HUMANITY MUST WIN

DEFENDING RIGHTS, TACKLING REPRESSION AT THE 2026 FIFA WORLD CUP

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Cover: *A university student places a candle near a replica of the FIFA World Cup trophy decorated with pictures of missing persons, during an art intervention with the "Light and Hope" collective in Guadalajara, Mexico, 21 November 2025 © Ulises Ruiz/Getty Images*

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 11 June 2026, the largest and most lucrative FIFA World Cup to date will kick off at the Estadio Azteca in Mexico City, Mexico, culminating six weeks and 104 games later at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, USA. Millions of fans will travel to Canada, Mexico and the USA, while billions more will watch the tournament on television around the world. FIFA stands to earn US$11 billion from the spectacle.

For millions of fans, the World Cup represents something special: an extraordinary moment of shared joy, a chance to travel across borders, even via a screen, to support their national team, and a global celebration of the world's most followed sport. FIFA itself has promised a tournament where everyone "feels safe, included and free to exercise their rights." It is a promise that has rarely been more needed – and is at high risk of being broken.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup is taking place amidst an acute human rights crisis, with significant risks and impacts for fans, players, journalists, workers and local communities alike. The USA – where three-quarters of World Cup matches will be held – is facing a "human rights emergency" and a recognizable pattern of authoritarian practices. Armed agents are breaking down doors, detaining children and have deported hundreds of thousands of people. LGBTQI+ fan groups say it is not safe to have a visible presence, and supporters of four qualifying countries are barred from entering the country. Mexico has mobilized 100,000 security personnel, including the military, in response to high levels of violence, while a movement of women, mothers, seeking truth, justice and remedy for the country's 133,500 disappeared people is planning a peaceful protest outside the opening match at the Estadio Azteca in Mexico City. In Canada, experiences of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver and a growing housing crisis have raised fears that people experiencing homelessness will be displaced. Already, a shelter for people experiencing homelessness in the winter in Toronto was closed a month early due to the venue being pre-booked for use by FIFA as part of the city's hosting agreement.

Globally, the situation is fraught. Despite being awarded the newly created FIFA Peace Prize in December 2025, the Trump administration has actively sought to dismantle and defund existing systems of international cooperation, committed an act of aggression in Venezuela, launched air strikes that constitute extrajudicial executions in Latin America and initiated, jointly with Israel, large-scale attacks against Iran – killing civilians as well as putting the country's participation in the tournament in doubt.

ABUSIVE IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT AND DISCRIMINATORY BORDER CONTROL

Perhaps the starkest threat to both visiting and local participants in the World Cup comes from the machine of abusive, discriminatory and deadly immigration enforcement and mass detention in the USA. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and other agencies have been transformed into a paramilitary-style operation, which has involved masked, armed federal agents breaking down doors and into homes without warrants and arbitrarily arresting, detaining, abusing, and killing community members across the USA. Forty-three people have died in ICE detention between January 2025 and 18 March 2026, while agents have used deadly force during operations and in response to peaceful protests, including the unlawful killings of Renée Good, Keith Porter, Ruben Ray Martinez, Silverio Villegas González, and Alex Pretti.

The scale of immigration arrests, detentions and deportation has been massive. The number of arrests and deportations has only been possible because of the erosion of due process safeguards. Analysis of official government data conducted by the media outlet the New York Times estimates that ICE and CBP deported over 500,000 people in 2025, including 230,000 arrested in the interior of the country and 270,000 at the border. This is more than six times as many people as will watch the World Cup final at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey. ICE street arrests have increased eleven-fold and the number of children held in ICE detention six-fold. As of 19 March 2026, ICE had also signed 1,544 287(g) agreements with state and local law enforcement agencies, including in World Cup host cities Dallas, Houston and Miami, deputizing their officers to enforce immigration law and allowing for local jails to be used for immigration detention. Amnesty International has also documented immigration detention conditions in the Krome North Service Processing Center and the Everglades Detention Facility – also known as “Alligator Alcatraz” – within 20 and 50 miles of FIFA’s Miami headquarters, respectively. The organization concluded that conditions amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and in some cases torture.

Despite football being among the most popular sports in many immigrant communities in the USA, and millions of fans travelling from all over the world, neither FIFA nor the US authorities have provided any guarantees that people will be safe from ethnic profiling, indiscriminate raids, unlawful detention and deportation. None of the three US draft Host City Human Rights plans so far published provide any mention of how people will be protected from such threats. Indeed, the acting director of ICE has told Congress that the agency will be "a key part of the overall security apparatus for the World Cup." The risk is not abstract – at the FIFA Club World Cup in 2025, Human Rights Watch documented the case of one fan who was arrested for a minor civil offence before being transferred to ICE and later deported.

Amnesty International has documented the devastating impacts of the current administration's policies at the US-Mexico border, with the effective end of asylum and funding cuts leaving thousands of people in limbo in appalling and dangerous conditions. In Canada, legislation currently in parliament would further restrict the right to claim asylum, while the 'Safe Third Country Agreement' with the USA means people may be turned back at the US-Canada border and sent back to the USA, where they may face discrimination, detention and limited legal support.

Fans may also face discrimination at the border. Of 39 countries subject to severe travel restrictions imposed by the US government, four have qualified for the World Cup – few fans from Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, Iran and Senegal will be able to travel to support their team. Other fans face intrusive surveillance, with policies to force visitors and immigrants applying for immigration benefits, including asylum, to make their social media accounts available for vetting, and screening for "anti-Americanism".

THE RIGHTS TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Given their scale and impact, World Cups are often the focus of critical reporting and public protest. Yet despite its own human rights policies, FIFA restricts the right to freedom of expression of both fans and players, including through its "Stadium Code of Conduct" for fans that prohibits "political" messages and symbols, as well as its Disciplinary Code for players and officials.

The US government has dramatically escalated its attacks against journalists and media outlets that it considers to be critical of its policies. At least one journalist, Mario Guevara, was deported as a result of reporting on ICE operations and raids. Journalists in Mexico continue to face serious threats. The country is described by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) as the most dangerous country for the press in the Western Hemisphere, with seven journalists killed in 2025 in retaliation for their reporting.

There have also been restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in all three host countries. The administration has targeted foreign-born students protesting the Israeli government's ongoing genocide in Gaza, and people protesting and monitoring aggressive immigration enforcement actions. This included revoking 8,000 student visas in 2025 for "encounters with law enforcement for criminal activity," with visa review analysis assisted by artificial intelligence-powered mass surveillance systems. The military has been deployed for domestic law enforcement in several US cities, including World Cup host city Los Angeles, where President Trump federalized and deployed approximately 4,000 California National Guard troops in June 2025 before the deployment was ended by a court order in December 2025.

Canada has also seen a wave of protests against the genocide in Gaza, including large scale peaceful demonstrations and student encampments that were unduly dispersed or cleared by the police. Protest exclusion zones have been introduced in some cities, including Toronto, restricting protests around schools, care centers and religious buildings, although not tournament venues.

There have been a series of World Cup-related protests in Mexico focused on access to land, water, housing and criticizing gentrification, while women searchers continue to seek truth, justice and remedy for disappeared loved ones. In host city Guadalajara, authorities have threatened to remove posters searching for missing people from the "Roundabout of the Disappeared", while in Monterrey police attempted to arrest women searchers who were displaying banners on a bridge. A total of 100,000 security personnel will be mobilized to provide security for the tournament, including 20,000 from the military. The military continues to be implicated in a range of human rights violations including extrajudicial killings. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has ruled Mexico's use of military force for public security must be exceptional, temporary and under strict civilian control.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LGBTQI+ PEOPLE

Despite the original inclusive vision of the 2026 World Cup promised by the organizers, as well as commitments by some host cities, LGBTQI+ fans and players face risks of discrimination that must be addressed. FIFA has clear commitments to tackle discrimination, though reportedly cancelled anti-discrimination communications for the FIFA Club World Cup in 2025.

The current administration's attack on the rights of LGBTQI+ people, particularly in relation to transgender and gender-diverse people, has led to the main England LGBTQI+ fans' group and a network of European LGBTQI+ fans' groups to say they will not have a visible presence at matches in the USA. President Trump has signed executive orders aimed at "keeping men out of women's sport" and "restoring biological truth". Government programs protecting the rights of LGBTQI+ people or

providing care have been cut, while some countries have warned their nationals that there could be risks of being refused entry at the US border if the gender identity on their passport is different from their sex assigned at birth, or if they have the "X" marker. Trans youth also face persistent discrimination in Canada, while Mexico is considered to be the second most dangerous country in the world for transgender people, with 59 transfemicides recorded in 2024.

In football, homophobic chanting has also been a persistent problem in matches involving the Mexican, US and Canadian national teams, leading to match suspensions and sanctions imposed by FIFA on the Mexican Football Federation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With just weeks to go until kick-off, FIFA's claim that "Football Unites the World" sits in stark contrast to the divisive and repressive practices of governments who host its flagship tournament. This World Cup is very far from the "medium risk" tournament that FIFA once judged it to be, and urgent efforts are needed to bridge the growing gap between the tournament's original promise and today's reality.

There is still time to save the 2026 World Cup from becoming a stage for repression and a platform for authoritarian practices. Host governments must meet their obligations under international human rights law, while FIFA, national FAs and sponsors all have clear responsibilities to respect human rights and use their significant leverage to protect fans, players, journalists, workers and local communities. It is these people – not governments, FIFA or sponsors – to whom football belongs, and their rights must be at the centre of this tournament.

As such, FIFA, national governments and host cities must:

- Guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly inside and outside World Cup venues in all host countries, avoiding the use of military forces for civilian policing and protecting media and human rights defenders.
- End indiscriminate raids, ethnic profiling, arbitrary arrests, mass detention and unlawful deportations in the USA; provide public guarantees that World Cup events, venues and gatherings will not be targeted for immigration enforcement.
- Lift the discriminatory travel bans to the USA, including for teams qualified for the tournament, and drop proposals to vet social media accounts.
- Take effective measures to protect LGBTQI+ people from discrimination, harassment and abuse, including through anti-discrimination campaigns and proper use of FIFA's anti-discrimination protocol during matches, throughout and beyond the tournament.
- Ensure the publication of updated and strengthened Host City Human Rights Plans that provide comprehensive protections for fans, players, journalists, workers and local communities.

National football associations – as members of FIFA and financial beneficiaries earning millions of dollars from the tournament – have responsibilities too and must speak up for human rights and the fans who will follow their national team. Sponsors must also exercise their leverage over FIFA to ensure it fulfils its human rights responsibilities.

An onlooker holds a sign in protest as members of law enforcement work the scene following a suspected shooting by an ICE agent during federal law enforcement operations in Minneapolis, Minnesota, 7 January 2026 © Stephen Maturen/Getty Images

2. METHODOLGY

This report draws on existing analysis of key human rights issues in the three countries hosting the 2026 FIFA World Cup, in order to identify the threats to fans, players, journalists, workers and local communities. The analysis is based on states' obligations under international human rights law as well as FIFA's human rights responsibilities according to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, in addition to its own statutes and policies. The extent of FIFA's responsibility has been further articulated in previous reports over more than a decade by Amnesty International and other organizations.

The report focuses on some key human rights risks directly connected to the hosting of the World Cup, rather than all human rights issues in the country. A number of salient human rights risks – such as workers' rights, threats to people experiencing homelessness, including Indigenous people, or climate impacts – are not covered in depth.

This report draws on a range of existing analysis published by Amnesty International, complemented by reports and analysis from other human rights organizations; official government reports, statements and legal instruments, including national legislation and court documents; host city human rights plans; UN documents and resolutions; and credible media monitoring. Additional research support was provided by Fair Square Research and by Mariaclara Baldassarre, Ariane Hein, Philipp Schöler, Crea Shine and Ariana Vasquez from the T.M.C. Asser Institute.

Amnesty International wrote to FIFA on 2 March 2026 with a series of questions on topics covered in the report. As of 26 March 2026, FIFA had not provided a written response.

3. 2026 FIFA WORLD CUP: FOOTBALL ON A DIFFERENT SCALE

On 11 June 2026, at the Estadio Azteca in Mexico City[1], the national teams of Mexico and South Africa will kick off the largest FIFA Men's World Cup in history. A 39-day schedule across 16 host cities in Canada, Mexico and the United States will see the 104-game tournament reach its finale at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey on 19 July. FIFA hopes that as many as 6.5 million people could attend the 2026 tournament across the host countries, and that 6 billion viewers around the world will watch on their screens.[2]

The United States will host three-quarters of the matches – 78 – including every game from the quarterfinals onwards, with Mexico and Canada hosting 13 matches each.

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF MATCHES	HOST CITIES
UNITED STATES	78	11
		ATLANTA, BOSTON, DALLAS, HOUSTON
		KANSAS CITY, LOS ANGELES, MIAMI
		NEW YORK/NEW JERSEY, PHILADELPHIA
		SAN FRANCISCO, SEATTLE
MEXICO	13	3
		GUADALAJARA, MEXICO CITY, MONTERREY
CANADA	13	2
		TORONTO, VANCOUVER

Stadium illustrations © Afrel Refiana/Vecteezy.com

1 Outside of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the Estadio Azteca is now known as Estadio Banorte, after having sold the naming rights in order to fund the stadium's redevelopment.

