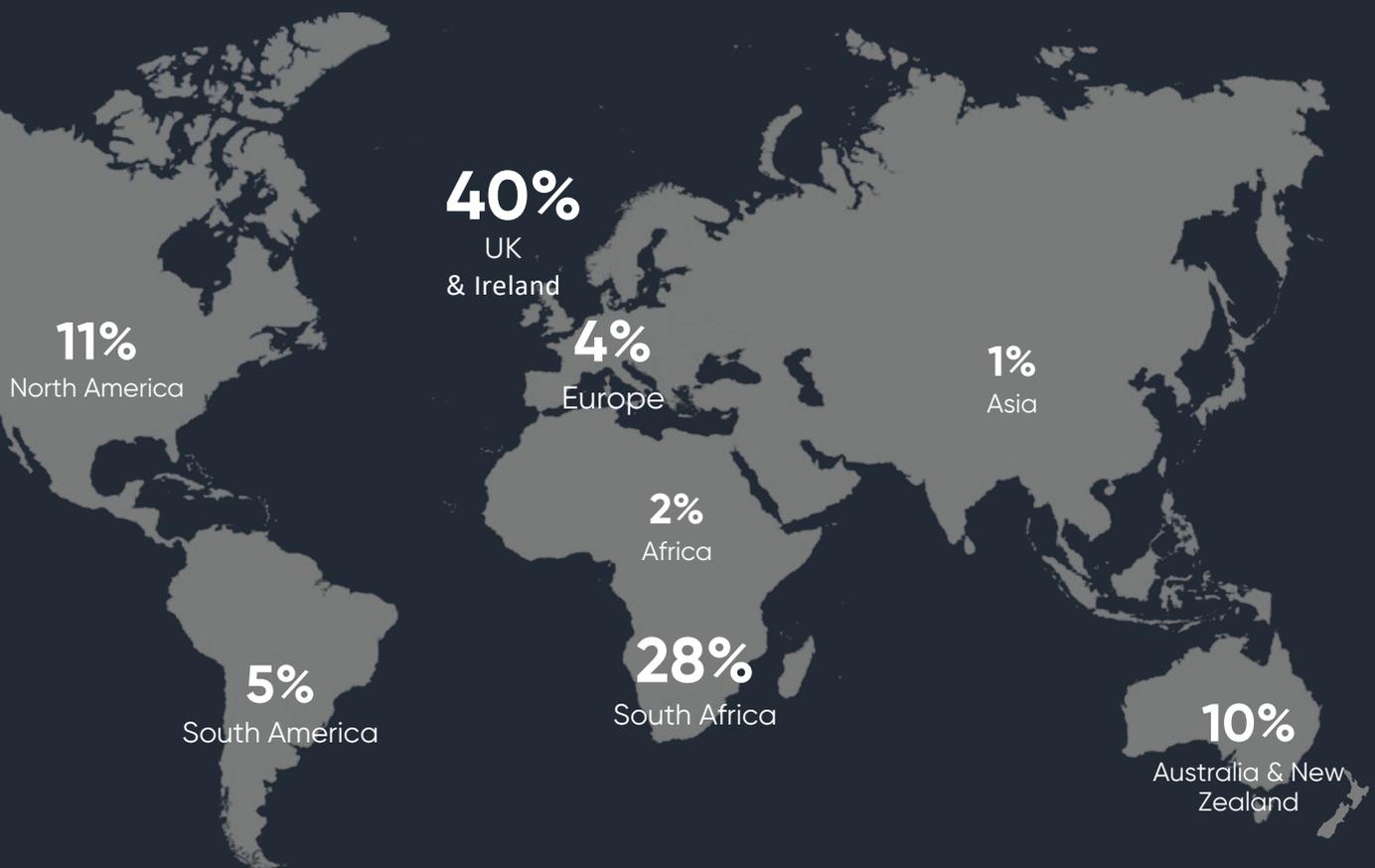


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GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

This chart is a representation of accounts where author location has been verified, across the world, drawn from abuse reported to social media platforms.



*Based on 115 social media accounts with self-declared locations.



