

# The treatment of homelessness must be addressed in the legacy of major sporting events: a FEANTSA Response

**RE:** [Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on fostering the lasting legacy of major sporting events](#)

Last month the Council of the European Union released their *Conclusions on fostering the lasting legacy of major sporting events*. The document attempts to offer a balanced analysis of how to ensure a long-term positive impact of major sporting events, considering the importance of a sustainable and socially and locally integrated approach.

While FEANTSA recognises and appreciates the multiple references to the need for values such as “sustainability”, “inclusivity”, and “accessibility” the Conclusions unfortunately fail to provide a substantial reflection on the significant impact of such events on homelessness and housing. We must only look at the recent example of the displacement of people experiencing homelessness around the Paris Olympics 2024 (See: *Le Revers de la Medaille*, 2024), as well as the historical prevalence of the ‘reduced affordability of housing as a result of gentrification, sweeping operations against the homeless, and criminalization and discrimination of marginalized groups [as] frequent features in cities staging the events’ (OHCHR, 2009) to see the potentially damaging impact of major sporting events. Despite this, the only explicit reference to housing comes in point [8] of the Conclusions

Major sporting events can pose challenges that need to be overcome or minimised as well, such as: the budgetary burdens of maintaining oversized and potentially unused infrastructure after the event, a negative impact on the environment (e.g. due to greenhouse gas emissions, unsustainable facilities, the destruction of natural areas, biodiversity loss, increased waste and noise) and **possible gentrification of the hosting areas**.

There are no explicit references to homelessness.

FEANTSA acknowledges that we could reasonably expect the anti-criminalisation and non-displacement of homelessness to be included under point [13]: ‘The security of major sporting events should be guaranteed with an adequate provision of material and human resources to strive for the **safety and peaceful coexistence of all**, e.g. athletes, spectators, as well as **residents**, and the peaceful enjoyment of the event’. However, due to the prolific and reoccurring nature of this mistreatment, the lack of a single specific and substantial reference to homelessness is a grave oversight. FEANTSA will continue to promote the need for specific and targeted references and protections for people experiencing homelessness.

Additionally, the Conclusions make good reference to the need to ensure the proper integration and utilisation of new infrastructure, namely for community and sport purposes. However, such thinking should be extended to consider the adaption of buildings and accommodation into affordable or social housing - a concept which has been previously promised, but the success and follow through remains to be seen (e.g., London Olympic Village 2012).

If we want major sporting events to 'be a catalyst for change in society, with regards to sustainability, integrity, inclusivity, accessibility and a healthy lifestyle...' [5] we must ensure that they do not conflict with our wider social values and commitments. The economic and reputational value of tourism must not be allowed to eclipse the needs of those individuals living in host cities, regions, and countries. While these events have the 'potential to create a lasting legacy and...contribute to the global and public reputation of the host city, region, country and the European Union as a whole' (6), it would be a mistake to ignore the growing public consciousness of, and sensitivity to, the hypocrisy and disparity already seen between the poor treatment of vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups, such as those experiencing homelessness, and the presentation of cities for major sporting events (for examples see: Dart, 2022; Watts, 2016). To ensure a truly good lasting-legacy of major-sporting events, strong protections must be established to prevent the displacement of homeless people, eviction of tenants in favour of short-term rentals, or the augmentation of rental costs to 'advantage' from the event.

Ultimately, the legacy of major sporting events *cannot* be disconnected from their impact on the local situations of housing and homelessness. As the Council states, 'long term planning perspective is needed' [10]. Such planning must ensure that while striving 'to ensure that the largest possible number of people benefit from major sporting events' [21] Member states and the EU institutions must not allow for the most vulnerable to be pushed aside.

For more information on the impact of major-events, sporting or otherwise, on homelessness and housing please see FEANTSA's previous statement '[On the displacement of people experiencing homelessness due to mega-events](#)' (In re Paris Olympics 2024), and our upcoming edition of the Homeless in Europe Magazine '*Who is the city for?*' (to be released January 2025).



## References

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