2 FIFA, "FIFA-WTO study estimates USD 4.7 billion economic output from FIFA Club World Cup and FIFA World Cup in the US", 5 April 2025, https://inside.fifa.com/organisation/media-releases/fifa-wto-study-estimates-usd-47-billion-economic-output-from-fifa-club-world

FIFA26 WORLD CUP MAP | 3 COUNTRIES, 16 CITIES

FIFA anticipates that the 2026 edition will be the most lucrative tournament in the organization's history, driven by the spending power of the North American market and the expansion of the tournament from 36 to 48 teams. In FIFA's revised 2023–2026 budget, the organization projects total revenue of US$11 billion for the four-year cycle culminating in the 2026 World Cup, with income "mainly generated from the 2026 World Cup". Of this amount, US$3.9 billion is projected to come from the sale of broadcasting rights, US$3.1 billion from hospitality rights and ticket sales and US$3.4 billion from marketing and licensing rights.[3]

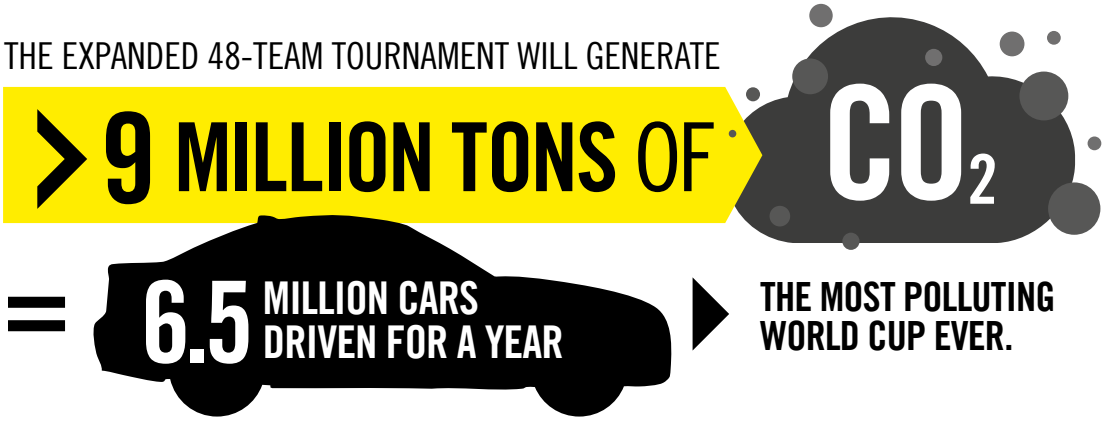
Revenues generated by FIFA are used to run the sports body and provide funding for its Member Associations. This includes prize money for teams participating in the World Cup, which will reach US$727 million for the 2026 tournament – a 50% rise from 2022.[4]

As FIFA's accounts show, its sponsorship deals are highly lucrative. FIFA operates a tiered sponsorship system: at the highest level, the state-owned oil firm Saudi Aramco is FIFA's first "Major Worldwide Partner", and Adidas, Coca-Cola, Hyundai/Kia, Qatar Airways, Visa and Lenovo make up the other six "FIFA partners" that sponsor all its events. The second tier of FIFA World Cup sponsors holds event-specific rights for the 2026 tournament, including AB InBev, Bank of America, Hisense, Lay's, McDonald's, Mengniu Dairy, Unilever and Verizon. Other "third tier" partners include Airbnb, Diageo, DoorDash, Globant, The Home Depot, Rock-It Cargo, Valvoline and Marriott-Bonvoy.[5]

3 FIFA, FIFA Annual Report 2022, 2023, https://publications.fifa.com/en/annual-report-2022/finances/2023-2026-cycle-budget-and-2024-detailed-budget/, "2023–2026 cycle budget and 2024 detailed budget".

4 FIFA, "FIFA Council approves record-breaking FIFA World Cup 2026™ financial contribution", 17 December 2025, https://inside.fifa.com/organisation/fifa-council/media-releases/council-approves-record-breaking-world-cup-2026-financial-contribution

5 Sports Business Journal, "2026 FIFA World Cup sponsors and host city supporters", 29 October 2025, https://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Articles/2025/10/29/2026-fifa-world-cup-sponsors-and-host-city-supporters/



It is not fans who are benefiting from increased FIFA revenues. Ticket prices for the 2026 tournament are historically high, with the face value of most group stage tickets set at three times the price of those for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, even before resales.[6] The cheapest ticket for the final in New Jersey was initially stated as over US$2,030, and up to over US$8,680 for the most expensive. Following a backlash from fan groups, including Football Supporters Europe, and pressure from city mayors, FIFA introduced a fixed price of US$60, albeit for just 1.6% of tickets.[7] Host cities in the USA have also complained that they risk facing collective losses of US$250 million because FIFA keeps the bulk of World Cup revenue, while restricting the commercial partnerships available to host cities in order not to compete with their own partnerships.[8]

In 2021, FIFA endorsed the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework and committed to achieve a 50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 and reach net zero by 2040.[9] However, a 2025 report by Scientists for Global Responsibility estimated the expanded 48-team tournament will generate over 9 million tons of carbon dioxide, equivalent to 6.5 million cars driven for a year, claiming it would be the most polluting World Cup ever.[10]

6 Guardian, "How prices for the cheapest World Cup tickets have rocketed", 18 December 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/dec/18/analysis-how-prices-for-the-cheapest-world-cup-tickets-have-rocketed

7 Football supporters Europe, "Statement: Historically high World Cup ticket prices – FSE calls for immediate halt to ticket sales", 11 December 2025, https://www.fanseurope.org/news/statement-historically-high-world-cup-ticket-prices-fse-calls-for-immediate-halt-to-ticket-sales/; Politico, "LA, NYC mayors slam FIFA ticket prices", 29 January 2026, https://www.politico.com/news/2026/01/29/la-nyc-mayors-fifa-ticket-prices-00754523; FIFA, "New ticket pricing tier introduced for fans of qualified teams at FIFA World Cup 2026™", 16 December 2025, https://www.fifa.com/en/tournaments/mens/worldcup/canadamexicousa2026/articles/fifa-world-cup-2026-new-ticket-pricing-tier

8 Independent, "Hosting 2026 World Cup to cost US cities upwards of $250m after 'worst deal in history'", 10 December 2025, https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/fifa-world-cup-2026-us-cities-donald-trump-sponsors-deal-cost-b2881267.html

9 FIFA, Annual Report 2021, 2022, https://publications.fifa.com/en/annual-report-2021/around-fifa/fifa-climate-strategy/, "FIFA climate strategy".

10 New Weather Institute, *FIFA's Climate Blind Spot: The Men's World Cup in a Warming World,* July 2025, https://www.newweather.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/FIFAs_climate_blind_spot.pdf

4. FIFA'S BIDDING REQUIREMENTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS POLICIES

4.1 FIFA'S HUMAN RIGHTS RESPONSIBILITIES

Since 2015, FIFA has recognized that it has a responsibility to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for any adverse human rights impacts from its own activities, and those directly linked to its operations, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UN Guiding Principles). This responsibility exists regardless of what states are doing – or failing to do – to fulfil their own obligations to respect and protect human rights.[11] These commitments can be found in a range of FIFA's policies, including but not limited to:

- Article 3 of FIFA's statutes, stating that, "FIFA is committed to respecting all internationally recognised human rights and shall strive to promote the protection of these rights."[12]
- FIFA's 2017 Human Rights Policy, outlining its responsibilities and commitments across FIFA-led events and activities, as well as expectations for FIFA bodies, members and partners.[13]
- FIFA's statement on media representatives and human rights defenders (HRDs), first published in 2018 and updated in 2025, setting out its commitments and launching a complaints mechanism.[14]
- FIFA's grievance mechanisms, including first a mechanism developed for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar and then a general human rights grievance reporting system.[15] A specific grievance mechanism for the 2026 World Cup is expected to be launched.
- FIFA's Human Rights Framework for the 2026 World Cup in Canada, Mexico and the USA.[16]

FIFA has also committed to go beyond the UN Guiding Principles. Its human rights policy states that

> ***"FIFA will strive to go beyond its responsibility to respect human rights, as enshrined in the UN Guiding Principles, by taking measures to promote the protection of human rights and positively contribute to their enjoyment."***[17]

11 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework, 2011, UN Doc. HR/PUB/11/04, Principles 11 and commentary, p. 13. The OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct also clarifies that "[e]nterprises retain responsibility to address adverse impacts that they cause or contribute to, even when operating in contexts where systemic issues are prevalent." OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct, 2018, p. 75, http://mneguidelines.oecd.org/OECD-Due-Diligence-Guidance-for-Responsible-Business-Conduct.pdf

12 FIFA, FIFA Legal Handbook 2024, September 2024, https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/bd789dd9dfbf3dd/original/FIFA-Legal-Handbook-2024.pdf

13 FIFA, FIFA's Human Rights Policy, May 2017, https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/1a876c66a3f0498d/original/kr05dqyhwr1uhqy2lh6r-pdf.pdf

14 FIFA, "FIFA launches complaints mechanism for human rights defenders and journalists", May 2018, https://inside.fifa.com/organisation/media-releases/fifa-launches-complaints-mechanism-for-human-rights-defenders-and-journalists and "FIFA statement on human rights defenders and media representatives", 2025, https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/ec85f3de496c6cb6/original/ejf1ecdku14lm2v9zc03-pdf.pdf

15 FIFA, Human Rights Grievance Mechanism, https://inside.fifa.com/human-rights/grievance-mechanism (accessed on 12 March 2026).

16 FIFA, FWC26 Human Rights Framework, June 2024, https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/494d934f7de1bad/original/FWC26-Human-Rights-Framework_Final_EN_24-July-2024.pdf

17 FIFA, FIFA's Human Rights Policy (previously cited).

FIFA President Gianni Infantino takes a selfie during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Official Draw with U.S. President Donald Trump, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, Washington, DC, USA, 5 December 2025 © Andrew Harnik/ Getty Images

4.2 NATIONAL FOOTBALL ASSOCIATIONS' RESPONSIBILITIES

As members of FIFA with voting rights, national Football Associations (FAs) are also bound by FIFA's statutes and are expected to comply with its Human Rights Policy. Further, through their business relationships with FIFA – from which FAs generate substantial revenues – they have clear human rights responsibilities under the UN Guiding Principles, not least to use their leverage to prevent human rights harms. All FAs receive funding from FIFA via its FIFA Forward programme – in the four years leading up to 2026 each received a minimum of US$8 million[18] – as well as additional funding for participating in FIFA tournaments. For the 2026 men's World Cup, each participating FA will receive a minimum of US$9 million, rising to US$19 million if they make it to the Quarter Finals or US$50 million for winning the tournament.[19]

4.3 SPONSORS' RESPONSIBILITIES

Given that FIFA earns billions of US dollars from marketing, FIFA's partners and sponsors should also use their leverage to ensure the organization fulfils its human rights responsibilities. Options to increase leverage include creating monitoring processes that document how FIFA is fulfilling its human rights responsibilities and requiring that audits, reporting or corrective action plans are included as human rights clauses in contracts with FIFA. Sponsors can also join forces and use their collective power to push for human rights compliance in policies and practice.

18 FIFA, FIFA *Forward Development Programme – Forward 3.0 Regulations*, March 2025 Edition, https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/63501befaa1f09b2/original/FIFA-Forward-Development-Programme-Forward-3-0-regulations.pdf

19 FIFA, "FIFA Council approves record-breaking FIFA World Cup 2026™ financial contribution" (previously cited).

A man protests against homelessness in Vancouver during the 2010 Winter Olympics hosted in the city, Canada, 15 February 2010
© Mark Ralston/AFP via Getty Images

4.4 HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITMENTS IN THE BIDDING PROCESS

The 2026 Men's World Cup was also the first FIFA tournament in which human rights standards were embedded in bidding and selection. In 2018, as part of a competitive bidding process against Morocco, the "United Bid" – a joint bid between Canada, Mexico and the USA – submitted a 90-page Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy, which identified "salient human rights risks" for the tournament, including in relation to labour rights, discrimination and inclusion, safety, security, policing, human trafficking and exploitation, freedom of expression and assembly, housing and displacement, and privacy and surveillance.[20]

FIFA's Bid Evaluation report assessed the human rights risks relating to the United Bid as "medium", noting concerns regarding "proposed national legislation that could jeopardize discrimination-free entry to the United States," in the context of Donald Trump's first Presidential term, and "the absence of specific commitments in relation to security and human rights by the governments of Canada and the United States." Central to the United Bid – and noted positively by FIFA in the evaluation report – was the fact that the level of construction necessary for previous World Cups (and associated with significant and high-profile harms in Qatar) would not be required for 2026, as host cities already had much of the infrastructure and facilities required to host mega sporting events.[21] After the United Bid was selected, all candidate host cities were required by FIFA to sign Host City Human Rights Declarations, and to produce human rights strategies, based on stakeholder engagement that took place between 2019 and 2021. In 2022, FIFA selected the 16 host cities and stadiums and published a high-level assessment of the quality of the cities' human rights plans.[22]

20 United 2026, *Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 16 March 2018, https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/35837f1073bdad15/original/s2xnrvfjg9kp0zelhxnt-pdf.pdf. The strategy was accompanied by an independent risk assessment and evaluation. Ergon Associates, Human Rights Assessment: World Cup Bid, 28 August 2018 (on file); Business for Social Responsibility, Evaluation Report of the Human Rights Strategy Submitted by 2026 FIFA World Cup Bidders, April 2018, https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/22d49e14125f1fca/original/tvla2wi13tskrliql4cs-pdf.pdf

21 FIFA, *Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/55d1d154bdd6324/original/ir3g14juxglqbbteevvf-pdf.pdf

22 FIFA, *Evaluations of FIFA World Cup 2026 Host City Stakeholder and Human Rights Submissions* – Summary Report, 1 July 2022, https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/5f0be69542b0caa3/original/Evaluations-of-FIFA-World-Cup-2026-Host-City-Stakeholder-and-Human-Rights-Submissions-Summary-Report.pdf

A coalition of organizations in Vancouver have **heavily criticized the draft Host City Human Rights Plan** for

1 **FAILING TO CONSULT ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTING MARGINALIZED PEOPLE IN THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE AREA**

2 **FAILING TO TAKE ANY NEW MEASURES TO PROTECT PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS** FROM HARMS CAUSED BY THE WORLD CUP

4.5 THE FIFA 2026 WORLD CUP HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK AND HOST CITY PLANS

In July 2024, FIFA published the FIFA World Cup 2026 Human Rights Framework, a guidance document developed jointly by the USA, Mexico and Canada, the sixteen World Cup Host City Committees, and the local entities responsible for organizing the World Cup matches in each city.[23] The framework set out priority areas, high-level aspirations and possible actions, but was significantly weaker than civil society organizations who had been consulted on the plans had expected.[24] It did not specify which actions would be taken in practice or who was responsible for implementation. Commitments on freedom of expression and the press, for example, are vague declarations with no clear allocation of responsibility between national host country governments, local authorities and Host City Committees. However, under the framework, the 16 host cities are required to conduct human rights risk assessments, engage stakeholders and publish action plans, suggesting that FIFA saw city-level implementation of human rights as its priority, rather than national-level engagement.[25]

As of 14 March 2026, only four host cities – Atlanta, Dallas, Houston and Vancouver – have published drafts of their human rights plans, while Boston and San Francisco have issued a brief statement.[26] The plans cover issues in three categories: safeguarding, workers' rights and access to remedy. While there are a range of commitments and initiatives highlighted in the plans – for example a commitment to a US$15 hourly minimum wage in Dallas and Houston, recognizing the low level of the US$7.25 state minimum – the plans appear to provide limited concrete guarantees on a number of the issues raised in this briefing. The plans and statements published by Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, Boston and San Francisco, for example, contain no information about how or whether visiting fans and local communities would be protected from immigration enforcement operations. While information is provided about people's rights to protest peacefully, it is also made clear that security is the responsibility of state and federal authorities and therefore beyond the scope of the plans.