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INSIGHTS + LEARNINGS

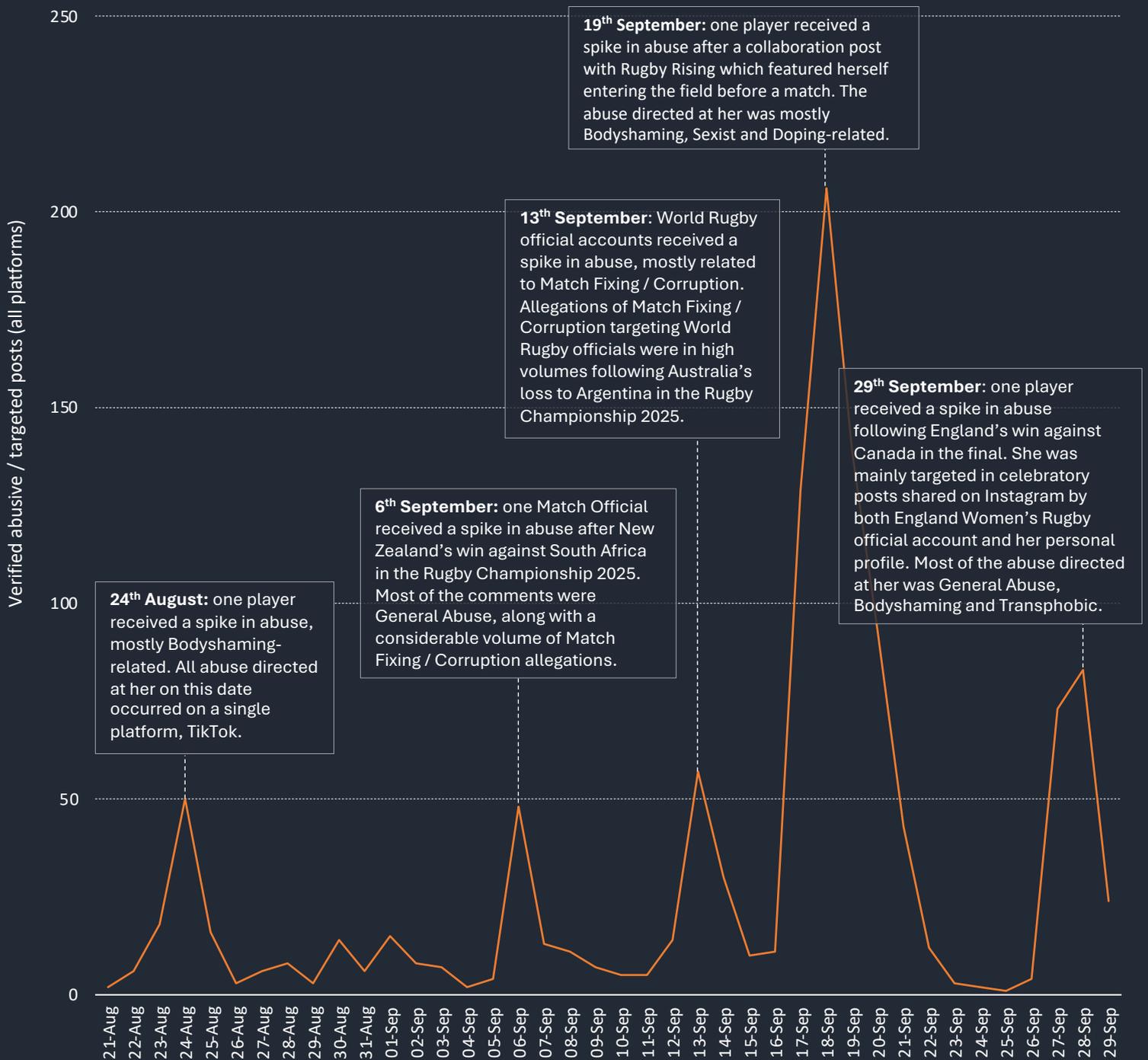
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DETECTED VERIFIED ABUSE TIMELINE: ALL PLATFORMS

This timeline presents an overview of the tournament, highlighting key events that led to peaks in abuse.

