

THE OLYMPIC FIGHT FOR UNHOUSED AND PRECARIOUS PEOPLE AGAINST PARIS 2024' SOCIAL CLEANSING

In the lead-up to the Paris 2024 Olympics, Le Revers de la Médaille, a coalition of over 100 organisations, denounced the social cleansing targeting unhoused and precarious people. The French government's policies, including inadequate temporary housing and forced evictions, displaced thousands, particularly near Olympic venues. With 260 informal living spaces cleared and police presence intensified, many vulnerable individuals lost access to essential services. Despite some small victories, the report urges systemic changes to ensure future mega-events respect social, environmental, and democratic standards.



By **Paul Alauzy**, project manager at Doctors of the World and spokesperson for Le Revers de la Médaille, France

One year before the Paris 2024 Olympics, we created the collective “Le Revers de la Médaille” (*the other side of the medal*), with more than a hundred associations, NGOs, federations and collectives working in solidarity and in the medico-social area. For a year, we launched an intensive advocacy campaign targeted at the French State and the Games organisers and became a thorn in their side. In order to denounce and fight the social cleansing that unhoused people suffer in the course of sporting mega events, we worked on well-documented propositions to adapt the games and prevent social cleansing, we organised activist actions inspired by methods of civil disobedience, we solicited and had meetings with states representatives and national or local institutions, and we were intensively present in the press and on social media in order to document the street situation and broadcast our message.

We meticulously documented the situation of people living on the streets and in precarious housing in the year leading up to the Paris 2024 festivities through our first report called “[1 year of social cleansing](#)” [FR], which studied and denounced the effects of social cleansing suffered by the latter, between the months of May 2023 and 2024.

[Our final report](#) complements our previous work: it documents the continuation of these phenomena during the period from the beginning of May 2024 to the end of September 2024 – in other words, just before the Games, during the Games, and after the Games.

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Paris 2024 was an historic opportunity to give a real social and human colouration to the Olympic and Paralympic Games (JOP), to act with reason and by anticipating the essential needs of the most precarious people. But all the data we have gathered from the field shows that the French government has failed to live up to this ambition. On the contrary, many situations of precariousness were exacerbated. During the Games, we witnessed a Paris that was idyllic for the “Rassemblement National” (the French right-wing political party),¹ but dystopian for those in precarious situations who had not benefited from care.

In this final report, in addition to the 64 medals already won by French athletes, we award France three additional medals:

→ **The gold medal for “social washing”: the schemes described by the State as a social legacy have been largely inadequate and deployed in utilitarian logics.**

The French government has publicised the 256 accommodation places it has created for the most vulnerable homeless people living near Olympic venues, but this scheme is undersized (3,492 people were counted as homeless in Paris in February 2024)² and carried out under conditions that are sometimes restrictive for the people concerned.

As of July 15, 2024, the last informal settlements of exiled people in the vicinity of the Olympic venues were evacuated. Hundreds of people were then temporarily housed in “buffer sites” in the Paris region,

1 Article from Franceinfo, “[Le RN tente de capitaliser sur des JO ultra sécurisés](#)”, 08/08/2024.

2 Count realized by Paris City Hall during the “[Night of solidarity](#)”.

whereas until this date, the people taken into care were systematically relocated to a region outside the Île-de-France (IdF). This sudden turnaround and the release of these places in the Paris region has met with greater approval from the people concerned. It highlights the State's ability to offer this type of solution, but also its willingness to do so only as part of a calculated strategy to free up public space, for the purposes of events and reputation. Despite the evidence of this manoeuvre and the leak of internal documents³ from a ministerial service of the French Government describing this strategy, the prefectural authorities still insist on denying any link between their practices and the Olympic Games.

This placement in buffer sites around Paris represents a clear break with the method used since the SAS centres were set up in March 2023, and will run until July 2024. The SAS centres, promoted by the authorities as a privileged means of accessing accommodation, do not, however, provide unconditional care for the people sent there, as they are only entitled to a three-week assessment of their administrative situation, in ten locations outside the IdF region. It's more a question of dispersing them and moving them away from the Olympic capital, as part of a move to decentralize the IdF region.⁴ On average, 40% of the people who are assessed here are then referred for medium- to long-term care in the SAS host region. The remainder end up on the streets after short-term care, or are deported to their country of origin, with or without their consent.

