



Monitoring and stopping forced eviction: a crucial pathway to secure housing for all

Input for the first session of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group on Adequate Housing for All — Nairobi, December 2024

Member States should use the first session of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group on Adequate Housing for All to commit to the development of principles and guidelines, and the definition of a clear roadmap, to monitor and stop forced evictions. **Monitoring and stopping forced evictions are key mechanisms for Member States to implement the 2023 UN-Habitat Assembly resolutions** on ‘Adequate housing for all’ (HSP/HA.2/Res.7) and ‘Accelerating the transformation of informal settlements and slums by 2030’ (HSP/HA.2/Res.2).

Rationale

Housing insecurity takes a variety of forms in different contexts. Weak or inexistent tenants’ rights, the precarisation of livelihoods, and processes of gentrification and enclosure affect millions of people across the global South and North. Likewise, 1.1 billion people live in informal settlements with different degrees of insecure tenure and the United Nations estimates that, over the next 30 years, the number of people living in informal settlements will nearly triple, with an additional two billion people living in ‘slum’-like conditions.¹

A common threat that cuts across different forms of housing insecurities is the risk of forced evictions. Forced evictions constitute “a gross violation of human rights” and a fierce manifestation of housing injustices.²

Procedures behind forced evictions are often hosted by public bodies different to those in charge of housing provision. These include the jurisdictional system through court orders, local and regional authorities and departments through administrative orders, and security and public forces who are often in charge of executing evictions, among others. Ministries of housing and urban development, however, should reclaim **their role in enabling the protection of housing rights and stopping forced evictions** for at least two reasons:

- They have the duty of respecting, protecting and guaranteeing the right to adequate housing, which forced evictions might violate in multiple ways, and
- Forced evictions and demolitions are a counterproductive (and often violent) mechanism that dismisses existing housing stock, assets and investment. Improving inadequate and insecure existing housing stock is crucial to address the current housing crisis.

Despite these elements, forced evictions are a reality for millions of people, and renewed principles and guidelines are necessary to establish a roadmap to effectively prevent forced evictions — as a key mechanism to advance the 2023 UN-Habitat resolutions.

Evidence

- While UN-Habitat acknowledges that global data on forced evictions are difficult to determine and not systematically collected, they estimate that around two million people are forcibly evicted each year.³
- Evictions affect both the global South and North. Evictions are a widespread phenomenon across Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.⁴ In countries like the United States, 4.6% of rental households faced eviction procedures in 2018. Countries like Belgium, Finland, France, Greece, Poland and the United Kingdom recorded between 1% and 2.5% initiated eviction proceedings.
- The ceasing of the work of the UN Advisory Group on Forced Evictions (UN-AGFE) left a critical void in the monitoring and prevention of forced evictions worldwide.
- Civil society groups and networks are constantly mobilising efforts to monitor, document and stop evictions, and to keep governments accountable to the potential human rights violations that forced evictions might entail. Some of these efforts have reached a national scale, for instance the 'Zero evictions' campaign initiated in Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵
- Currently, several global trends make the work on eviction at the international level essential:
 - The climate crisis is creating new challenges in relation to forced evictions, with discourses around the prevention of environmental disasters becoming a common narrative to justify new waves of evictions. This phenomenon has even been termed 'benevolent evictions', referring to those forced displacements justified by climate-related considerations such as flood control.
 - The COVID-19 pandemic brought to the forefront the issue of evictions. On the one hand, the pandemic demonstrated the capacity of local and national governments to act by suspending evictions during the crisis in countries such as Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Colombia, France, Germany, France, Spain, South Africa, the UK and the US.⁶ On the other hand, there had been growing concerns about a surge in evictions due to a potential "rebound effect" after lifting these relief measures.⁷
 - There are several ongoing trends that, although not new, continue to deepen the unsecured nature of housing for millions of people: growing migratory flows — increased by the expansion of climate displaced persons; the precarisation of livelihoods and rental housing; weak or inexistent tenants' rights; and the financialisation of housing, land and urban development are examples of exacerbating factors.

Recommendations

To build a roadmap towards effective commitments to monitor and stop forced evictions, as a critical mechanism to enable the implementation of the 2023 UN-Habitat resolutions, the intergovernmental group should work towards:

- Developing principles and guidelines to ensure effective monitoring and detection of forced evictions
- Establishing a permanent space equivalent to the UN-AGFE
- Promoting the recognition of efforts of civil society groups to monitor and document forced evictions
- Advancing towards the establishment of local offices of conflict resolution that address risks of eviction from a human rights perspective, preventing their judicialisation, and
- Promoting the in-country adoption of existing rights-based protocols for forced evictions.

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Notes

- ¹ https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2023/07/2023_hlpf_factsheet_sdg_11_1.pdf
- ² https://www.hlrn.org/img/documents/ECN4199377_en.pdf
- ³ <https://unhabitat.org/programme/housing-rights>
- ⁴ https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Affordable_Housing_Database/HC3-3-Evictions.pdf
- ⁵ <https://www.campanhadespejozero.org/>
- ⁶ https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/uploaded/hlpf_2023-p1.pdf
- ⁷ https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Affordable_Housing_Database/HC3-3-Evictions.pdf