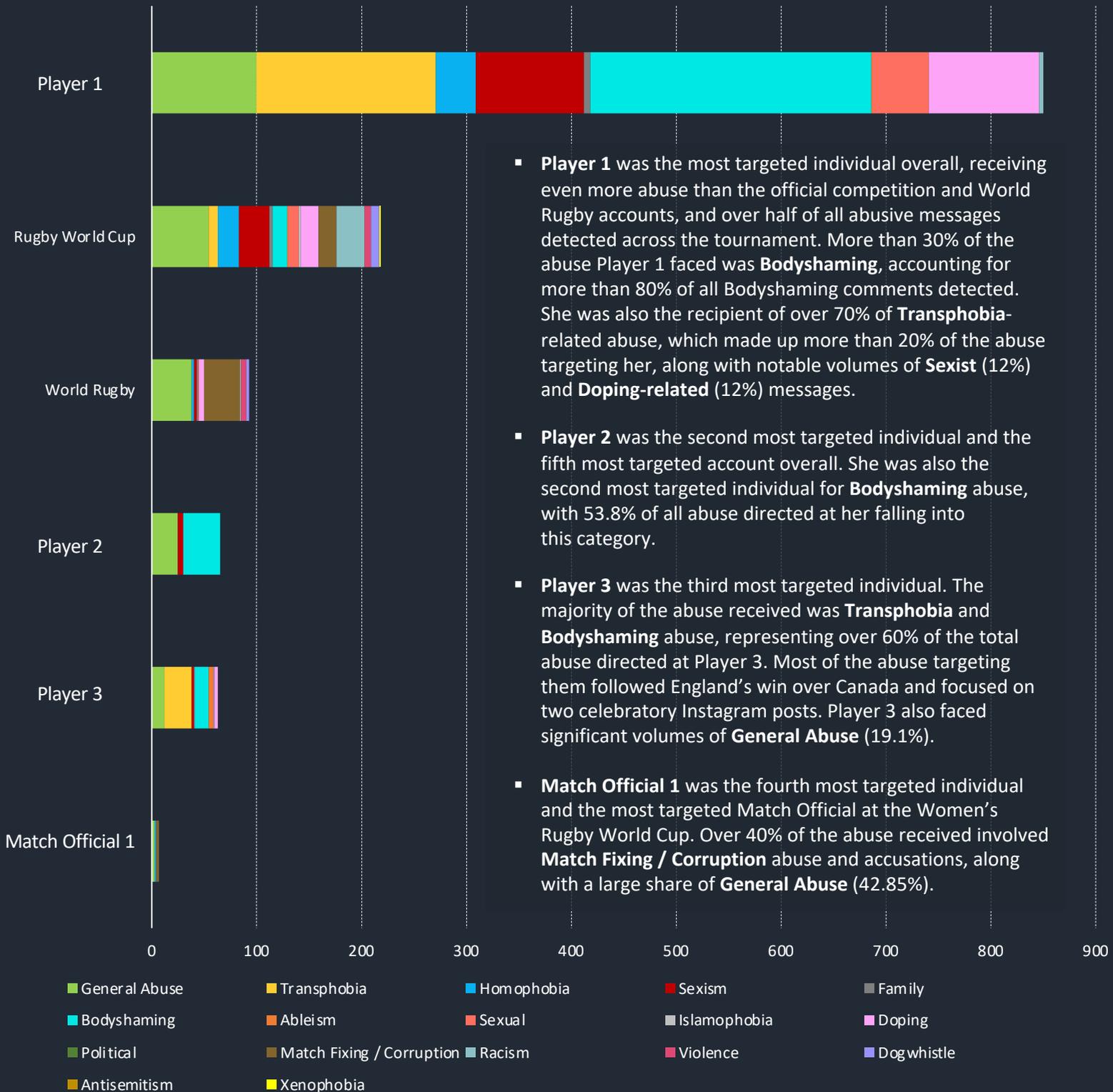


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TARGETED INDIVIDUALS + COMPETITION ACCOUNTS



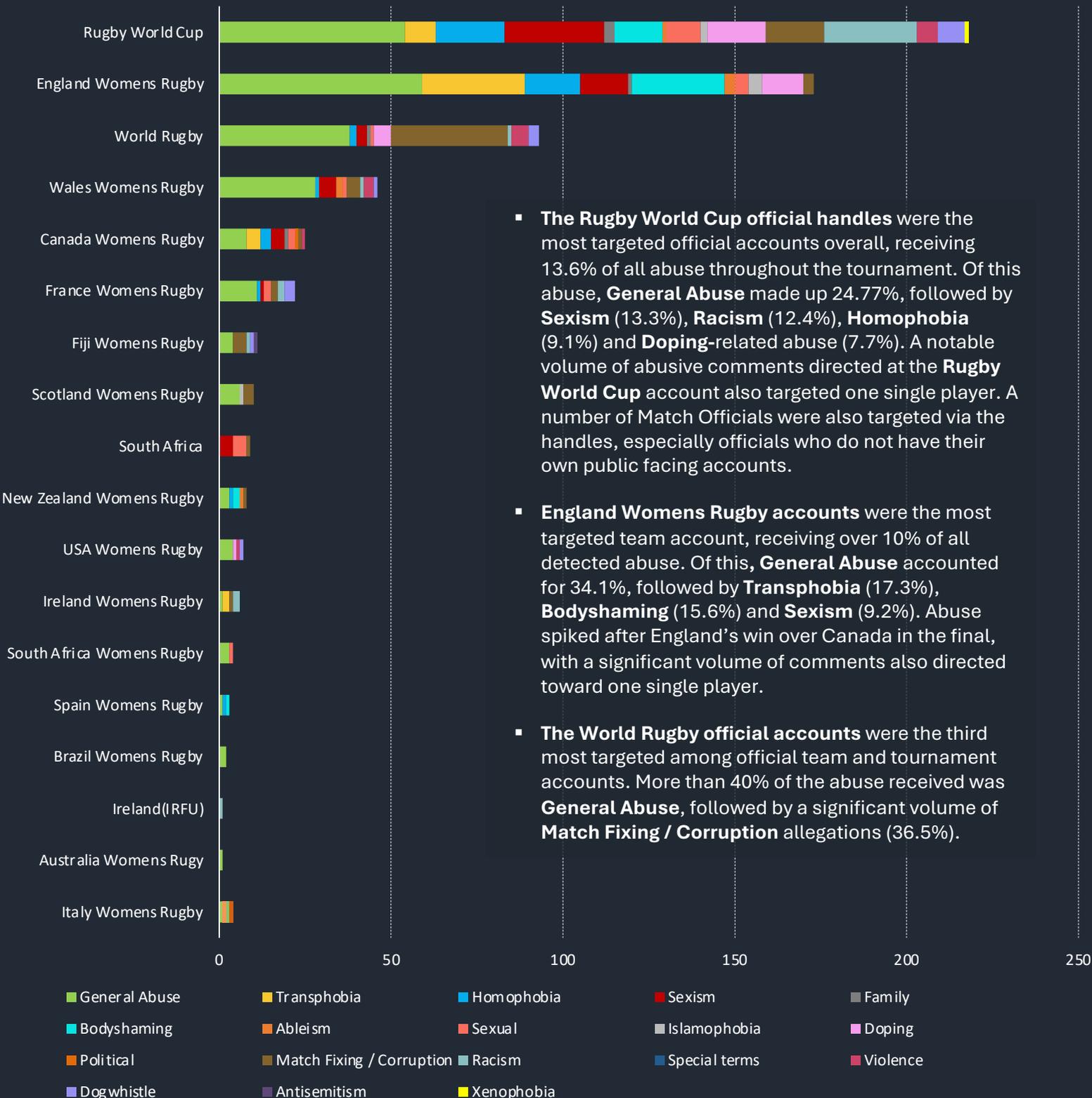
- Player 1** was the most targeted individual overall, receiving even more abuse than the official competition and World Rugby accounts, and over half of all abusive messages detected across the tournament. More than 30% of the abuse Player 1 faced was **Bodyshaming**, accounting for more than 80% of all Bodyshaming comments detected. She was also the recipient of over 70% of **Transphobia**-related abuse, which made up more than 20% of the abuse targeting her, along with notable volumes of **Sexist** (12%) and **Doping-related** (12%) messages.
- Player 2** was the second most targeted individual and the fifth most targeted account overall. She was also the second most targeted individual for **Bodyshaming** abuse, with 53.8% of all abuse directed at her falling into this category.
- Player 3** was the third most targeted individual. The majority of the abuse received was **Transphobia** and **Bodyshaming** abuse, representing over 60% of the total abuse directed at Player 3. Most of the abuse targeting them followed England's win over Canada and focused on two celebratory Instagram posts. Player 3 also faced significant volumes of **General Abuse** (19.1%).
- Match Official 1** was the fourth most targeted individual and the most targeted Match Official at the Women's Rugby World Cup. Over 40% of the abuse received involved **Match Fixing / Corruption** abuse and accusations, along with a large share of **General Abuse** (42.85%).

