

Grand Paris Eviction

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July 9, 2024

Touted as Europe's largest infrastructure project, the Grand Paris Express promises better connectivity and improved public transport for the French capital. However, for Roma squatters and slum residents, the colossal project has meant forced evictions and further exclusion from society. With the Paris Olympics right around the corner, the trend has only worsened.

One morning in April 2016, 27 private security agents arrived on the grounds of a rundown warehouse in Vitry-sur-Seine, a Parisian suburb, to evict the 29 people living there. All of them were Romanian citizens of Roma ethnicity. The agents came with three dogs and no judicial mandate.

Daniel, a 25-year-old migrant, his wife, and their baby were among the residents who were told to leave the premises immediately.

The warehouse was a 20-minute walk from the centre of Vitry, and the site of a train stop on the future line 15 of the Parisian metro. Vitry is just one of 45 towns that will be served by the Grand Paris Express, the first metro line connecting all Parisian suburbs. The southern branch, where Vitry is located, is expected to be the first to open, at the end of 2025.

The warehouse belonged to real estate firm SCI Aten, whose owner had filed a request for the residents' expulsion a week earlier. The court hearing was pushed to May, and the owner took matters into his own hands to remove the squatters. Before then, Daniel and his family had already been evacuated twice – in October and January 2015 – to make way for the metro line 15.

The case of Daniel, who requested to change his name for security reasons, is not an exception. In Île-de-France, the greater Paris region, the past decade has seen an increase in expulsions with the rapid urban expansion transforming the landscape. According to the Défenseur des Droits, the French constitutional human rights body, Roma communities living in slums and squats are disproportionately threatened by the construction. Experts and activists say that the Grand Paris Express, a 40-billion-euro infrastructure project, exacerbates the social exclusion of people living in shanty towns around Paris. An investigation of nearly 50 evictions of Roma families in the southern suburb of Val-de-Marne revealed that the pattern of expulsions matches urban development and transport projects of Grand Paris Express, notably along metro line 15.

"The Grand Paris Express is a project that develops with the construction of new train stops, but also with real estate speculation," said sociologist Anne-Cécile Caseau, who wrote a report on Roma people's access to adequate housing in Europe.

"Marginal spaces are seen as potentially attractive in the future, and that puts pressure on the near and far suburbs [of Paris]. This pressure turns terrains that are vacant and forgotten into lucrative investments. So there are more expulsions from these terrains," explained Caseau. "This ceaselessly pushes people farther. Evicted people are then displaced towards terrains which are densely polluted or

significantly farther away [from the city],” she said.

The cycle of eviction creates lapses in administrative support, employment, education, and medical services.

Decades of evictions

Large *bidonvilles*, or slums, started cropping up around France in the 1930s, largely populated by Spanish, Portuguese and Italian workers. By the end of the 1970s, slum living was mostly eradicated in metropolitan France. The vast social housing programs developed over the ‘70s facilitated the relocation of these populations into permanent homes. But as new waves of migrant workers, from Eastern European and African countries, came in the late 1990s, they were relegated to improvised living conditions in *bidonvilles*, according to the Abbe Pierre Foundation. Today, city halls and regional administrations are still evicting people living in slums, offering them few alternatives afterwards.

Like many slum residents, Daniel wished to integrate into French society. By 2015, he had already been living in France for seven years. He worked as a metal scrap seller and construction worker. Moving from one slum to another for nearly a decade, each time having to start over.

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In a police report filed two months after the eviction from the Vitry warehouse, Daniel recalled the security agents grabbing women and pushing children out into the street, including a crying baby in a stroller. Daniel demanded they be let in to collect their belongings, but the agents blocked the entrance.

Their official documents, 600 euros in cash, car keys, clothes, silver jewellery, and other personal belongings were inside the building. After leaving in a hurry, Daniel returned hours later to try to retrieve the items, only to watch the security agents put them into a dumpster.

“One other pretext”

In the poorer suburbs in the North, East and South of Paris, near former warehouses, train tracks, and the Seine riverbanks, communities of Roma people from Eastern Europe have settled since the 1990s.

Roma people are Europe’s largest minority and have origins on the Indian subcontinent. A historically marginalised group, Roma people are confronted with high levels of housing, education, and employment discrimination in France and the rest of Europe. According to the National Consultative Commission of Human Rights of France (CNCDH), Roma people are among the most stigmatised minorities in the country.

According to official data from 2021, there are over 430 shanty towns across metropolitan France, with over 22,000 people living there; half are European citizens, mainly from Romania and Bulgaria. While French census data is not broken down by ethnicity, the EU citizens living in shanty towns are largely understood by associations, authorities and researchers to be people of Roma ethnicity.

The social exclusion caused by urban development projects has been well documented in Seine-Saint-

Denis, the department to the north of Paris, which has the highest rate of people living in poverty in metropolitan France. The research shows that social inclusion projects suffer from “institutional inertia and contradictory policy goals” and that the most vulnerable populations are directly impacted by urban development.