23 FIFA, FWC26 Human Rights Framework (previously cited).

24 Human Rights Watch and Dignity 2026, "FIFA: Publish robust Rights Framework for 2026 World Cup", 16 May 2024, https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/16/fifa-publish-robust-rights-framework-2026-world-cup

25 FIFA, FWC26 Human Rights Framework (previously cited).

26 FIFA World Cup 26™ Houston Host Committee, *Human Rights Action Plan Version 1*, 16 February 2026, https://www.fwc26houston.com/human-rights-plan; North Texas FIFA World Cup Organizing Committee, *Human Rights Action Plan Version 1*, 16 February 2026, https://www.dallasfwc26.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/NTFWCOC-Human-Rights-Action-Plan-FINAL-2-16-2026.pdf; Vancouver Host Committee, *Human Rights Action Plan (Draft)*, 19 February 2026, https://media.vancouverfwc26.ca/website-assets/community-hub/Human%20Rights/FWC26_Vancouver_Host_City_Human_Rights_Action_Plan_V1_DRAFT.pdf; FIFA World Cup 26™, "Boston Host Committee, Human Rights Update", February 2026, https://bostonfwc26.com/human-rights-update/; ATL 26, *Human Rights Action Plan*, March 2026, https://www.atlantaga.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/67944; Bay Area Host Committee, "Bay Area Host Committee statement on human rights", February 2026, https://www.sfbayareafwc26.com/human-rights

A coalition of organizations in Vancouver have heavily criticized the draft Host City Human Rights Plan for failing to consult organizations representing marginalized people in the Downtown Eastside area and for failing to take any new measures to protect people experiencing homelessness from harms caused by the World Cup.[27] A coalition of 30 organizations in Atlanta also lamented the lack of meaningful consultation and criticized the city's plan as "incredibly weak and missing many of the accountability mechanisms needed for the World Cup."[28] The coalition said they were particularly concerned about housing, labor protections and policing.

4.6 CIVIL SOCIETY SCRUTINY

In the years prior to the tournament, civil society organizations and trade unions have made a series of recommendations across a broad range of human rights issues in connection to the tournament, including through the Dignity 2026 coalition in the USA, a range of civil society organizations in Canada and Mexico and through the Sport & Rights Alliance globally. Issues raised by the organizations included the need for measures to ensure minimum labor standards, the lack of a child safeguarding plan, and the need to ensure that unsheltered populations are not criminalized or displaced as part of so-called beautification efforts for the tournament.[29] Since the start of the current Administration, there have been repeated calls to provide guarantees on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, continue anti-discrimination campaigns and protection from abusive and arbitrary immigration enforcement.[30]

Issues raised by the organizations included:

The need for measures to ensure minimum labor standards

The lack of a child safeguarding plan

The need to ensure that unsheltered populations are not criminalized or displaced as part of so-called beautification efforts for the tournament

27 British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA), "Downtown Eastside organizations sound the alarm after the release of Vancouver's FIFA 2026 Human Rights Action Plan", 26 February 2026, https://bccla.org/2026/02/press-release-downtown-eastside-organizations-sound-the-alarm-after-the-release-of-vancouvers-fifa-2026-human-rights-action-plan/

28 CBS News Atlanta, "Coalition calls Atlanta's World Cup human rights action plan 'weak'", 10 March 2026, https://www.cbsnews.com/atlanta/news/coalition-calls-atlantas-world-cup-human-rights-action-plan-weak/

29 Guardian, "Largest US union federation presses Fifa on labor rights around 2026 World Cup", 8 April 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/football/2022/apr/08/afl-cio-labor-union-demands-2026-world-cup; Human Rights Watch, "FIFA has no child safeguarding policy for 2026 World Cup", 23 April 2025, https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/04/23/fifa-has-no-child-safeguarding-policy-2026-world-cup

30 Sport & Rights Alliance, Human Rights Watch and Dignity 2026, "World Cup 2026: FIFA needs to act on human rights", 3 December 2025, https://sportandrightsalliance.org/world-cup-2026-fifa-needs-to-act-on-human-rights/; Sport & Rights Alliance, "World Cup: A year out, growing attacks on rights", 11 June 2025, https://sportandrightsalliance.org/world-cup-a-year-out-growing-attacks-on-rights/

5. KEY HUMAN RIGHTS RISKS

Fans, players, workers, journalists and local communities face a range of human rights risks in all three host countries. This briefing focuses on those with a direct connection to the tournament – particularly the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, non-discrimination, and human rights violations connected to immigration enforcement, detention and deportation. It does not seek to be exhaustive: workers' rights, child safeguarding and the impacts of the tournament on people experiencing homelessness all require greater scrutiny and action than is covered here.

5.1 CONTEXT

Tournament-related risks are clearly linked to the wider political context and strength of broader human rights protections, which have changed dramatically. All three host countries have elected new political leaders in the last eighteen months, with Claudia Sheinbaum inaugurated as President of Mexico on 1 October 2024, Donald Trump as President of the USA on 20 January 2025 and Mark Carney as Prime Minister of Canada on 14 March 2025.

On the first anniversary of President Trump's inauguration, Amnesty International described the **USA** as facing a "human rights emergency", with a "recognizable pattern of authoritarian practices and erosion of human rights that Amnesty International has documented for decades across countries worldwide."[31] The administration has acted to simultaneously close civic space, while dehumanizing and criminalizing marginalized people. The administration has aggressively advanced an anti-migrant, anti-refugee agenda, subjecting migrants, asylum seekers and refugees to a litany of human rights violations.[32] The mass immigration detention system has been expanded, holding thousands of people arbitrarily, in overcrowded, inhuman facilities.[33] It has acted to intimidate, silence, and punish protesters and critics, restrict the press and reshape access to information, and systematically erode the rule of law. The administration has also taken multiple steps that had the effect of constraining the judiciary and the wider US legal system.[34]

ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF **PRESIDENT TRUMP'S INAUGURATION**, **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL** DESCRIBED THE USA AS FACING A

"HUMAN RIGHTS EMERGENCY"

with a **"recognizable pattern of authoritarian practices and erosion of human rights that Amnesty International has documented for decades across countries worldwide."**

31 Amnesty International USA, *Ringing the alarm bells: Rising authoritarian practises and erosion of human rights in the United States* (Index: AMR 51/0616/2026), 20 January 2026, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/01/usa-one-year-into-president-trumps-return-to-office-authoritarian-practices-are-eroding-human-rights/

32 Amnesty International, *USA: Torture and enforced disappearances in the Sunshine State: Human Rights Violations at "Alligator Alcatraz" and Krome in Florida* (Index: AMR 51/0511/2025), 4 December 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR51/0511/2025/en/, p. 14.

33 Amnesty International USA, *USA: Ringing the alarm bells: Rising authoritarian practises and erosion of human rights in the United States* (previously cited), p. 25.

34 Amnesty International USA, Letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee, 6 October 2025, https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/DC_AIUSA_Judiciary_Comm_Letter_10.6.25.pdf

The administration has actively undermined long-established institutions and mechanisms for international cooperation and human rights protection. It has almost entirely cut its overseas aid budget, putting millions of lives at risk; [35] sanctioned individuals and organizations for their efforts for justice and accountability related to the International Criminal Court;[36] and withdrawn from the UN Human Rights Council, the Paris Climate Agreement, the World Health Organization, UNESCO, and terminated all funding to UNRWA. In January 2026, President Trump announced withdrawal from a further 66 international organizations. [37] The administration has threatened to seize control of Greenland and carried out illegal air strikes in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific that have killed over 150 people and which amount to extrajudicial executions.[38] In addition, the USA violated the UN Charter by committing an act of aggression against Venezuela.[39] On 28 February 2026, the USA and Israel launched unlawful attacks on Iran. In this context, it is no surprise that FIFA's awarding of a newly created "Peace Prize" to President Trump and its endorsement of his "Board of Peace" has been so widely criticized, nor that there have been numerous calls for teams or fans to boycott the tournament.[40]

Mexico continues to face deep-seated human rights challenges characterized by widespread violence, impunity, and systemic threats to human rights, with serious implications for journalists, defenders, migrants, and marginalized people. Such risks were highlighted in the human rights stakeholder engagement reports for Guadalajara and Mexico City.[41] Violence continues to be an overarching challenge, with the official homicide rate remaining one of the highest in the world, despite President Sheinbaum reporting a 40% decrease between 2024 and 2025.[42] This includes high rates of gender-based violence, with 2,589 investigations into the killings of women opened by the prosecutors' offices between January and November 2025, of which 672 were classified as possible femicides.[43] The country also has some of the world's highest rates of killings of journalists and human rights defenders.[44]

The risk of violence was further illustrated in February 2026 following the killing of a cartel leader, including in Guadalajara where World Cup matches will be played at the Estadio Akron. The government issued a "red alert protocol" encouraging citizens to stay home, and several football matches were suspended. At least 73 people including 25 members of Mexico's National Guard were killed in the

35 Amnesty International, *USA: Lives at risk: Chaotic and abrupt cuts to foreign aid put millions of lives at risk* (Index: AMR 51/9408/2025), 29 May 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr51/9408/2025/en/

36 Executive Order, Imposing Sanctions on the International Criminal Court, 6 February 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/imposing-sanctions-on-the-international-criminal-court/

37 Executive Order, Withdrawing the United States from International Organizations, Conventions, and Treaties that Are Contrary to the Interests of the United States, 7 January 2026, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-international-organizations-conventions-and-treaties-that-are-contrary-to-the-interests-of-the-united-states/

38 CNN, "A timeline of US strikes on boats that have killed at least 157", 9 March 2026, https://www.cnn.com/2025/11/02/politics/timeline-us-strikes-caribbean-pacific-vis; Amnesty International USA, "U.S. airstrikes in Latin America and the Caribbean are murder. Congress must stop them now", 30 October 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/10/u-s-airstrikes-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean-are-murder-congress-must-stop-them-now/

39 Amnesty International, "USA: Act of aggression against Venezuela further weakens rules-based international order and leaves Venezuelans still waiting for justice", 3 February 2026, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/02/usa-aggression-against-venezuela-further-weakens-rules-based-order/

40 Al Jazeera, "Blatter urges FIFA World Cup boycott over Trump administration policies", 27 January 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/sports/2026/1/27/blatter-urges-fifa-world-cup-boycott-over-trump-administration-policies; Al Jazeera, "FIFA's Gianni Infantino faces ethics complaint over Trump peace prize", 10 December 2025, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/12/10/fifas-gianni-infantino-faces-ethics-complaint-over-trump-peace-prize

41 Guadalajara Candidate Host City team, *Guadalajara FIFA 2026 World Cup Candidate Host City: Human Rights Stakeholder Engagement Report*, 2021, https://fmf.mx/docs/reportes/Guadalajara_Committed_to_Human_Rights.pdf; Mexico City Host City Team, *Mexico City FIFA 2026 World Cup Candidate Host City: Human Rights Stakeholder Engagement Report,* 2021, https://fmf.mx/docs/reportes/Mexico_City_Committed_to_Human_Rights.pdf

42 Reuters, "Mexico murder rate down 40% under Sheinbaum, president says", 8 January 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-murder-rate-down-40-under-sheinbaum-president-says-2026-01-08/

43 Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, Datos Abiertos de Incidencia Delictiva, https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/acciones-y-programas/datos-abiertos-de-incidencia-delictiva?state=published (accessed on 14 March 2026).

44 Vision of Humanity, "Violence against women in Mexico", 13 May 2025, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/violence-against-women-in-mexico/; Front Line Defenders, Global Analysis 2024/25, 6 May 2025, https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/global-analysis-202425; Article 19, Periodistas y Comunicadorxs Asesinadxs en México, 2025, https://articulo19.org/periodistasasesinados/ (accessed on 13 March 2026).

Police guard the Ministry of Tourism in Mexico City, while members of various collectives protest against gentrification and overtourism ahead of the 2026 World Cup, Mexico, 27 February 2026 © Gerardo Vieyra/NurPhoto via Getty Images

operation.[45] Previously, in November 2025, a FIFA spokesperson said that the organization was "very confident that the protocols and plans being implemented for the World Cup will provide a secure framework for all fans, teams and referees in 2026."[46] Following the violence in February 2026, FIFA said it was "closely monitoring" the situation while FIFA President Gianni Infantino told journalists he was, "very reassured, everything's good. It's going to be spectacular."[47]

Mexico also continues to experience a crisis of disappeared persons, for which there is widespread impunity, with the total number of people missing and unlocated since 1952 reaching 133,500 at the end of 2025. In the last 10 years, disappearances have increased more than 200%.[48] The issue of disappearances was grimly illustrated by the discovery of at least a dozen mass graves identified within a 10-mile radius of Guadalajara's Estadio Akron. A 2025 report by the media outlet El País, quoting families of missing people, said that at least 500 bodies had been recovered from just four of these sites.[49] Nationwide, between 2023 and 2024, state prosecutors' offices recorded 1,451 clandestine graves and the Attorney General's Office recorded 94.[50] Disappearances are not only carried out by organized criminal groups, but in many cases with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the authorities.[51] Women searchers who have led efforts to find loved ones have faced violence, killings, threats, stigmatization and discrimination as they seek truth, justice and reparation.[52]

45 Al Jazeera, "Schools shut, troops on streets: Mexico on alert after El Mencho killing", 24 February 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/2/24/schools-shut-troops-on-streets-mexico-on-alert-after-el-mencho-killing

46 Mexico News Daily, "Sheinbaum juggles World Cup and FIFA presser – Monday's mañanera recapped", 10 November 2025, https://mexiconewsdaily.com/politics/sheinbaum-juggles-world-cup-fifa-presser-mondays-mananera-recapped/

47 BBC Sport, "Infantino sure of 'spectacular' World Cup in Mexico despite violence", 23 February 2026, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/articles/cpd81d7y901o

48 México Evalúa, "Propuestas para la paz: Análisis de los datos de violencia en México", 9 February 2026, https://mexicoevalua.org/propuestas-para-la-paz-analisis-de-los-datos-de-violencia-en-mexico/

49 El País, "Mexico's missing people crisis casts a shadow over World Cup venue", 20 December 2025, https://english.elpais.com/international/2025-12-20/mexicos-missing-people-crisis-casts-a-shadow-over-world-cup-venue.html

