

# English articles

It's useful to read articles in English, even if you don't understand every word - it will help you increase your vocabulary and keep up to date with things happening in English-speaking countries!

*This page will be updated on **Mondays**. The first article is aimed at a B1 and upwards level and the second article is aimed at a B2 and upwards level*

## Articles of the week



## Rainbow armbands are dividing opinion at Euro 2025



By CIARÁN FAHEY AP Sports Writer

Some captains are wearing them, some are not.

Rainbow armbands at the Women's European Championship are proving more divisive than perhaps intended for a symbol promoting tolerance and inclusion.

UEFA is giving team captains the option of wearing armbands with the bright colors of the rainbow flag or plain monocolored versions with the word "respect" when they play.

"Standard yellow and blue armbands are provided to all teams and rainbow armbands are available upon request," UEFA told The Associated Press.

Both versions have been worn so far at the tournament in Switzerland, with the captains' choices facing scrutiny for the meaning behind their decisions.

### **What it means**

The rainbow armband is intended to show solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community, while it also stands for diversity.

"UEFA is committed to making football a safe and welcoming environment for everybody, independent of who we love, our gender identification or gender expression," the governing body said before the women's Euro 2022, where it also gave team captains the option of wearing rainbow armbands.

UEFA faced criticism the year before when it nixed Munich's plans to illuminate its stadium in rainbow colors for Germany's game against Hungary during the men's European Championship.

The Germans wanted to protest to a law passed by Hungarian lawmakers the week before that prohibited sharing with minors any content portraying homosexuality or sex reassignment.

### **Who's wearing the rainbow armbands?**

When Germany played France in their quarterfinal on Saturday, the German captain, Janina Minge, wore a rainbow armband while her French counterpart did not.

Switzerland captain Lia Wälti wore a rainbow armband in her team's quarterfinal against Spain the day before. Her opposite, Irene Paredes, did not.

Norway captain Ada Hegerberg wore a rainbow armband, as did Wales captain Angharad James, Iceland's Glódís Viggósdóttir, England's Leah Williamson and others.

England defender Lucy Bronze also wore a rainbow wristband during her team's quarterfinal win over Sweden, whose captain, Kosovare Asllani, also wore a rainbow armband.

Elena Linari became the first to wear a rainbow armband for Italy when she captained the side against Spain, but Cristiana Girelli wore a plain one when she returned for the quarterfinal against Norway.

### **France chose 'respect' armband**

France captain Griedge Mbock Bathy suggested the rainbow armband's message is too restrictive because of its focus on LGBTQ+ rights.

"Highlighting a single issue also potentially excludes the others," she said. "We cannot champion a single cause through our diverse group because there are so many causes to defend."

Mbock said the France team is "so diverse that we cannot highlight just one cause. I think that the armband with the word 'respect' really represents what we want to convey as a message and that is the most important thing."

When told that nine of the 16 countries participating at Euro 2025 wear the rainbow armband, France coach Laurent Bonadei defended his team's choice not to.

"Our one has 'respect' written on it. Respect as a word gathers a lot of causes such as racism. I think the 'respect' one is really a nice one," Bonadei said.

### Controversy in Qatar

Swedish player Nilla Fischer, the former Wolfsburg captain, was the first in Germany to wear the rainbow armband in the women's Bundesliga in 2017. She inspired others to follow suit, both in women's and men's sports.

Germany was a strong campaigner for rainbow armbands at the men's World Cup in Qatar in 2022. That developed into a showdown with FIFA over the compromise "One Love" campaign, which featured a rainbow-type heart design that was supposed to be a symbol against discrimination. It was still largely seen as a snub to the host nation, where homosexual acts are illegal and its treatment of migrant workers was a decade-long controversy.

FIFA banned the armbands and threatened to book team captains who wore them, leading the German players to cover their mouths for the team photo before their opening game, suggesting they were being silenced.

Germany's interior minister at the time, Nancy Faeser, who was also responsible for sports, wore a "One Love" armband in the stands beside FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

Qatari supporters later hit back by holding pictures of former Germany player Mesut Özil while covering their mouths during Germany's match against Spain. They were referring to the racist abuse in Germany of Özil, a German-born descendant of Turkish immigrants, who became a scapegoat for Germany's early World Cup exit in 2018.

Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann called for an end to political statements in 2024, saying they were too distracting for his players. The German men's team ultimately failed to deliver on the field.

AP soccer: <https://apnews.com/hub/soccer>

## AI shakes up the call center industry, but some tasks are still better left to the humans

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By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Armen Kirakosian remembers the frustrations of his first job as a call center agent nearly 10 years ago: the aggravated customers, the constant searching through menus for information and the notes he had to physically write for each call he handled.

Thanks to artificial intelligence, the 29-year-old from Athens, Greece, is no longer writing notes or clicking on countless menus. He often has full customer profiles in front of him when a person calls in and may already know what problem the customer has before even saying “hello.” He can spend more time actually serving the customer.

“A.I. has taken (the) robot out of us,” Kirakosian said.

Roughly 3 million Americans work in call center jobs, and millions more work in call centers around the world, answering billions of inquiries a year about everything from broken iPhones to orders for shoes. Kirakosian works for TTEC, a company that provides third party customer service lines in 22 countries to companies in industries such as autos and banking that need extra capacity or have outsourced their call center operations.

Answering these calls can be thankless work. Roughly half of all customer service agents leave the job after a year, according to McKinsey, with stress and monotonous work being among the reasons employees quit.

Much of what these agents deal with is referred to in the industry as “break/fix,” which means something is broken — or wrong or confusing — and the customer expects the person on the phone to fix the problem. Now, it's a question of who will be tasked with the fix: a human, a computer, or a human augmented by a computer.

Already, AI agents have taken over more routine call center tasks. Some jobs have been lost and there have been dire forecasts about the future job market for these individuals, ranging from modest single-percentage point losses, to as many as half of all call center jobs going away in the next decade. The drop likely won't match the more dire predictions, however, because it's become evident that the industry will still need humans, perhaps with even higher levels of learning and training, as some customer service issues become increasingly harder to solve.

Some finance companies have already experimented with going in heavily with AI for their customer service issues.

Klarna, the Swedish buy now, pay later company, replaced 700 of their roughly 3,000 customer service agents with chatbots and AI in 2024. The results were mixed. While the company did save money, Klarna found there was still a need for higher skilled human agents in certain circumstances, such as complicated issues related to identity theft. Earlier this year, Klarna hired seven internal freelancers to handle these issues.

Earlier this year, Klarna hired a handful of customer service employees back to the firm, acknowledging there were certain issues that AI couldn't handle as well as a real person, like identity theft.

“Our vision of an AI-first contact center, where AI agents handle the majority of conversations and fewer, better trained and better paid human agents support only the most complex tasks, is quickly becoming a reality,” said Gadi Shamia of Replicant, an AI-software company that trains chatbots to sound more human, in an interview with consultants at McKinsey.

The call center customer's experience, while improved, is still far from perfect.

The initial customer service call has long been handled through interactive voice response systems, known in the industry as IVR. Customers interact with IVR when they're told "press one for sales, press two for support, press five for billing." These crude systems got an update in the 2010s, when customers could prompt the system by saying "sales" or "support" or simple phrases like "I'd like to pay a bill" instead of navigating through a labyrinthian set of menu options.

But customers have little patience for these menus, leading them to "zero out," which is call center slang for when a customer hits the zero button on their keypad in hopes of reaching a human. It's also not uncommon that after a customer "zeros out" they will be put on hold and transferred because they did not end up in the right place for their request.

Aware of Americans' collective impatience with IVR, Democratic Sen. Ruben Gallego of Arizona and Republican Jim Justice of West Virginia have introduced the "Keep Call Centers in America Act," which would require clear ways to reach a human agent, and provide incentives to companies that keep call center jobs in the U.S.

Companies are trying to roll out telephone systems that broadly understand customer service requests and predict where to send a customer without navigating a menu. OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, is coming out with its "ChatGPT Agent" service for users that's able to understand phrases like "I need to find a hotel for a wedding next year, please give me options for clothing and gifts."

Bank of America says it has had increasing success in integrating such features into "Erica," its chatbot that debuted in 2018. When Erica cannot handle a request, the agent transfers the customer directly to the right department. Erica is now also predictive and analytical, and knows for instance that a customer may repeatedly have a low balance and may need better help budgeting or may have multiple subscriptions to the same service.

Bank of America said this month that Erica has been used 3 billion times since its creation and is increasingly taking on a higher case load of customer service requests. The chatbot's moniker comes from the last five letters of the company's name.

James Bednar, vice president of product and innovation at TTEC, has spent much of his career trying to make customer service calls less painful for the caller as well as the company. He said these tools could eventually kill off IVR for good, ending the need for anyone to "zero out."

"We're getting to the point where AI will get you to the right person for your problem without you having to route through those menus," Bednar said.

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