Constructions related to the 2024 Olympics have also accelerated this process for migrants and Roma living in informal housing (squats in abandoned buildings, slums, makeshift shacks, etc.). In April 2024, riot police squads evicted the biggest squat in France, located in the south of Paris, and housing over 400 people of African origins, many of whom had refugee status. Half of those evicted in April had come there after a previous eviction from a squat near the Olympic Village in the French capital’s northern suburbs.

Le Revers de la Medaille Collective estimates that the number of evicted people increased by 38.5 per cent from one year to the other in the areas of Olympic sites. In its June 2024 report, the collective says that Paris and Île-de-France authorities have led “one year of social cleansing” of “undesirable” people in preparation for the event and its spectators.

“With the Olympic Games (...) that’s just one other pretext for pushing out people,” said Aline Poupel, president of Romeurope Val-de-Marne and a psychologist, who has worked with Roma communities in the area since the 1990s. “As soon as there’s been the start of a Grand Paris Express project, that brings evictions (...) especially around line 15. That line is going to pass everywhere, all the places where the Roma lived more than two years ago.”

Evictions trace future metro lines

In the 2010s, following the eastward expansion of the EU, the number of inhabitants in *bidonvilles* surged. Around then, France started deploying aggressive campaigns of slum dismantlement, which included expelling EU citizens by taking Roma families to the nearest border and putting them on charter flights to Romania.

Around the same time, the greater Paris region was lit up with the promise of urban renewal, economic prosperity, and increased connectivity for suburban residents. The Grand Paris Express, Europe’s “biggest infrastructure project”, was announced in 2012, and it aims to double the size of Paris’ metro system on a rollout schedule for 2024-2035.

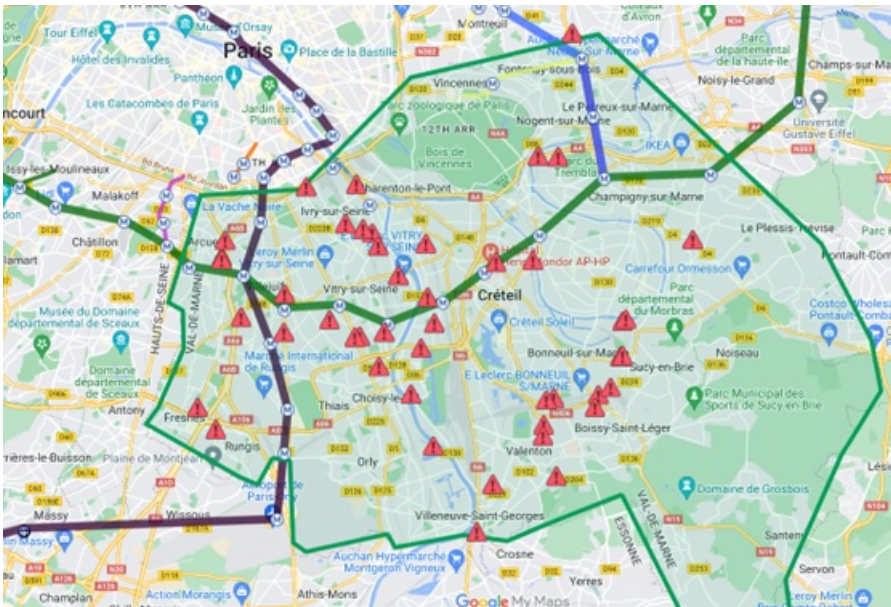
Since 2014, Aline Poupel has kept files detailing expulsions in Val-de-Marne. The folders contain hundreds of pages of printed biographical data, such as emails, legal correspondence, court eviction orders, and censuses of the slum inhabitants. From these documents, we mapped out where evictions occurred in the southeast of the Parisian region, the number of people affected, and who demanded the court-ordered expulsions.

While most of the files included expulsion orders, some did not. This is not uncommon: the Observatory of the Expulsion of Informal Housing (OEIH) found that 26 per cent of eviction cases between October 2022 and November 2023 occurred without a legal basis. These are still carried out by law enforcement, and only in exceptional cases, like Daniel’s, private agents are hired by owners for an extrajudicial eviction.

A lawful eviction is not a mere deployment of police forces to a slum; it needs to be requested by a public or private actor in a court of law, which can then decide whether to issue an eviction order.

Our investigation reveals that, over the past decade, expulsions have persisted also to the South of the French capital, in a pattern that matches the Grand Paris Express construction sites. Our survey of the nearly 50 evictions in the Val-de-Marne department between 2014 and 2024 shows that 15 evictions from this period occurred one kilometre or less away from the trace of the southern branch of the future line 15 and the Southern expansion of line 14. One other evicted site is on the eastern section of line 15.

Seven other evictions occurred between one and two kilometres away from Grand Paris lines.



*Note: for practical reasons this is a screenshot – Please **consult the map here***

Most of the expulsions were in state-run or state-owned structures, several of which are directly linked to the Grand Paris projects, such as the national railway company SNCF, Grand Paris Aménagement, or DRIEA, the public agency tasked with studying the development of the neighbourhoods around Grand Paris Express train stops.

What entities requested evictions in Val-de-Marne over the years?