50 Artículo 19, "La Plataforma Ciudadana de Fosas revela irregularidades y opacidad en los registros oficiales de fosas clandestinas en México", 10 February 2025, https://articulo19.org/la-plataforma-ciudadana-de-fosas-revela-irregularidades-y-opacidad-en-los-registros-oficiales-de-fosas-clandestinas-en-mexico/

51 Open Society Justice Initiative, *Undeniable Atrocities: Confronting Crimes Against Humanity in Mexico,* June 2016, https://www.justiceinitiative.org/publications/undeniable-atrocities-confronting-crimes-against-humanity-mexico

52 Amnesty International, *Disappear Again: Violence and Affectations Faced by Women Searchers in Mexico,* (Index: AMR 41/9374/2025), https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr41/9374/2025/en/

A protester holds a placard to demonstrate during the Olympic torch relay in Vancouver, Canada, 12 February 2010 © Kevork Djansezian/Getty Images

In recent years, **Canada** has increased restrictions on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and weakened the rights of migrants and refugees, including those at risk of deportation to the USA, while concerns have been raised about growing anti-LGBTQI+ hate. Civil society organizations have also raised concerns about the introduction of hundreds of CCTV cameras for the tournament.[53]

Civil society organisations in Vancouver have raised fears of "street sweeps" in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) district, in which municipal authorities clear encampments or confiscate personal belongings of people experiencing homelessness, echoing what occurred during the city's hosting of the 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympics.[54] These fears have been exacerbated by the FIFA World Cup 2026 By-law, passed in November 2025, which makes temporary amendments "designed to help promote public safety, uphold event integrity, minimize disruptions, and present a clean and welcoming environment", explicitly modelled on 2010 measures.[55] In addition to regulating advertising, it severely restricts activities such as street vending and street performances. The same civil society organisations have criticised Vancouver's draft Host City Human Rights Plan as being "riddled with weak, empty language" in relation to homelessness, largely reiterating existing policies on homelessness, including confirming that city officials may continue to remove encampments in parks during the daytime.[56]

The number of people experiencing homelessness, particularly in the DTES district, has risen steadily in the past decade, prompting persistent efforts on the part of local authorities to disrupt encampments and remove visible manifestations of homelessness.[57] A 2025 study found that a quarter of respondents reporting homelessness in Vancouver had had belongings – including essential items and medications – confiscated by authorities in the previous six months.[58] In 2024, Canada's Federal Housing Advocate called for an end to evictions of encampments of people experiencing homelessness, as they "make people more unsafe and expose them to a greater risk of harm and violence".[59]

Similar risks exist in Toronto, where the Ontario government has passed legislation placing high fines on public drug use, aimed at removing encampments in the urban areas, and has closed safe consumption sites. Indigenous Peoples are overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness in the city,

53 CBC News, "Surveillance cameras for 2026 World Cup in Vancouver spark privacy concerns", 19 December 2025, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/surveillance-cameras-2026-world-cup-vancouver-9.7022777

54 Pivot Legal Society, "City of Vancouver's new FIFA bylaw prioritizes branding and security over rights protections", 16 December 2025, https://www.pivotlegal.org/city_of_vancouver_s_new_fifa_bylaw_prioritizes_branding_and_security_over_rights_protections

55 City of Vancouver, FIFA World Cup 2026 By-law – RTS 17965, 4 November 2025, https://council.vancouver.ca/20251126/documents/pspc1.pdf

56 BCCLA, "Downtown Eastside organizations sound the alarm after the release of Vancouver's FIFA 2026 human rights action plan" (previously cited).

57 CBC News, "Number of people who are homeless in Metro Vancouver up 9 per cent in 2 years: Report", 30 July 2025, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/metro-vancouver-homeless-count-1.7597673

58 Irem Mia Eren and others, "'Street sweeps': The municipal government-enforced confiscation of personal belongings among unstably housed people who use drugs in Vancouver, Canada", September 2025, *Public Health,* Volume 248, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2025.105885

59 Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, *Upholding Dignity and Human Rights: The Federal Housing Advocate's Review of Homeless Encampments,* 13 February 2024, https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/publications/upholding-dignity-and-human-rights-federal-housing-advocates-review-homeless

Iranian fans protest during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Group B match between England and Iran at Khalifa International Stadium, Doha, Qatar, 21 November 2022 © Robbie Jay Barratt - AMA/Getty Images

in interactions with police, and in encampments.[60] City authorities have also closed one month early a 'warming center' providing shelter to people experiencing homelessness in winter, because the venue had been pre-booked for FIFA's use.[61] City officials said that alternative places would be provided for those affected, though organizations working in the sector report that people were referred to existing shelters that are already oversubscribed.

5.2 THE RIGHTS TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

The visibility, cost and impact of the World Cup mean that tournaments are often the legitimate focus of both critical media reporting and public protest, before and during the tournament, inside and beyond FIFA venues. Amongst many examples, ahead of the World Cup in Brazil there were widespread protests against the unlawful use of force by the police and the forced eviction of communities, as well as for free bus transport.[62] At the World Cup in Qatar, Iranian fans and players demonstrated against repression at home, while many thousands of other fans flew Palestinian flags.[63]

Guaranteeing the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are obligations of hosting states under international human rights law and the responsibility of FIFA under both the UN Guiding Principles and its own policies. Yet, in all three host countries there are threats to these rights that must be addressed.

60 Amnesty International, "Ontario's new laws put lives at risk: Bill 6 and Bill 223 will make communities less safe", 17 December 2025, https://amnesty.ca/human-rights-news/ontario-bill-6-and-bill-223-public-safety/

61 CBC News, "Homeless advocates concerned GTA respite centre is closing early for World Cup despite tough winter", 15 February 2026, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/especially-cold-winter-homeless-response-9.7084618

62 Amnesty International, *"They Use a Strategy of Fear": Protecting the Right to Protest in Brazil* (Index: AMR 19/005/2014), 5 June 2014, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr19/005/2014/en/

63 Reuters, "U.S. defeat Iran in World Cup match overshadowed by political tension", 30 November 2022, https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/fans-brace-politically-charged-us-iran-match-world-cup-2022-11-29/; Al Jazeera, "Palestinians wave their flag high at the Qatar World Cup", 24 November 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/11/24/palestinians-wave-their-flag-high-at-the-qatar-world-cup

Supporters turn their backs to the pitch to protest the world turning its back on Palestine, during the 2026 FIFA World Cup Asian qualification football match between Oman and Palestine at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat, Oman, 14 November 2024
© Haitham Al-Shukairi/AFP via Getty Images

RESTRICTIONS OF RIGHTS IN FIFA VENUES

In its Human Rights Framework for the 2026 World Cup, FIFA commits to "[a] tournament environment that aims to respect and protect the right to peaceful assembly, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of the press, and emphasises the protection of human rights defenders, journalists, and other media workers."[64] It further commits to "[p]rohibiting and addressing potential threats, discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or violence against human rights defenders, journalists, broadcasters, and other media workers, spectators, visitors, and local community groups."

However, FIFA's approach to restrictions on the right to freedom of expression of fans and players within its venues fails to comply with international human rights law and standards. The right to freedom of expression protects the free communication of information and ideas, including critical views, political discourse and even those that may be considered as offensive.[65] Therefore, any permissible restrictions on the right to freedom of expression must be prescribed in rules that are sufficiently clear and precise, and be assessed on a case-by-case basis to be necessary and proportionate to achieve at least one legitimate aim, such as ensuring public order, or protecting the rights of others.[66] Prohibitions, being the most serious restriction, are only acceptable when speech reaches a high threshold such as that of incitement to violence, hostility or discrimination against a target group.[67] The UN Human Rights Committee is clear that peaceful assemblies are protected "wherever they take place; outdoors, indoors and online; in public and private spaces; or a combination thereof."[68]

64 FIFA, FWC26 Human Rights Framework (previously cited).
65 UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 34: Article 19 (Freedoms of Opinion and Expression), 12 September 2011, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 11.
66 UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 19.3; UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment 34 (previously cited), para. 22; Siracusa Principles on the Limitation and Derogation Provisions in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1985, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1985/4, Sections I.B.
67 UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 20.2; UN General Assembly, *Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Expert Workshops on the Prohibition of Incitement to National, Racial or Religious Hatred,* UN Doc. A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, 11 January 2013, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Rabat_draft_outcome.pdf
68 UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General Comment 37: The Right of Peaceful Assembly (Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), 23 July 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37.

FIFA's Stadium Code of Conduct prohibits all forms of expression that are "of a political, offensive and/or discriminatory nature.[69] Similarly, FIFA's Disciplinary Code holds FAs liable for their fans' "use of gestures, words, objects or any other means to transmit a message that is not appropriate for a sports event, particularly messages that are of a political, ideological, religious or offensive nature."[70] The Disciplinary Code also provides for sanctions against players or officials for "using a sports event for demonstrations of a non-sporting nature." The way FIFA defines prohibitions and restrictions is overly broad and lacks the necessary precision to allow those impacted to regulate their conduct. It therefore creates a chilling effect on the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and can lead to arbitrariness and unwarranted restrictions on the right.

At the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, rainbow flags were confiscated in some games from fans wishing to show their support for the rights of LGBTQI+ people despite prior assurances and Iranian fans were assaulted or thrown out of stadiums for holding "Woman, Life, Freedom" banners, or the pre-revolutionary Persian flag.[71] Players too face restrictions, as illustrated by sanctions threatened against any player who wore a "One Love" armband intended to show support for LGBTI people's rights.[72]

Iranian fans hold up signs "Woman Life Freedom" during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Group B match between England and Iran at Khalifa International Stadium, Doha, Qatar, 21 November 2022 © Juan Luis Diaz/Quality Sport Images/Getty Images

69 FIFA, FIFA World Cup 2026 Stadium Code of Conduct, https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/50ebae81c412b7d5/original/FIFA-World-Cup-2026-Stadium-Code-of-Conduct.pdf

70 FIFA, FIFA Disciplinary Code, 2023, https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/59dca8ae619101cf/original/FIFA-Disciplinary-Code-2023.pdf, Article 15.

71 Arab Weekly, "US team beats Iran in World Cup amid tensions, divided fans", 30 November 2022, https://thearabweekly.com/us-team-beats-iran-world-cup-amid-tensions-divided-fans

72 Al Jazeera, "Seven European teams ditch 'OneLove' armband World Cup plan", 21 November 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/21/european-teams-say-wont-wear-onelove-world-cup-armband

THREATS TO JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS

In its 2025 statement on human rights defenders and media representatives, FIFA commits to striving for the highest standards of freedom of the press, guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression without discrimination, and protecting the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly in host states, including by using its leverage with third parties where those rights are at risk. FIFA has also established a complaints mechanism for HRDs and journalists whose rights have been violated in connection with its activities.[73] These commitments face a serious test given the threats journalists and human rights defenders will encounter covering the 2026 tournament.

In the **USA**, the government has dramatically escalated its attacks against journalists and media outlets that it considers to be critical of its policies, including through verbal attacks, removing security clearances, restricting press access and threatening funding sources. In the administration's first 100 days, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported "a significant increase in the number of newsrooms seeking safety advice, concerned that the changing national political environment could threaten their ability to report without fear of retribution from authorities."[74] The administration has denied coverage to outlets such as the Associated Press over editorial decisions and unsuccessfully asked reporters to waive their First Amendment rights.[75] According to US Press Freedom Tracker, President Trump has expressed his disdain for the media on social media on average once a day for the last 10 years, including depicting them at least 70 times as "enemies of the people".[76] Funding to public broadcasters has been cut and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has been weaponized as an instrument of political retaliation.[77] The administration has also proposed changes to foreign journalists' visas, drastically shortening their duration and creating the potential for abuse, described by Reporters Without Borders as having "catastrophic consequences" for press freedom.[78]

At least one journalist has been deported as a result of their work. US-based Salvadoran journalist, Mario Guevara, was arrested on 14 June at a "No Kings" protest in Doraville, Georgia, for his coverage of immigration enforcement actions. Despite criminal charges being dropped and a bond for his release set by an immigration judge, ICE refused to accept the bond and appealed the order. Guevara was deported to El Salvador on 3 October 2025.[79] 90% of arrests and detention of journalists in the USA in 2025 also took place in the context of protests.[80]

73 FIFA, "FIFA statement on human rights defenders and media representatives" (previously cited).

74 Committee to Protect Journalists, *Alarm Bells: Trump's First 100 Days Ramp Up Fear for the Press, Democracy*, 30 April 2025, https://cpj.org/special-reports/alarm-bells-trumps-first-100-days-ramp-up-fear-for-the-press-democracy/

75 Associated Press, "Journalists turn in access badges, exit Pentagon rather than agree to new reporting rules", 15 October 2025, https://apnews.com/article/pentagon-press-access-hegseth-trump-restrictions-5d9c2a63e4e03b91fc1546bb09ffbf12; New York Times, "Read the Pentagon's new restrictions on reporters", 20 September 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/09/20/us/pentagon-press-restrictions.html

76 U.S. Press Freedom Tracker, "On social media, Trump targets the press on average once a day – for 10 years and counting", 12 June 2025, https://pressfreedomtracker.us/blog/on-social-media-trump-targets-the-press-on-average-once-a-day-for-10-years-and-counting/

77 Amnesty International USA, *Ringing the Alarm Bells: Rising Authoritarian Practices and Erosion of Human Rights in the United States* (previously cited).

78 Reporters Without Borders (RSF), "USA: Proposed journalist visa restrictions would have catastrophic consequences for press freedom", 3 September 2025, https://rsf.org/en/usa-proposed-journalist-visa-restrictions-would-have-catastrophic-consequences-press-freedom

79 Amnesty International USA, *Ringing the Alarm Bells: Rising Authoritarian Practices and Erosion of Human Rights in the United States* (previously cited).