3 Médiapart investigation, “[L'Etat prépare des sites d'hébergement pour vider les rues avant les jeux](#)”, 19/07/2024.

4 New-York Times investigation, “[France Is Busing Homeless Immigrants Out of Paris Before the Olympics](#)” 07/2024.

“Between April 26, 2023, and September 30, 2024, 260 informal living spaces were evicted in the Paris region... At least 19,526 people were evicted from their living quarters, an increase of 33% compared to the 2021-2022 period.”

→ **The silver medal of social cleansing: to welcome “the whole world”, the streets of Paris have been emptied of people in great precariousness.**

According to the [Observatoire des expulsions de lieux de vie informels](#), **between April 26, 2023 and September 30, 2024, 260 informal living spaces were evicted in the Paris region.** These included shantytowns, tented settlements, squats, caravan sites, but also simple cardboard boxes on the ground. **During this period, at least 19,526 people were evicted from their living quarters, an increase of 33% compared to the 2021-2022 period.** The number of minors evicted rose particularly sharply in the final pre-JOP year. **At least 4,550 minors were evicted from their informal living quarters between April 26, 2023, and September 30, 2024.** Three times more than in the 2021-2022 period (1,527 minors evicted), and almost twice more than in the 2022-2023 period (2,637 minors evicted).

Several of these evictions were justified by orders directly citing Olympic reasons. In the vicinity of the Games venues, a large number of dissuasive measures were taken to prevent the re-establishment of street encampments. An unprecedented police presence was also deployed throughout Paris and its inner suburbs, to occupy any possible resettlement areas.

The saturation of public space linked to the Olympic Games (passage of the flame, events, fan-zones, tourists, etc.) and the omnipresence of the forces of law and order had deleterious consequences for people on the streets: essential facilities were closed and/or relocated during the JOP, the mobility of the most excluded was restricted – the latter sometimes adopting confinement behaviours, limiting their movements to access services meeting their primary needs, such as food aid or access to healthcare.

→ **The bronze medal for democratic denial: despite the event being widely publicised, there was a lack of transparency on the part of public authorities, and little room was given to critical voices and mobilisations, which suffered targeted repression.**

While the Olympic Games have gradually become the world's premier sporting “mega-event”, and it has been documented for several years that they have profoundly disrupted the lives of the host cities, no vote or debate has been held in France and/or Paris about holding them.

Despite the large number of political players met by our collective, most of our proposals have met with too little support, with positions oscillating between a game of ping pong of responsibilities between institutions and interlocutors, an admission of powerlessness or invocation of “lack of means”, and, particularly for the prefectures, a denial of a policy, however proven, of social cleansing.

Lawyers mobilised during the Olympic Games are also denouncing the repression of activists belonging to collectives denouncing the damage caused by the organisation of the Olympic Games, reflecting the misuse of police custody and placement in the administrative retention centre for foreigners, as a tool for social cleansing, intimidation and political pressure.

They have also witnessed the implementation of exceptional justice. The instructions converged around the idea of a “clean sweep” in the streets and Gérald Darmanin, the ministry of interior at that time, welcomed the introduction, between June and July 2024, of more than 500 Individual Administrative Control and Surveillance Measures.⁵

⁵ [Le Monde article, “Sécurité et Jeux olympiques : une réussite grâce à d’énormes moyens et beaucoup de pression”, 11/09/2024.](#)

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Never before have so many measures restricting freedoms been taken since the introduction of the state of emergency following the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris.

- Despite these negative findings, and while social cleansing will indeed remain an indelible stain on the Paris 2024 Games' shop window, the few efforts made by the authorities and the small victories conceded to our collective must serve as a precedent: never again must Games be staged without thought for the care of those who depend on public space.

To ensure that future editions of the Games take place in a climate that is more respectful of social, environmental and democratic requirements, numerous solutions exist: systematic consultation of the host populations, access to balanced, free and high-quality information, and the organisation, much earlier than the Games, of open consultations with civil society players. Simply staging the Games in the same place every year, and broadcasting them online, rather than inviting the whole world to come for such a short time, could address a number of issues, including social cleansing, gentrification and ecological factors.