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TARGETED TEAM ACCOUNTS



- **The Rugby World Cup official handles** were the most targeted official accounts overall, receiving 13.6% of all abuse throughout the tournament. Of this abuse, **General Abuse** made up 24.77%, followed by **Sexism** (13.3%), **Racism** (12.4%), **Homophobia** (9.1%) and **Doping**-related abuse (7.7%). A notable volume of abusive comments directed at the **Rugby World Cup** account also targeted one single player. A number of Match Officials were also targeted via the handles, especially officials who do not have their own public facing accounts.
- **England Womens Rugby accounts** were the most targeted team account, receiving over 10% of all detected abuse. Of this, **General Abuse** accounted for 34.1%, followed by **Transphobia** (17.3%), **Bodyshaming** (15.6%) and **Sexism** (9.2%). Abuse spiked after England's win over Canada in the final, with a significant volume of comments also directed toward one single player.
- **The World Rugby official accounts** were the third most targeted among official team and tournament accounts. More than 40% of the abuse received was **General Abuse**, followed by a significant volume of **Match Fixing / Corruption** allegations (36.5%).

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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Whilst the Men's Rugby World Cup 2023 was a bigger event in terms of viewership and overall volume of messages mentioning player handles, a relative comparison demonstrates that players and at Women's Rugby World Cup 2025 were subject to a higher percentage of discriminatory, abusive or threatening content.

Individuals at the Women's Rugby World Cup 2025 were

69%

more likely to be targeted with online abuse than individuals at the Men's Rugby World Cup 2023



Although a lower raw number, the smaller total engagement around Women's Rugby World Cup 2025 means that comparatively, players and other individuals monitored were 68.75% more likely to receive verified abuse or threat.

This is significant given the increasing viewership for the Women's Rugby World Cup 2025, indicating a possible trend as TV / online audiences grow.

Additionally, although the top target at the Men's RWC was a Match Official, at the Women's RWC the top 3 targeted individuals were players. This was also reflected in the percentage of Match Fixing / Corruption abuse and allegation which saw a 65% decrease in represented volume.

Further abuse categorisation also saw a stark difference between the Men's and Women's Rugby World Cups. With abuse and insults to Women's players centred around Body Shaming, Transphobia, and Doping, which were all used to discredit performance. This was in addition to a significant increase in volume of Sexist abuse.

*visuals are indicative / representative - not to scale.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

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RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made for consideration by and discussion with the client:

- **Player protection** – players continue to receive event driven abuse (i.e. connected to specific match results and/or their performance) throughout the year. Signify would recommend that consideration is given to a strategy of how players could be monitored more broadly in rugby, especially during major events, in addition to the Match Officials. This tournament highlighted the benefits and peace of mind that Threat Matrix provided to players and their families, in addition to the supportive environment of the wider rugby community.
- **Education** – World Rugby and Signify to agree dates for a briefing session of best practises and online safety with Men's and Women's Match Officials. Signify would also recommend planning additional education briefings for players ahead of upcoming tournaments, notably around their responsibility in ensuring rugby remains a safe and supportive environment for players, coaches, Match Officials and fans alike.
- **Direct Message risk mitigation** – World Rugby and Signify to communicate the availability of the DM service to stakeholders and other relevant parties. While some individuals could be reluctant to sign up to the terms of automated DM monitoring (e.g. having a public Instagram profile) there is still the opportunity to continue to provide additional support to report abuse any individuals receive via DM and which can be reactively assessed and investigated. World Rugby could a dedicated report@rugbyonlineabuse.com email account that would be managed by Signify to avoid additional work for World Rugby to report these manually. Signify could help draft posters advertising the DM service to appear in officials or players' changing rooms or to be sent out over email, WhatsApp etc.
- **Communications** – it would be advantageous for World Rugby to communicate some of the findings from this project to internal stakeholders, participating players and officials. This will allow officials and players to feel supported in knowing that World Rugby understands the issues they face, and that actions are being taken. Communicating some of the findings externally will also inform other stakeholders of the positive steps that World Rugby continues to take to protect officials and players from online abuse and threat.
- **Intelligence-led moderation** – World Rugby could consider utilising moderation on World Rugby owned channels as well as an intelligence-led approach to onboarding players or officials. The offering of moderation could be given to players and officials on a welfare-led basis, utilising Signify's data to guide as to which individuals would benefit the most from moderation and hence to approach for the service. Players such as Ilona Maher would be great candidates due to the volumes of abuse received on Instagram, and her influence on social media.
- **Platform engagements** – World Rugby and Signify to continue developing ongoing relationships with the relevant platforms. Further building these relationships will allow for better response and takedowns from the participating platforms in addition to the other actions and support provided by the Threat Matrix service.



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