80 Freedom of the Press Foundation. "Report: Most journalist detainments this year are at protests", 15 December 2025, https://freedom.press/issues/report-most-journalist-detainments-this-year-are-at-protests/

Mexico is described by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) as the most dangerous country for the press in the Western Hemisphere.[81] Article 19 has reported that seven journalists were killed in 2025 in retaliation for their reporting. They also warned of an increased use of regulatory frameworks as censorship tools within the country, registering 51 cases of judicial harassment against 39 journalists between January and July 2025, more than double the rate the previous year.[82]

Impunity remains a defining feature of the violence against journalists in Mexico. Despite hundreds of recorded attacks and dozens of murders, FEADLE – Mexico's Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes Against Freedom of Expression – secured just eight convictions for journalist killings between 2012 and 2023, and federal authorities have never convicted those who ordered the killings. Journalists most at risk tend to be based outside Mexico City, covering crime and the intersection of organized crime and political corruption for local and regional outlets.[83]

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

MEXICO IS THE MOST DANGEROUS COUNTRY FOR THE PRESS IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

7 **JOURNALISTS KILLED IN 2025**

IN RETALIATION FOR THEIR REPORTING

51 **CASES OF JUDICIAL HARASSMENT AGAINST 39 JOURNALISTS**

BETWEEN JANUARY AND JULY 2025

CRACKDOWNS ON PEACEFUL PROTEST

The possibility of restrictions on protests in all three host countries during the 2026 World Cup is significant. The **USA** has seen a wave of protests since the inauguration of President Trump, related to the implementation of cruel immigration policies, Palestinian rights and those organized by the "No Kings" movement. The 250th anniversary of US independence on 4 July 2026 could prove significant, building on tensions from previous protests in 2025.[84] One of the matches played that day will be held in Philadelphia, the city in which the Declaration of Independence was signed.

Given the record of the current administration, there are clear risks that the right to protest around the World Cup could be repressed. Since January 2025, the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression have come under sustained attack – repeatedly undermined by executive action and

81 Amnesty International, *México: Informe para el Comité de Derechos Humanos de la ONU: 145 Periodo de Sesiones, 2-19 de Marzo, Lista de Cuestiones Previa al Informe* (Index: AMR 41/0581/2025), 9 January 2026, https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr41/0581/2025/es/; Amnesty International, *Mexico: Human Rights Defenders and Journalists at Risk – Systemic Flaws in Protection Mechanisms* (Index: AMR41/7666/2024), 6 March 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr41/7666/2024/en/

82 Article 19, "Las leyes como mecanismo de censura: Aumento del acoso judicial contra periodistas en México", 26 August 2025, https://articulo19.org/las-leyes-como-mecanismo-de-censura-aumento-del-acoso-judicial-contra-periodistas-en-mexico/; Article 19, Periodistas y Comunicadorxs Asesinadxs en México (previously cited), (accessed on 13 March 2026).

83 Amnesty International and Committee to Protect Journalists, *"No One Guarantees My Safety": The Urgent Need to Strengthen Mexico's Federal Policies for the Protection of Journalists* (Index: AMR 41/7666/2024), 6 March 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr41/7666/2024/en/

84 New York Times, "As Americans celebrate Independence Day, some protest the Trump Administration", 4 July 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/04/us/politics/trump-protests-4th-july.html

The California National Guard creates a line to hold back Anti-ICE protesters in front of the Federal Building on Monday, Los Angeles, CA, USA, 9 June 2025 © Carlin Stiehl/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images

highly politicized policing.[85] The administration has targeted foreign-born students protesting the Israeli government's ongoing genocide in Gaza, and people protesting and monitoring the administration's aggressive immigration operations. The administration used the "Catch and Revoke" program to revoke visas at scale; over 100,000 visas were revoked in 2025, of which 8,000 were student visas for "encounters with law enforcement for criminal activity."[86] This program was turbocharged by AI tools Babel X, provided by Babel Street, and Palantir's Immigration OS, which have automated capabilities that enable constant mass monitoring, surveillance, and assessments of people.[87]

The administration has not only restricted protest and undermined universities as a space where people can freely exercise their rights, but also built a "permission structure" to use the military in forms of domestic enforcement.[88] In one example, Trump federalized the California National Guard to deploy at least 4,000 troops to the City of Los Angeles – a host city for the FIFA World Cup – ostensibly to support the policing of individuals protesting ICE immigration raids, over the objections of the state's governor.[89] Militarized security forces, including the National Guard, have also been deployed in Chicago, Minneapolis, Portland, Memphis, New Orleans and Washington DC, and threatened in New York, San Francisco and Baltimore. In a speech to Generals and Admirals, President Trump has described the USA as being "under invasion from within" and referred to US cities as a training ground for the armed forces.[90]

85 Amnesty International USA, *Ringing the Alarm Bells: Rising Authoritarian Practices and Erosion of Human Rights in the United States* (previously cited)

86 U.S. Department of State, X post: "Breaking: The State Department has now revoked over 100,000 visas, including some 8,000 student visas and 2,500 specialized visas for individuals who had encounters with U.S. law enforcement for criminal activity.", 12 January 2026, https://x.com/StateDept/status/2010740549469557010

87 See, for example, Electronic Privacy Information Center, "EPIC FOIA: CBP (Babel Street Location-Tracking Service)", 3 December 2021, https://epic.org/documents/epic-foia-cbp-babel-street-location-tracking-service/ ; Babel Street, https://www.babelstreet.com/; Palantir UK, https://www.palantir.com/uk.

88 Amnesty International USA, *Ringing the Alarm Bells: Rising Authoritarian Practices and Erosion of Human Rights in the United States* (previously cited).

89 Reuters, "Trump administration deploys Marines to Los Angeles, vows to intensify migrant raids", 10 June 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/us/los-angeles-police-order-immigration-protesters-downtown-go-home-2025-06-09/

90 Associated Press, "Trump calls for using US cities as a 'training ground' for military in unusual speech to generals", 30 September 2025, https://www.apnews.com/article/trump-hegseth-generals-meeting-military-pentagon-0ecdcbb8877e24329cfa0fc1e851ebd2; CNN, "Trump's ominous move to recruit generals and admirals to his political cause", 30 September 2025, https://www.cnn.com/2025/09/30/politics/quantico-trump-generals-admirals-military

CASE STUDIES

Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian activist, student organizer from Columbia University, and lawful permanent resident of the USA, was unlawfully detained by US immigration authorities in March 2025 for his pro-Palestinian activism. At least ten other international students were similarly targeted.[91] He was released on bail three months later by a federal judge in June 2025, however a2026 appellate decision reversed that order and deportation proceedings continue as his appeal moves forward.[92]

Leqaa Kordia, a Palestinian woman, was arbitrarily detained in Texas for over a year, far from her family and attorney in New Jersey. She was detained on13 March 2025, after being targeted for her participation in a 2024 protest outside Columbia University advocating against the Israeli government's ongoing genocide in Gaza. She has lost approximately 175 members of her family in Gaza since the genocide began. The conditions of Leqaa's detention have resulted in a serious deterioration of her health, requiring hospitalization in February 2026. Leqaa was eventually released from custody on 16 March 2026 after having been granted bond for the third time. The two previous times DHS had issued administrative stays to keep her detained while her case proceeded.[93]

Protests have already taken place in relation to the World Cup in **Mexico**. Mexico City has seen a series of protests against gentrification, inequality, infringements on Indigenous land rights and access to water that they say is driven or exacerbated the World Cup.[94] Large protests have taken place over the past year against real estate speculation and potential environmental damage.[95] Activists in the city, including representatives of Indigenous peoples have called the tournament a "World Cup of displacement", and warned of threats to water supply of communities near to the Azteca stadium.[96] In September 2025, anti-gentrification protesters smashed a giant FIFA World Cup Piñata, combining their demonstration with a show of solidarity for Palestinian rights.[97]

91 Amnesty International USA, "Mahmoud Khalil must not be deported", 20 October 2025, https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/targeting-and-threatening-peaceful-protesters-and-their-immigration-status-for-speaking-out-on-the-human-rights-of-palestinians-or-any-other-issue-is-a-clear-violation-of-human-rights/

92 New York Times, "Appeals court opens the door to Mahmoud Khalil's rearrest", 15 January 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/15/nyregion/mahmoud-khalildetention.html?utm_sf_cserv_ref=807095&smid=tw-nytimes&smtyp=cur&utm_sf_post_ref=652088858

93 Amnesty International USA, "Amnesty International welcomes the release of Leqaa Kordia from year-long detention", 16 March 2026, https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/amnesty-international-welcomes-the-release-of-leqaa-kordia-from-year-long-detention/

94 Reuters, "Mexico City residents protest World Cup over displacement fears", 27 February 2026, https://www.reutersconnect.com/item/mexico-city-residents-protest-world-cup-over-displacement-fears/dGFnOnJldXRlcnMuY29tLDIwMjY6bmV3c21sX1ZBOTI5MTI3MDIyMDI2UlAx; Guardian, "'We get nothing': Residents fight back as Mexico builds big for 2026 World Cup", 25 August 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/aug/25/we-get-nothing-residents-fight-back-as-mexico-builds-big-for-2026-world-cup

95 Associated Press, "Large protest in Mexico City against real estate speculation ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup", 21 July 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ixd40UBXpRI

96 Dialogue Earth, "World Cup construction fever pits Mexico City locals against developers", 3 February 2026, https://dialogue.earth/en/water/world-cup-construction-fever-pits-mexico-city-locals-against-developers/

97 Dawn News English, "Mexico City protesters smash World Cup piñata in anti-gentrification rally", 14 September 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CsuJsXLGhk4

Relatives and friends of three missing university students take part in a demonstration demanding that their loved ones are returned alive, at the "Ninos heroes" roundabout in Guadalajara, Mexico, 19 April 2018. In Mexico there are over 133,000 missing people in the official national registry, and family members, especially women, are the ones who are taking charge of the search. © Ulises Ruiz/AFP via Getty Images

In host city Guadalajara, the authorities have threatened to remove portraits of missing people at the "Roundabout of the Disappeared".[98] In addition, the Jalisco Congress, which covers Guadalajara, is due to approve a legislative reform that, because it is ambiguous, will allow officials to remove missing persons search announcements and posters from public spaces.[99] In host city Monterrey, police tried to prevent women searchers from placing banners on a bridge commemorating the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances.[100]

Families searching for relatives subjected to enforced disappearance, led by the parents of Ana Amelí García Gámez, missing since July 2025, have called for a protest at the opening match of the World Cup against the ongoing impunity. The families are planning a human chain but say they will not block fan access to the stadium.[101]

The right to peaceful assembly has come under increasing pressure across Mexico. Amnesty International has documented the use of criminal proceedings against land, territory and environmental defenders for their participation in protests without complying with the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality.[102] In recent years, authorities in at least 14 states have responded to peaceful demonstrations with unlawful force, arbitrary detention, and rhetoric designed to delegitimize protesters'

98 Al Jazeera, "World Cup 2026: Re-disappearing Mexico's disappeared", 6 December 2025, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/12/6/world-cup-2026-re-disappearing-mexicos-disappeared; UDG TV, "Con el pretexto del Mundial, Guadalajara quiere intervenir la glorieta de los Desaparecidos, alerta legisladora", 27 September 2025, https://udgtv.com/noticias/guadalajara-quiere-intervenir-glorieta-de-los-desaparecidos/286375

99 Congreso del Estado de Jalisco, Dictamen de Ley que Reforma el Artículo 146 del Código Penal para el Estado Libre y Soberano de Jalisco, así como los Artículos 4 y 74 de la Ley de Personas Desaparecidas del Estado de Jalisco, 15 December 2025, https://infolej.congresojal.gob.mx/documentos/estados/R_161004.pdf

100 Proceso, "Policía de Monterrey intenta arrestar a madre buscadora durante manifestación", 30 August 2025, https://www.proceso.com.mx/nacional/estados/2025/8/30/policia-de-monterrey-intenta-arrestar-madre-buscadora-durante-manifestacion-video-357842.html

101 El Universal, "Familias buscadoras buscan visibilizar desapariciones en Copa Mundial de Futbol de 2026; convocan a protesta pacífica", 12 February 2026, https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/metropoli/familias-buscadoras-buscan-visibilizar-desapariciones-en-copa-mundial-de-futbol-de-2026-convocan-a-protesta-pacifica/

102 Amnesty Internacional, *México: Informe para el Comité de Derechos Humanos de la ONU* (previously cited).

causes.[103] This repression is disproportionately directed at Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, and women claiming their human rights, while vague criminal offences such as "riot" and "obstruction of public works" are routinely used to criminalize the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly.[104]

In February 2026, President Sheinbaum announced that almost 100,000 security personnel will be mobilized for the World Cup, partly in response to violence following the killing of a cartel leader. 20,000 military personnel will work alongside 55,000 police and a range of private security companies.[105] Since 2006, the military has been involved in public security operations, during which time levels of disappearances and killings increased and it continues to be implicated in extrajudicial executions. [106] In 2024 and 2025, Congress nonetheless passed laws transferring the National Guard – the main public security institution in Mexico – to the control of the Secretary of National Defence, along with other armed forces, further relinquishing control of public security to the military.[107] The use of torture and other ill-treatment by Mexican police, prosecutors and soldiers has been described as a "widespread practice" by the World Organisation Against Torture.[108]

The participation of the armed forces in public security tasks violates Mexico's international human rights obligations, which establish that the maintenance of public order should be reserved primarily for civilian police forces, which must be trained and equipped with various types of weapons and ammunition to make differentiated use of force and firearms, in accordance with the principles of necessity and proportionality.[109] This was affirmed by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2018.[110]

There has been a significant rise in protests in **Canada**, including waves of demonstrations in support of Palestinian human rights, as well as student encampments demanding divestment from Israel's genocide.[111] In 2024, university administrators have sought legal recourse from the courts to clear the encampments, and police forces intervened to forcibly remove peaceful protestors.[112] Protests against ICE and other policies of the Trump administration have already taken place in both of Canada's World Cup host cities, Vancouver and Toronto, and could be repeated during the tournament, not least if the US team is drawn to play in Canada in later rounds and ICE personnel are deployed to provide security.[113] Vancouver's City Council members have warned that any deployment of ICE to the city

103 Amnesty International México, "Amnistía Internacional llama al Estado mexicano a garantizar el derecho a la manifestación pacífica", 18 December 2025, https://amnistia.org.mx/contenido/index.php/amnistia-internacional-llama-al-estado-mexicano-a-garantizar-el-derecho-a-la-manifestacion-pacifica/

104 Amnesty International, *México: Informe para el Comité de Derechos Humanos de la ONU* (previously cited).

105 Al Jazeera, "Mexico's Sheinbaum pledges robust World Cup security in visit to Jalisco", 6 March 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/6/mexicos-sheinbaum-pledges-robust-world-cup-security-in-visit-to-jalisco

106 Amnesty International, Mexico 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/north-america/mexico/report-mexico/; El País, "Familiares de las niñas muertas a balazos en Badiraguato: 'Los militares dispararon como diez segundos, no nos dieron el alto'", 10 May 2025, https://elpais.com/mexico/2025-05-10/familiares-de-las-ninas-muertas-a-balazos-en-badiraguato-los-militares-dispararon-como-diez-segundos-no-nos-dieron-el-alto.htmlares-dispararon-como-diez-segundos-no-nos-dieron-el-alto.html

107 Amnesty International, "Mexico: Militarization of public security will lead to more human rights violations and perpetuate impunity", 9 September 2022, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/mexico-militarizing-public-security-human-rights-violations-impunity/

108 World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), "Global Torture Index 2025: Mexico Factsheet", 2025, https://www.omct.org/site-resources/files/factsheets/Factsheet-Mexico.2025-2.pdf

109 UN, Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, adopted on 7 September 1990.

110 Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR), *Alvarado Espinoza and Others v. Mexico*, Series C 370, judgment, 28 November 2018, https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_370_ing.pdf, para. 180.

111 Amnesty International Canada, "U of T encampment ruling fails to uphold the right of peaceful assembly", 2 July 2024, https://amnesty.ca/human-rights-news/u-of-t-encampment-ruling-fails-to-uphold-the-right-of-peaceful-assembly/; CTV News, "'Polarized' world is fuelling a growing number of protests in Canada, police say", 21 February 2026, https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/article/polarized-world-is-fuelling-a-growing-number-of-protests-in-canada-police-say/

112 Amnesty International Canada, "U of T encampment ruling fails to uphold the right of peaceful assembly" (previously cited); IJV, "IJV Canada salutes the victories of student-led encampments across Canada", 4 June 2024, https://www.ijvcanada.org/ijv-canada-salutes-the-victories-of-student-led-encampments-across-canada/

113 CBC News, "Hundreds in Vancouver protest Hootsuite's contract with U.S. Homeland Security", 30 January 2026 (updated on 2 March 2026), https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/hootsuite-protest-vancouver-us-department-homeland-security-ice-9.7069265; CBC News, "Torontonians gather to honour ICE victims as NDP calls for end to contracts with agency", 27 January 2026 (updated on 28 January 2026), https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-ice-victims-vigil-ndp-roshel-9.7063981

"could reasonably be expected to cause protests."[114] Previous international events have led to violations, with police admitting they were wrong to effectively detain hundreds of protestors for hours during the 2010 G20 Summit in Toronto.[115]

Different pieces of legislation at both the federal and municipal levels have proposed new hate crime offences and protest exclusion zones. In Toronto, for example, a bylaw came into force in July 2025 allowing owners of childcare centers, care facilities, schools, hospitals, and places of worship to apply for 50 meter protest exclusions around their premises.[116] These federal bills and municipal bylaws in cities across Canada risk criminalizing freedom of expression and peaceful assembly with excessive penalties, imposed stigmatizing labels, and reduced police oversight. Civil society organizations have expressed concern that these initiatives primarily target pro-Palestinian protesters and increase the surveillance against racialized communities.[117]

5.3 ABUSIVE IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT AND BORDER CONTROL

With millions of foreign visitors expected to travel for the 2026 World Cup, and with football being one of the most popular sports amongst diaspora communities living in the host countries, there are risks – for both local communities and visitors – related to abusive and deadly immigration enforcement, mass detention and deportations, and discriminatory border control.

In the **USA**, the government has aggressively pursued an anti-migrant, anti-refugee agenda, implementing racist and xenophobic executive orders that dehumanize and criminalize migrants and people seeking safety. ICE has been transformed into a paramilitary-style operation, which has involved masked, armed federal agents breaking down doors, using flashbangs, and zip-tying people, including children.[118] ICE agents have targeted areas near schools, faith centers, hospitals, and other previously prohibited areas for immigration enforcement.[119] Additionally, significant parts of other federal enforcement agencies have also been diverted to enforce immigration law. Agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Park Police, Secret Service, U.S. Marshalls, Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) have been diverted from other law enforcement work to engage on immigration enforcement. Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), a department within ICE, have long played a role at large events to combat trafficking and labor exploitation, but their work has also been diverted to focus on arrests and detentions, including targeting victims of exploitation.

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114 CBC News, "Vancouver Council to confront ICE issue ahead of World Cup", 21 February 2026 (updated on 21 February 2026), https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/vancouver-council-ice-motion-world-cup-9.7094047; CBC News, "Hundreds in Vancouver protest Hootsuite's contract with U.S. Homeland Security (previously cited); Council Members Motion, ICE Out of the Beautiful Game and Vancouver's World Cup", 25 February 2026, https://council.vancouver.ca/20260225/documents/pspc_motion1.pdf

115 Toronto Star, "'We regret that mistakes were made': Toronto police acknowledge 'unacceptable' mass arrests at 2010 G20", 19 October 2020, https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/we-regret-that-mistakes-were-made-toronto-police-acknowledge-unacceptable-mass-arrests-at-2010-g20/article_c2f05d6f-8afa-5acc-9f81-f0a3b519d64e.html

116 Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA), Anti-protest bylaws - Our fight against state censorship, https://ccla.org/major-cases-and-reports/anti-protest-bylaws/ (accessed on 12 March 2026); Social Planning Toronto, "The bubble zone bylaw has been passed: what to know", 26 May 2025, https://www.socingtoronto.org/the_bubble_zone_bylaw_has_been_passed_what_to_know

117 Amnesty International, *Canada: Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee 145th Session, 2-19 March 2026* (Index: AMR 20/0675/2026), 10 February 2026, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr20/0675/2026/en/

118 Amnesty International USA, "Pre-dawn ICE raid in Chicago is attack on human rights, spreads fear and intimidation", 7 October 2025, https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/pre-dawn-ice-raid-in-chicago-is-attack-on-human-rights-spreads-fear-andintimidation/

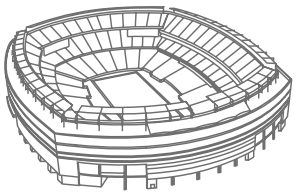
119 Amnesty International USA, Ringing the Alarm Bells: Rising Authoritarian Practices and Erosion of Human Rights in the United States, January 2026 (previously cited), p. 25.

2025

THE US GOVERNMENT DEPORTED

OVER 500,000 PEOPLE

INCLUDING **230,000** ARRESTED IN THE INTERIOR OF THE COUNTRY AND **270,000** AT THE BORDER.



THIS IS MORE THAN

6 X

AS MANY PEOPLE AS WILL WATCH THE WORLD CUP FINAL AT THE **METLIFE STADIUM IN NEW JERSEY**

The US government is targeting immigrant communities across the country with brutal enforcement intending to strike fear across communities and hoping their punitive and abusive policies will encourage people to self-deport. Analysis of official government data conducted by the New York Times estimates that ICE and CBP deported over 500,000 people in 2025, including 230,000 arrested in the interior of the country and 270,000 at the border. This is more than six times as many people as will watch the World Cup final at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.[120]

Among the people detained arbitrarily, there have been refugees, asylum seekers in the asylum procedure, migrants with regular status, US citizens, children and families, and people with severe illnesses. In many cases, the grounds for their detention are unknown. Many individuals have been unable to access the courts to challenge their detention and deportation.

According to the Deportation Data Project's analysis of official reports, ICE street arrests increased eleven-fold in the first nine months of 2025, while overall arrests including transfer from state and local law enforcement custody to ICE immigration custody increased four-fold.[121] ICE's approach to street arrests have been supported by the US Supreme Court decision in Vasquez Perdomo vs. Noem, where it granted an emergency request from the Trump administration and temporarily halted a LA judge's order that barred "roving patrols" from stopping people and questioning them based on how they look, what language they speak, what work they do, or even where they happen to be.[122] Deadly interactions with ICE and CBP have also occurred, including the killings of Renée Good, Keith Porter, Ruben Ray Martinez, Silverio Villegas González and Alex Pretti.

The use of immigration detention has substantially increased, including a six-fold increase in the number of children in immigration detention.[123] As of January 2026, there were at least 73,000 individuals in ICE detention, which is largely considered an undercount because it does not include thousands of people in short-term ICE processing facilities, ICE field offices, federal pre-trial detention, or other facilities.[124] Furthermore, conditions in detention are poor, substandard and in many cases

120 New York Times, "How many people has Trump deported so far?", 18 January 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2026/01/18/us/trump-deportation-numbers-immigration-crackdown.html

121 Graeme Blair and David Hausman, *Immigration enforcement in the first nine months of the Trump administration*, 27 January 2026, https://deportationdata.org/analysis/immigration-enforcement-first-nine-months-trump.html.

122 American Immigration Council, "How the Supreme Court's latest decision clears the way for racial profiling during immigration raids", 9 September 2025, https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/supreme-courts-decision-racial-profiling-immigration-raids/; U.S. Supreme Court, *Noem v. Vasquez Perdomo*, Application 25A169, order, 8 September 2025, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/24pdf/25a169_5h25.pdf

123 The Marshall Project, "'Why is this happening to us?' Daily number of kids in ICE detention jumps 6x under Trump", 29 January 2026, https://www.themarshallproject.org/2026/01/29/ice-kids-in-detention-numbers

124 American Immigration Council, "New report details ICE's expanding and increasingly unaccountable detention system", 23 January 2026, https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/ice-expanding-detention-system/; TRAC Immigration, ICE Detainees, https://tracreports.org/immigration/detentionstats/pop_agen_table.html (accessed on 12 March 2026).

inhumane. Amnesty International has also documented immigration detention conditions in the Krome North Service Processing Center – and the Everglades Detention Facility, also known as "Alligator Alcatraz" – both within 50 miles from FIFA's Miami headquarters – and concluded that they amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and in some cases torture.[125] Thirty-one people died in ICE detention in 2025, while a further 12 had died by 18 March 2026.[126]

The US government has adopted a series of measures to remove people from the United States as rapidly as possible, bypassing normal due process protections. These include expanding expedited removal procedures nationwide – any individual who cannot prove continuous presence for two years in the USA can be placed in expedited removal, which mandates detention, and allows people to be deported without seeing an immigration judge. Asylum seekers have been targeted by policies that allow judges to terminate asylum procedures as well as deportations to third countries. The administration has also negotiated with over 25 countries to accept people who are not nationals of those countries.[127] These deportations breach the principle of non-refoulement and are unlawful under international law.[128] The transfers to third countries have exposed people to further human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, in undisclosed locations.[129]

The current administration has attempted to terminate Haiti's "Temporary Protected Status" (TPS), which shields nationals from deportation on the grounds that conditions in Haiti make safe return impossible.[130] On 3 February 2026, a federal judge temporarily blocked the move, a ruling upheld by a federal appeals court in March.[131] The issue will now be heard by the Supreme Court, leaving more than 300,000 Haitians in uncertainty.[132] Since 2022, UNHCR and the OHCHR have called on States to halt forced returns to Haiti, due to the insecurity and violence, including kidnappings, killings and rape, with criminal groups controlling much of the country.

All World Cup host cities have been directly affected by arbitrary and aggressive immigration practices. Not only does Miami-Dade county host detention facilities where Amnesty International has documented human rights violations, the state of Florida has passed laws, and the Governor has issued executive orders, which make migration a criminal offense within its borders, creating immediate human rights risks.[133] New Jersey, where the final will take place, has experienced ICE raids and arrests, including at football matches.[134] In Los Angeles, federal authorities have carried out hundreds of raids across predominantly Latino neighborhoods, targeting workplaces, commercial areas, and residential communities.[135]

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125 Amnesty International, "USA: New Findings Reveal Human Rights Violations at Florida's "Alligator Alcatraz" and Krome Detention Centers", 4 December 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/12/estados-unidos-nuevas-investigaciones-revelan-violaciones-de-derechos-humanos-en-los-centros-de-detencion-de-alligator-alcatraz-y-krome-en-florida/

126 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Detainee Death Reporting, https://www.ice.gov/detain/detainee-death-reporting (accessed on 12 March 2026); Reuters, "Eleven people died in US immigration custody this year, ICE says", 9 March 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/eleven-people-died-us-immigration-custody-this-year-ice-says-2026-03-09/

127 Amnesty International, *USA: Torture and enforced disappearances in the Sunshine State: Human Rights Violations at "Alligator Alcatraz" and Krome in Florida* (previously cited).

128 OHCHR, "UN experts alarmed at illegal deportations from the United States to El Salvador", 30 April 2025, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/04/un-experts-alarmed-illegal-deportations-united-states-el-salvador

129 Amnesty International, "South Sudan: End four deportees' arbitrary detention" (Index: AFR 65/0280/2025), 18 September 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr65/0280/2025/en/; Amnesty International, "Eswatini: Five detained deportees denied legal access" (Index: AFR 55/0294/2025), 19 September 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr55/0294/2025/en/

130 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), "Termination of the designation of Haiti for Temporary Protected Status", 28 November 2025, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/11/28/2025-21379/termination-of-the-designation-of-haiti-for-temporary-protected-status

131 New York Times, "Appeals court upholds protected status for 350,000 Haitians", 6 March 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/06/us/haiti-tps-appeals-court.html

132 Reuters, "Supreme Court to weigh Trump bid to end legal protections for Haitian, Syrian migrants", 16 March 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/supreme-court-weigh-trump-bid-strip-temporary-status-haitian-syrian-migrants-2026-03-16/

133 Amnesty International, *USA: Torture and enforced disappearances in the Sunshine State: Human Rights Violations at "Alligator Alcatraz" and Krome in Florida* (previously cited).

134 Guardian, "ICE Raid: New Jersey Warehouse Workers Detained", 21 August 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/aug/21/ice-raid-new-jersey-warehouse-workers-detained; Human Rights Watch, "US: ICE Arrest at FIFA Event Spotlights Dangers for World Cup", 3 December 2025, https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/12/03/us-ice-arrest-at-fifa-event-spotlights-dangers-for-world-cup

135 Human Rights Watch, "US: ICE Abuses in Los Angeles Set Stage for Other Cities", 4 November 2025, https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/11/04/us-ice-abuses-in-los-angeles-set-stage-for-other-cities

A woman raises her hands as Customs and Border Protection officers extend their skirmish line into a crop field during a raid by Federal immigration agents at Glass House Farms in Camarillo, California, USA, 10 July 2025 © Blake Fagan/AFP via Getty Images

ICE and CBP are by far not the only agencies active in immigration enforcement. Indeed, approximately 1,500 state and local law enforcement agencies have been deputized to engage in civil immigration enforcement through 287(g) agreements which allow ICE to delegate certain immigration enforcement duties to state and local law enforcement agencies.[136] These agreements have long led to racial profiling, where community members are stopped under some guise of criminality, and subsequently arrested and transferred to immigration custody.

In five of the US host cities – Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, Kansas City and Miami – local law either bans 'sanctuary cities' or compels cooperation by police with immigration enforcement. In Texas, where Dallas and Houston are located, new legislation requires every county sheriff to enter into a 287(g) agreement with ICE before 1 December 2026; several county law enforcement agencies in the Dallas and Houston areas already have such agreements in place.[137] In Miami, Florida, multiple local law enforcement agencies have entered into 287(g) agreements, deputizing officers to act as immigration agents.[138] Florida is the state with the most 287(g) agreements – 344 as of March 2026.[139] In Atlanta and Kansas City, state laws in Georgia and Missouri ban sanctuary policies and require local law enforcement to cooperate with federal immigration authorities.[140]

The other six US host cities – Boston, Los Angeles, New York/New Jersey,[141] Philadelphia, San Francisco and Seattle – are "sanctuary cities" where local law limits or denies cooperation with the federal government in enforcing immigration laws. However, the federal government has targeted these

136 Immigration and Nationality Act § 287(g), codified at 8 U.S.C. § 1357(g) (1996); ICE, Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act, https://www.ice.gov/identify-and-arrest/287g

137 Texas, Senate Bill 8, 89th Regular Session, 2025, https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/89R/billtext/html/SB00008S.htm

138 ACLU of Florida, "Miami City Commission approves 287(g) Agreement putting immigrant communities at risk", 17 June 2025, https://www.aclufl.org/press-releases/miami-city-commission-approves-287g-agreement-putting-immigrant-communities-risk/; U.S. ICE, Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act – 287(g) Participating Agencies, 3 March 2026, https://www.ice.gov/identify-and-arrest/287g (accessed on 12 March 2026), "287(g) Participating Agencies".

139 U.S. ICE, Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act (previously cited), (accessed 12 March 2026).

140 Georgia, Prohibition on Immigration Sanctuary Policies by Local Governmental Entities; Certification of Compliance, Official Code of Georgia Annotated, 2016, https://law.justia.com/codes/georgia/2022/title-36/chapter-80/section-36-80-23/, § 36-80-23; Missouri, Sanctuary Policies for Municipalities Prohibited, Revised Statutes of Missouri, 2018, https://revisor.mo.gov/main/OneSection.aspx?section=67.307, § 67.307.

141 While New York and parts of New Jersey are sanctuary jurisdictions, the county where the MetLife Stadium is located, Bergen County, New Jersey, is not.

cities with an increased level of ICE enforcement without the assistance of local actors, as a means of punishing localities that do not cooperate with immigration forces. The current administration has also pledged to "continue bringing litigation against sanctuary jurisdictions and work closely with the [DHS] to eradicate these harmful policies."[142]

CASE STUDIES

ICE ARREST AND DETENTION OF FATHER AT CLUB WORLD CUP FINAL

Human Rights Watch has documented how in June 2025, ICE arrested and detained for three months a fan who was with his children outside MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, as they were about to attend the final of the FIFA Club World Cup between Chelsea and Paris St. Germain. The man was a registered asylum seeker whose family had fled his country after armed groups threatened to kill them, he said. He was stopped at the stadium by local police for a minor civil offence, yet later handed over to ICE where he was detained for three months while the agency moved to deport him. During his detention, his asylum claim was denied by a judge. The father said that, traumatized by three months of detention and desperate to speak more regularly to his children, he decided not to pursue further legal action, despite his fear of returning to his country of origin. The family had to purchase air tickets for his "voluntary departure." He is now back in his country of origin.[143]

FIFA has not shared any public commitment from the US authorities that ICE or other law enforcement agencies will not be conducting immigration enforcement operations in World Cup host cities, or at World Cup events and venues. Indeed, in January 2026, the acting director of ICE told Congress that the agency will be "a key part of the overall security apparatus for the World Cup."[144]

Further, the three US Host City Human Rights Plans and two statements available as of 14 March 2026 – from Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, Boston and San Francisco – make no reference to risks around immigration enforcement and provide no protective measures.[145]

In **Mexico**, Amnesty International has also documented the devastating and immediate impacts of the Trump administration's policy at the US-Mexico border.[146] With the effective end of the possibility of claiming asylum at the border, as well the border's militarization and funding cuts to civil society organizations working to support migrants and refugees, the lives of hundreds of thousands have been left in limbo, often living in shelters or informal encampments. Mexico's northern border has become increasingly dangerous, with people often being victims of extortion, kidnapping, and discrimination, as well as sexual and gender-based violence by state and non-state actors.[147]

142 U.S. Department of Justice, "Justice Department Releases New List of Sanctuary Jurisdictions", 5 August 2025, https://www.gov1.com/public-safety/justice-department-releases-new-list-of-sanctuary-jurisdictions

143 Human Rights Watch, "US: ICE arrest at FIFA event spotlights dangers for World Cup", 3 December 2025, https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/12/03/us-ice-arrest-at-fifa-event-spotlights-dangers-for-world-cup

144 BBC Sport, "ICE will be 'key part of security' at World Cup in US", 11 February 2026, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/articles/c62g4322ywno

145 FIFA World Cup 26™ Houston Host Committee, *Human Rights Action Plan Version 1* (previously cited); North Texas FIFA World Cup Organizing Committee, *Human Rights Action Plan Version 1* (previously cited); Vancouver Host Committee, *Human Rights Action Plan (Draft)* (previously cited); ATL 26, Human Rights Action Plan (previously cited); Bay Area Host Committee, "Bay Area Host Committee statement on human rights", (previously cited).

146 Amnesty International, *USA: Lives in Limbo: Devastating Impacts of Trump's Migration and Asylum Policies* (Index: AMR 51/9029/2025), 20 February 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/9029/2025/en/

147 Amnesty International, *USA: Lives in Limbo: Devastating Impacts of Trump's Migration and Asylum Policies* (previously cited).

Photo from the Mexican side of the San Luis Port of Entry, which connects San Luis, Arizona to San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora, Mexico. Barriers pictured were set up by U.S. government officials, 11 April 2019
© Alli McCracken/Amnesty International

Their plight has been aggravated by the National Institute of Migration's (INM) suspension of the issuance of visitor cards for humanitarian reasons (TVRH), despite being provided for in law,[148] and significant delays in the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance's (COMAR) processes to recognize refugee status, apparently due to a lack of resources and budget.[149]

Mexican authorities are also accepting deportations by the US authorities of people who are not Mexican nationals. These individuals often face kidnapping and extortion after being deported into Mexico, while others are being bussed to the south of Mexico by Mexican authorities.[150]

Immigration practices in **Canada** have also resulted in serious human rights violations, with authorities regularly placing people in migrant detention centers and, as of July 2025, a federal prison.[151] The risks are heightened for people with disabilities who have faced legal capacity rights violations in Canada's immigration detention system.[152] In October 2025, the Canadian Government introduced Bill C-12, which would severely limit the right to seek asylum and endanger people seeking safety. If passed, the legislation would block people who have lived in Canada for more than a year from making a refugee claim and enable the government to conduct blanket cancellations of some immigration documents without due process, opening the door to arbitrary and politically driven decision making that could destabilize lives, separate families, and uproot people for whom Canada is home.[153]

Canada signed the Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA) with the United States in 2004, under which individuals seeking asylum after entering Canada from the USA are deemed ineligible to have their claims referred to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB). Instead, they are turned back at the border and returned to the USA, where they often face arbitrary detention, limited access to legal support, and risk deportation to countries where – as already described – they risk persecution, torture, or other serious human rights abuses.[154]

Amnesty International has also documented how Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Programme (TFWP), which ties workers' immigration status to a single employer, enables systematic labor exploitation – including unpaid wages, unsafe conditions, physical and sexual abuse, and deportation threats against those who complain.[155]

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148 Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CMDPDH), "OSC llaman a garantizar el acceso efectivo de derechos humanos de personas en movilidad", 30 January 2024, https://cmdpdh.org/2024/01/30/osc-llaman-a-garantizar-el-acceso-efectivo-de-derechos-humanos-de-personas-en-movilidad

149 La Jornada, "ONG denuncian retrasos y negativas de refugio en Comar", 7 August 2025, https://www.jornada.com.mx/2025/08/07/sociedad/031n1soc

150 Refugees International, *Protection, Not Concession: Mexico's Responsibility to Third Country Nationals Deported by the United States*, 27 February 2026, https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports-briefs/protection-not-concession-mexicos-responsibility-to-third-country-nationals-deported-by-the-united-states/

151 Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, *"I Didn't Feel Human There: Immigration Detention in Canada and Its Impact on Mental Health"* (Index: AMR 20/4195/2021), 17 June 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr20/4195/2021/en; Amnesty International Canada, "Human rights win: Immigration detention ends in provincial jails across Canada", 19 September 2025, https://amnesty.ca/human-rights-news/immigration-detention-ends-in-provincial-jails-canada/.

152 Human Rights Watch, *"It Felt Like Everything in Life Stopped": Legal Capacity Rights Violations Against People with Disabilities*, 3 December 2024, https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/12/03/it-felt-like-everything-in-life-stopped/legal-capacity-rights-violations-against

153 Amnesty International, *Canada: Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee* (previously cited).

154 Canadian Council for Refugees v Canada (Citizenship and Immigration), 2023 SCC 17, Factum of the Appellants, 14 March 2022, https://www.scc-csc.ca/cases-dossiers/search-recherche/39749/, para. 14; Amnesty International, *Canada: Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee* (previously cited), p. 2.

155 Amnesty International, *"Canada has destroyed me": Labour exploitation of migrant workers in Canada* (Index: AMR 20/8807/2025), 30 January 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr20/8807/2025/en/

VISA AND TRAVEL BANS

In addition to abusive immigration enforcement and mass detention practices, the USA has introduced a series of arbitrary and discriminatory restrictions on visas that threaten the inclusive and global spirit of the World Cup and pose real human rights risks for attendees.

Following Presidential Proclamation 10998 on "Restricting and Limiting the Entry of Foreign Nationals to Protect the Security of the United States", 39 countries, plus individuals travelling on Palestinian Authority-issued travel documents, currently face severe restrictions when applying for a range of both visitor and immigration visas, including four countries who have qualified for the World Cup – Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, Iran and Senegal.[156] While there are exemptions for players and coaching staff, fans of these countries will not be able to enter the USA to participate in the tournament unless they have a valid visa issued before 1 January 2026.

These blanket bans target individuals based on their race, religion, nationality and focus on countries with predominantly Black, Brown and Muslim-majority populations, constituting racial discrimination under human rights law.[157] Such measures spread hate and disinformation, reinforcing the misleading idea that certain populations are more likely to pose security risks or engage in acts of violence.

For other travelers, DHS has proposed that all visa waiver applicants must provide five years' worth of social media accounts for review, ensuring all profiles and posts are made public.[158] This expands rules introduced in June 2025 for student and exchange visitor visas.[159] United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the agency that processes visa and other immigration applications, also has a policy of screening applicants for "anti-Americanism", and rejecting applicants who have demonstrated ideas that contradict the current administration or its position.[160]

Such restrictions are counter to FIFA's own policies prohibiting discrimination, as well as commitments made by the US authorities when bidding to host the World Cup. In 2017, after President Trump introduced the "Muslim ban" during his first term, FIFA President Gianni Infantino stated that "teams who qualify for a World Cup need to have access to the country, otherwise there is no World Cup. That is obvious."[161] In May 2018, President Trump provided a letter to FIFA guaranteeing that teams, officials and fans would face no restrictions in entering the country to take part in the World Cup, if awarded to the USA.[162] In June 2025, FIFA stated in response to a letter by Human Rights Watch that, "FIFA expects that any of its host countries take measures to ensure that any eligible persons who are involved in the Competition are able to enter the respective countries."[163]

156 U.S. Department of State, Suspension of visa issuance to foreign nationals to protect the security of the United States, 2 February 2026 (last updated), https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/suspension-of-visa-issuance-to-foreign-nationals-to-protect-the-security-of-the-united-states.html (accessed on 12 March 2026), "U.S. Visa News".

157 Amnesty International, "USA: Trump's travel ban will harm people seeking safety", 5 June 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/usa-trumps-travel-ban-will-harm-people-seeking-safety/

158 U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Agency Information Collection Activities; Revision; Arrival and Departure Record (Form I-94) and Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), 10 December 2025, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/12/10/2025-22461/agency-information-collection-activities-revision-arrival-and-departure-record-form-i-94-and

159 U.S. CBP, Agency information collection activities; revision; arrival and departure record (Form I-94) and electronic system for travel authorization (ESTA) (previously cited).

160 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "USCIS to consider anti-Americanism in immigrant benefit requests", 19 August 2025, https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/news-releases/uscis-to-consider-anti-americanism-in-immigrant-benefit-requests

161 Guardian, "Donald Trump travel ban could prevent United States hosting World Cup", 9 March 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/football/2017/mar/09/donald-trump-travel-ban-could-prevent-united-states-hosting-football-world-cup

162 New York Times, "How 3 letters from Trump might help bring the 2026 World Cup to the US", 12 June 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/12/sports/trump-letters-world-cup.html

163 Gianni Infantino in response to Human Rights Watch, "Your letter regarding human rights and the FIFA World Cup 2026TM", 3 June 2025, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/06/20250603%20Response%20Letter_HRW_FWC2026.pdf

A fan poses with a rainbow flag in front of the Munich Stadium before the UEFA Euro 2020 Championship Group F match between Germany and Hungary at Allianz Arena, Munich, Germany, 23 June 23 2021 ©Stefan Matzke - sampics/Corbis via Getty Images

5.4 DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LGBTQI+ PEOPLE

The United 2026 bid committed to a human rights strategy prioritizing non-discrimination, inclusivity and unity, including specific pledges on LGBTQI+ people's rights. These pledges cover inclusive messaging, preventing and remedying discrimination, and ensuring adequate grievance mechanisms. The bid recommends LGBTQI+ inclusivity be factored into Host City plans, and that states contemplating discriminatory legislation be warned this "puts associated event contracts and agreements at risk."[164]

Further, the prohibition of discrimination in FIFA's statutes is complemented by FIFA's Human Rights Framework for the 2026 tournament, in which it commits to creating "[a] tournament environment that aims to promote and showcase inclusivity, address potential barriers to inclusion, and prohibit and address discrimination of any kind in relation to FIFA World Cup 2026™ activities."[165]

However, fears have been expressed about the risks of discrimination during the tournament. In January 2026, the England LGBTQI+ fans' group "Three Lions with Pride" announced that they will not have a visible presence at games in the **USA** because of a "rollback of human rights" and "unsafe and unacceptable" risks, in particular to the safety of trans or gender non-conforming fans.[166] Another network of European LGBTQI+ fans' groups, "Queer Football Fanclubs", is also advising its fans not to travel because of serious concerns over the treatment of minorities.[167]

Fears from fans' groups have been raised in light of the US government's attacks on the rights of LGBTQI+ people, particularly of transgender people. A number of countries have warned their nationals that there could be risks of being targeted for questioning or refused entry to the USA if the gender identity on their passport is different from their sex assigned at birth, or they have the "X" gender identifier.[168] As well as signing an executive order "keeping men out of women's sports",[169] President Trump signed another "restoring biological truth", defining sex as an "immutable biological

164 United 2026, *Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy* (previously cited).
165 FIFA, FIFA Statutes 2022, 2022, https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/3815fa68bd9f4ad8/original/FIFA_Statutes_2022-EN.pdf; FIFA, FWC26 Human Rights Framework (previously cited).
166 Three Lions Pride, Instagram post: "A statement from Three Lions Pride on the 2026 Men's World Cup", 15 January 2026, https://www.instagram.com/p/DTiY95YiP5y?img_index=1
167 Outsports, "Now two LGBTQ fan groups will not attend U.S. World Cup – one will", 26 January 2026, https://www.outsports.com/2026/1/26/24126601/lgbtq-gay-soccer-fans-fifa-world-cup-2026-usa-germany-england-safety/
168 CNN, Countries issue advisories about trans people traveling to the United States", 5 April 2025, https://edition.cnn.com/2025/04/03/travel/trans-people-travel-advisories-united-states
169 Executive Order, Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports, 5 February 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/keeping-men-out-of-womens-sports/

A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES HAVE WARNED THEIR NATIONALS THAT THERE COULD BE RISKS OF **BEING TARGETED FOR QUESTIONING OR REFUSED ENTRY TO THE USA**

IF THE GENDER IDENTITY ON THEIR PASSPORT IS DIFFERENT FROM THEIR SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH, OR THEY HAVE THE "X" GENDER IDENTIFIER.

classification as either male or female."[170] Transgender women and girls have been excluded from sports, agencies have cut programs and funding seeking to advance the rights of LGBTQI+ people and a LGBTQI+-specific option on the national youth suicide hotline was shut down.[171] As of November 2025, all new US passports must show only the biological sex assigned at birth.[172]

Football has not been spared from discrimination. In March 2025, persistent homophobic chanting was reported at a Major League Soccer match between San Diego FC and Saint Louis City.[173] In June 2023, a match in Las Vegas between the USA and Mexico national men's teams was cut short by the referee after homophobic chants, while a match was suspended again when the two teams played in Arlington, Texas, in the final of the Concacaf Nations League in March 2024.[174] The Mexican football federation has been fined on multiple occasions as a result such chants by fans during matches. In 2021, following chants at two games including one between **Canada and Mexico** in Edmonton, Canada, the national team had to play behind closed doors as a sanction imposed by FIFA.[175] At the Club World Cup in 2025, supporters of a Mexican team were warned that the game could be called off if the chant continued.[176] This is despite more positive national legislation in Mexico, which prohibits discrimination and recognizes same-sex marriage.

FIFA's Disciplinary Code clearly prohibits discriminatory behavior and expression by both players and fans and outlines a range of potential sanctions and punishments.[177] Under a 'three-step protocol' referees "have the authority to first stop the match and request a public announcement asking for the discriminatory behaviour to cease, to suspend the match until the behaviour stops following another warning announcement, and finally, if the behaviour still persists, to decide to abandon the match."[178]

Transgender and gender-diverse fans may also face specific risks in Mexico. According to Transgender Europe, Mexico was the second most dangerous country in the world for transgender people in 2023.[179]

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170 Executive Order, Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government, 20 January 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/defending-women-from-gender-ideology-extremism-andrestoring-biological-truth-to-the-federal-government

171 NPR, "Trump administration cuts specialized suicide prevention service for LGBTQ+ youth", 18 June 2025, https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/06/18/nx-s1-5438405/lgbtq-988-lifeline-samhsa-hhs

172 U.S. Department of State, Sex Marker in Passports, https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/passport-help/sex-marker.html (accessed on 14 March 2026), "Passport Help".

173 BBC Sport, "San Diego condemn 'unacceptable' homophobic chanting", 4 March 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/articles/c1en0z715y9o

174 Guardian, "USA win over Mexico cut short by homophobic chants on night of four red cards", 16 June 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/football/2023/jun/16/usa-win-over-mexico-cut-short-by-homophobic-chants-on-night-of-four-red-cards

175 Associated Press, "Mexico and FIFA go back to sports court in decade-long dispute over curbing soccer fans' gay slurs", 15 February 2025, https://apnews.com/article/world-cup-mexico-fifa-fan-discrimination-cc97060e8de28f0632d60bd51724d38c; Sportsnet, "Concacaf issues warning about homophobic chants during Canada-Mexico game", 8 October 2021, https://www.sportsnet.ca/soccer/concacaf-issues-warning-homophobic-chants-canada-mexico-game/

176 TheAthletic, "Supporters warned over homophobic chant during Monterrey's Club World Cup defeat by Borussia Dortmund", 2 July 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6467780/2025/07/02/club-world-cup-homophobic-chant/

177 FIFA, FIFA Disciplinary Code (previously cited), Article 15.

178 FIFA, "FIFA introduces innovative approach with launch of new disciplinary code", 11 July 2019, https://inside.fifa.com/legal/media-releases/fifa-introduces-innovative-approach-with-launch-of-new-disciplinary-code

179 Trans Europe and Central Asia (TGEU), *Trans Murder Monitoring 2024 Update*, 2024, https://tgeu.org/files/uploads/2024/11/TGEU-TMM-TDoR2024-Table-2.pdf

In 2024, one of the most dangerous years for transgender women in Mexico, at least 59 transfemicides were recorded.[180] Six of the 32 states have incorporated the crime of transfemicide into their penal codes (Nayarit, Mexico City, Baja California, Baja California Sur, Campeche and the State of Mexico).[181]

In **Canada**, violence and harassment against LGBTI people – in Canada the term 2SLGBTQQIA+ is used – persists, including vandalism of Pride flags and the defacement of rainbow crosswalks.[182] In 2024, Alberta introduced legislation targeting participation in sports, as well as the use of pronouns and access to gender-affirming care. In Saskatchewan, laws limiting students' ability to use their chosen names and pronouns at school remain in force.[183] While these laws are not in force in either of the locations of the 2026 World Cup, there is a growing climate of intolerance, especially since the election of President Trump in the USA. Trans youth face persistent and systemic discrimination nationwide, while technology-facilitated gender-based violence against Black, Indigenous, and other racialized women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people continues to rise, with little recourse for people affected.[184] Toronto has seen protests opposing gender-affirming care, as well as counter-protests in defense of trans and gender-diverse people's rights.[185]

With the vast majority of Host City Human Rights Plans unpublished, it is not yet possible to assess the extent to which they will protect the rights of LGBTQI+ people. Vancouver's plan integrates existing and future Transgender, Gender Diverse and Two-Spirit (TGD2S) Inclusion Strategies, while Atlanta's plan commits to hosting Pride-themed game-watching events with LGBTQ+ organizations and sharing relevant resources with attendees. Neither of the published plans for Dallas or Houston provide any mention of LGBTQI+ fans at all, nor specific protective measures.[186] While Seattle has not yet published its Human Rights Plan, local organizers have designated a match scheduled to play there during Pride weekend as a "Pride Match" to celebrate LGBTQI+ people's rights and freedoms.[187] Organizers say this will go ahead despite objections from the two national teams – Egypt and Iran – who were drawn to play in this match.[188]

FIFA's commitment to promoting anti-discrimination messages during major tournaments will again be tested at the 2026 World Cup. At the FIFA Club World Cup in 2025, held in the USA, FIFA reportedly removed planned anti-discrimination and anti-racism messaging, which had been a major part of its most recent tournaments, from pitch side advertising and social media.[189] The messages were briefly reinstated for the International Day for Countering Hate Speech, before disappearing again. The Dignity 2026 coalition, which brings together US-based human rights groups, labor unions and worker networks, athletes' organizations, fans, and migrant rights groups, said the decision "bodes ill" for the FIFA World Cup 2026.[190]

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6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With just weeks to go until the 2026 World Cup kicks off, FIFA's claim that "Football Unites the World" contrasts starkly with the divisive and repressive practices of governments who host its flagship tournament. The joy that fans hope to experience over a six-week celebration of football is overshadowed by the reality of violent arrests, mass detention, deportation and discriminatory visa bans. Amidst a human rights emergency, this World Cup is very far from the "medium risk" tournament that FIFA once judged it to be, and urgent efforts are needed to bridge the growing gap between the tournament's original promise and today's reality.

There is still time to save the 2026 World Cup from becoming a stage for repression and a platform for authoritarian practices. Host governments must meet their obligations under international human rights law, while FIFA, national FAs and sponsors all have clear responsibilities to respect human rights and use their significant leverage to protect fans, players, journalists, workers and local communities. But ensuring human rights are respected during the World Cup can only be the start – once the final whistle has blown, the struggle to defend rights and tackle repression must continue.

1. Guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and civilian-led policing in all host cities, inside and outside of World Cup venues.

- FIFA should revise its Stadium Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Code to ensure that everyone, including human rights defenders (HRDs), media workers, fans and players are able to realize their right to freedom of expression without discrimination in line with international human rights law and standards.
- FIFA must abide by its own policy towards media and HRDs, using its influence to protect any journalists or HRDs facing intimidation, reprisals or violence in relation to their coverage of the tournament, including through speaking out about their treatment.
- FIFA should use their leverage and work with host country authorities and host city committees to ensure that the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are also respected outside of tournament venues and that no one will face retaliation for exercising their rights.
- Host country authorities must protect the right to peaceful protest by ensuring policing of assemblies complies with international standards on legality, necessity, proportionality, and accountability, including the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms; review tactics and equipment used at demonstrations and investigate all allegations of unlawful force.
- While ensuring the security of fans and local communities during the tournament, all host country authorities must ensure military forces are not deployed to conduct law enforcement duties except under exceptional and temporary circumstances, with civilian command and oversight and full application of human rights law.

- The US authorities must immediately suspend mass and discriminatory surveillance and AI-driven surveillance used for immigration enforcement or protest monitoring unless and until strict safeguards are in place, including transparency, independent audits, and prohibitions on discriminatory profiling.

2. End indiscriminate raids, ethnic profiling, arbitrary arrests, mass detention and unlawful deportations and dismantle the detention and deportation machine. Provide guarantees that World Cup events, venues and gatherings will not be targeted for immigration enforcement.

- US authorities should refrain from indiscriminately and arbitrarily detaining migrants and asylum seekers, and ensure effective oversight, transparency, and accountability mechanisms for all detention facilities, including through independent monitoring by elected officials and human rights and civil society organizations.
- FIFA should secure public guarantees from the US authorities that there will be no immigration enforcement activities in World Cup host cities during the tournament, with ICE, Border Patrol and HSI playing no role in the policing and security of FIFA World Cup events, including fan zones, matches and watch parties.
- US Congress should cut funding for ICE and Border Patrol, with stringent restrictions on future funding contingent on adherence to meaningful policy changes.
- Host cities in the USA should become welcoming cities that do not collaborate or share information with immigration enforcement agencies.
- Canada should overhaul the Temporary Foreign Worker Programme to prevent and address the systemic discrimination faced by migrant workers, including by granting open work permits that allow workers to change employers and jobs freely.

3. Lift discriminatory travel bans and vetting of social media

- The US authorities should end arbitrary and discriminatory visa restrictions, including for – but not limited to – fans from countries who have qualified for the World Cup.
- The US authorities should drop the requirement for travellers to the US to make available their social media histories for vetting.
- The US authorities should ensure that travellers whose gender identity is not the same as their sex assigned at birth are not prevented from entering the USA nor harassed or discriminated against at the border.

4. Take effective measures to tackle discrimination

- FIFA and host city committees should consult with LGBTQI+ fans groups to ensure effective measures to protect people from discrimination, harassment and abuse, ensuring all FIFA venues are inclusive spaces with zero-tolerance for discrimination.
- FIFA should enforce its Disciplinary Code and ensure that its anti-discrimination protocol is effectively used, throughout the tournament and beyond, in response to discriminatory behaviour by fans, players and officials.
- FIFA should commit to and implement public anti-discrimination campaigns at all World Cup matches, events and venues.
- The US authorities should rescind discriminatory executive actions that restrict access to health care, education, or equal protection and restore and enforce non-discrimination protections, including for women, LGBTQI+ people, refugees and migrants, and racialized communities.

5. Ensure the publication of updated and strengthened Host City Human Rights Plans that provide comprehensive protections for fans, players, journalists, workers and local communities.

- Host City Committees and FIFA should urgently work to strengthen and publish comprehensive Human Rights Plans for the tournament, including filling key gaps such as protection from abusive and arbitrary immigration enforcement and tackling discrimination.
- All Host City Committees should ensure that their Human Rights Plans respect the rights of people experiencing homelessness and protect them from the potential impacts of the tournament including forced evictions which could occur as a result of “street sweeps” or beautification drives.
- For example, Vancouver and Atlanta’s Host City Committees should work with civil society organizations to strengthen protections and support for people experiencing homelessness potentially impacted by the tournament and existing policies.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. WHEN INJUSTICE HAPPENS TO ONE PERSON, IT MATTERS TO US ALL.

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HUMANITY MUST WIN

DEFENDING RIGHTS, TACKLING REPRESSION AT THE 2026 FIFA WORLD CUP

On 11 June 2026, the largest and most lucrative FIFA World Cup in history will begin. Millions of fans will travel to Canada, Mexico and the USA, while billions more watch from home. FIFA has promised a tournament where everyone "feels safe, included and free to exercise their rights." It is a promise that has rarely been more needed – and is at high risk of being broken.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup is taking place amidst an acute human rights crisis, with significant risks and impacts for fans, players, journalists, workers and local communities alike. In the USA, which will host most matches, a human rights emergency is unfolding amid sweeping authoritarian practices. Mexico has deployed 100,000 security personnel, including military forces, in response to high levels of violence. In Canada, the legacy of the Vancouver Olympics and a deepening housing crisis has fueled fears that people experiencing homelessness will once again be pushed to the margins.

With just weeks to go until kick-off, FIFA's claim that "Football Unites the World" sits in stark contrast to the divisive and repressive practices of the governments who host its flagship tournament. There is still time to save the 2026 World Cup from becoming a stage for repression and a platform for authoritarian practices. Host governments must meet their obligations under international human rights law, while FIFA, national FAs and sponsors all have clear responsibilities to respect human rights and use their significant leverage to protect fans, players, journalists, workers and local communities.

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