Out of the 50 evictions documented over the past decade, most of them were requested by public actors in court.

Plaintiff	Number of evictions	Description
SADEV94	4	Urban real estate developer created by Val-de-Marne department
SNCF	4	French national railway company
Prefecture Val de Marne	4	Administration of the Department
Department Val de Marne	3	
Grand Paris Aménagement	2	Group of public sector developers in Ile-de-France
Sucy-en-Brie City Hall	2	The city hall in the East of Val-de-Marne
DRIEA	2	Regional and interdepartmental direction of Equipment and Planning*

*DRIEA was combined with another agency in 2021 to form DRIEAT, a government agency in charge of surveying the organisation of neighborhoods around the new Grand Paris Express train stations
Table: EDJ Sciences Po - Created with Datawrapper

Note: for practical reasons, this is a screenshot -please consult the interactive version [here](#)

We shared our findings about the Grand Paris Express displacing Roma communities with Société des Grands Projets, (SGP) which leads the construction of Grand Paris Express. In response, Jérémy Huppenaire, the organisation’s press relations manager, said that the SGP “acquires only the land needed for the construction of the Grand Paris Express, and if necessary, secures it to prevent any illegal occupation before work begins. If its land is illegally occupied, SGP may have to ask the authorities to evacuate it so that work can begin.”

Huppenaire added that SGP will build 8,000 homes, 30 per cent of which will be social and intermediate housing with rents controlled by the state. Moreover, he said, the scheme will promote home ownership by selling apartments at below-market prices. Upon eviction, residents of *bidonvilles* are legally entitled to file a request for social housing, but people rarely receive one, according to the OEIH. 85 per cent of evictions come with no alternative solution for relocation, be it temporary or permanent.

New impetus for slum “integration”

In 2018, a French [government instruction](#) promised to “give new impetus” to integrating *bidonvilles* inhabitants by “going beyond the evacuation-centric approach,” suggesting a more humane outlook. The government aimed to reduce the number of people living in slums, but since 2018, the number of slum residents in France increased by 37 per cent, according to the most recently available official data.

Even though a 2021 [progress report](#) on the new framework indicated that more and more slum residents have been getting access to housing in 2019 and 2020, many Roma families remained in slums across the Paris region. Sociologist Anne Cecile Case notes that there are a multitude of factors that confine communities to a shanty town.

“Roma people in makeshift housing have difficulty accessing private housing even when they have an income,” said Caseau. “We have a more general housing crisis that makes it complicated, but there is also the problem of owners discriminating against Roma tenants, but that isn’t always documented.”

Associations say that the most common “solution” for evictions is short stays in social hostels, even after the 2018 framework. These hostels are paid for by authorities but operated by private enterprises. According to Poupel, the authorities offer victims of expulsions a stay of a maximum of three nights in a hostel. After that, they are left on their own. Poupel encourages the families she works with to go to the hostel, saying that some nights of sleep in a place with running water ought to serve as a respite from the intense stress of eviction.

In 2015, when Daniel’s family was evicted from the slum on the land of the future Les Ardoines metro stop, a handful of other families were directed toward social hostels. We found records of four of them – all of whom were sent over 15 kilometres away– in hostels close to the edge of the department.



Note: for practical reasons, this is a screenshot – [please consult the interactive version here](#).

One family was inadvertently separated by the temporary accommodation, according to Aline Poupel’s correspondence from the time. The couple and their two daughters were assigned to a hostel 17 kilometres away from their previous location, and even farther from the school where the children were enrolled.

The correspondence shows that the father was the sole breadwinner of the house, selling produce at the food market in Vitry and making upwards of 50 euros per week. But the hostel was a 2-hour drive from the market and could not be easily reached by public transport – so he stayed behind, hoping to receive closer accommodation.

“Harder and harder to reach”

According to associations that intervene in these areas, living conditions in shanty towns around Île-de-France are deplorable. Representatives from Romeurope and ASAV92, which accompanies people in shanty towns across the Hauts-de-Seine and Val d’Oise departments, told us that access to water is sparse and organised trash disposal is nearly non-existent. They note a high prevalence of illnesses like

lead poisoning, diabetes, hepatitis B and C, and high blood pressure, which are caused or worsened by precarious living conditions and difficult access to medical care. Bad living conditions, however, are also often used as a pretext for fast evictions and little to no delays granted, said Aline Poupel, president of Romeurope Val-de-Marne.

“Repeated expulsions have driven people further away from the urban zones,” said Luc Magistry, director of the ASAV92 association. “They are starting to settle in remote areas, [such as] around forests, and it becomes harder and harder to reach the slums and bring water [and] organise trash disposal, but also to enrol children in school and to go to work. One grave misconception is that people living in shanty towns do not work or want to work.”

Poupel and other experts maintain that authorities are reluctant to supply water, toilets, or trash disposal services as they don’t want to give people a reason to stay. When asked about the interactions with the city halls, Poupel sighed. “We feel like we’re in a state of war. We have to fight for every morsel,” she said.



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Published July 9, 2024

Article in English

Published in the *Green European Journal*

Downloaded from <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/grand-paris- eviction/>

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