

Remembering, Counting, Acting: Homeless Deaths in the UK and France



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This article examines two initiatives in the UK and France documenting the deaths of people experiencing homelessness: the Dying Homeless Project and the Collectif Les Morts de la Rue France. Combining data collection, memorialisation, and advocacy, both initiatives challenge the invisibility of deaths of people experiencing homelessness and call for stronger political action across Europe. Together, they show that these deaths are preventable and that dignity must be upheld in both life and death.

Across Europe, the deaths of people experiencing homelessness remain one of the starkest indicators of social failure. While policy contexts, welfare systems, and civic traditions differ, grassroots initiatives have emerged that refuse to let these deaths go unnoticed. Two of the most prominent examples are the Museum of Homelessness's *Dying Homeless Project* in the UK and the Collective Les Morts de la Rue's *Dénombrer et Décrire* (Record and Report) in Paris and across France. