

Statement

24 July 2024

FEANTSA statement on the displacement of people experiencing homelessness due to mega-events

FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, expresses deep concern over the displacement of homeless individuals in European cities due to mega-events, including the upcoming Olympic Games in Paris. The forced relocation and displacement of vulnerable populations during these events reflect a troubling trend of social exclusion and disregard for fundamental human rights. Services are being suspended or even stopped altogether. The impact on homelessness services, particularly food distribution, is of specific concern. Existing testimonies and studies, such as the landmark study by the Centre on Housing Rights and Eviction (COHRE)¹, confirm that such mega-events have historically had negative social impacts.

Authorities in Paris have stepped up efforts to remove individuals experiencing homelessness from the streets as the city prepares to host the Olympic Games, with hundreds reportedly affected. Back in October 2023, the collective 'Le Revers de la Médaille' already raised concerns about the risk of increased exclusion from the Paris Olympics, highlighting the visible and predictable social impact of this event on the most vulnerable populations and calling for a positive social legacy from the Games.²

More recently, in June 2024, a report based on the analysis of data and material collected by the field workers of the various associations during their missions in Paris and the Ile-de-France region documented various social cleansing events that resulted in the eviction of more than 12,500 people from informal settlements in the previous twelve months.³ Associations had noted an increase in evictions and feared that this phenomenon would affect all informal living space in the Paris greater area, especially Paris and Seine-Saint-Denis, and far beyond the immediate proximity of the Olympic sites, including squats, shantytowns, and tent clusters, as the Games approach.

¹ Fair Play for Housing Rights: Mega-Events, Olympic Games and Housing Rights: Opportunities for the Olympic Movement and Others (2007) - Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) and Geneva International Academic Network <https://www.ruig-gian.org/ressources/Report%20Fair%20Play%20FINAL%20FINAL%20070531.pdf>

² Le revers de la médaille JOP Paris 2024 : pour un héritage social positif. Les Jeux Olympiques à Paris en 2024 portent un risque de renforcement de l'exclusion. <https://lereversdelamedaille.fr/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Le-revers-de-la-medaille-JOP-Paris-2024-pour-un-heritage-social-positif.pdf>

³ Collectif le revers de la médaille - 1 an de nettoyage social - Juin 2024 <https://lereversdelamedaille.fr/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Rapport-1-an-de-nettoyage-social-le-revers-de-la-medaille.pdf>

In fact, social cleansing intensified a few days before the start of the Olympic Games, as the authorities carried out a major clean-up operation along the Saint-Denis, Saint Martin, and Ourcq canals, as well as in other places along the Seine. ⁴

European cities such as Berlin witnessed similar measures ahead of the UEFA European Championship.⁵ Similarly in Barcelona, preparations for the Americas' Cup in August 2024 may lead to the displacement of homeless individuals from their usual areas, exacerbating their vulnerability. In the Barceloneta neighbourhood, for example, residents now need accreditation to access their homes, demonstrating the potential impact of these measures on people experiencing homelessness. ⁶

While mega-events may benefit economic growth and international recognition, they often have negative consequences for marginalised groups. Such measures raise serious concerns about the treatment and well-being of homeless people who do not have the means or support to cope with these disruptions.

FEANTSA calls on local and national authorities, event organisers, and international bodies to prioritise the rights and dignity of people experiencing homelessness. We urge the implementation of inclusive policies that ensure the protection of and support for homeless communities during major events. These measures should include:

- Suspension of all plans for evictions and demolitions
- Provision of accommodation for those displaced during the event, close to their areas of reference
- Improving access to health care, housing assistance, and social services to meet the immediate and long-term needs of homeless people
- Active involvement of local communities and people experiencing homelessness in planning and decision-making processes to ensure that their needs are met

In solidarity with our members across Europe, FEANTSA is committed to defending the rights of homeless people and promoting inclusive policies that respect and uphold human dignity.

⁴ Nouvelles évacuations de campements de migrants à Paris <https://www.leparisien.fr/paris-75/apres-de-nouvelles-evacuations-de-campements-de-migrants-a-paris-a-quelques-jours-des-jo-les-ong-alertent-17-07-2024-N2CWVWYUPVA2PG7O6LKT177UMA.php>

⁵ European Football Championship 2024: Will Berlin-Mitte be made "homeless-free" beforehand? <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/mensch-metropole/fussball-europameisterschaft-em-2024-in-berlin-wird-die-innenstadt-vorher-obdachlosfrei-gemacht-li.2224121>

⁶ Plan para que la Copa del América no colapse el frente marítimo <https://www.lavanguardia.com/local/barcelona/20240611/9721620/plan-copa-america-colapse-frente-maritimo.html>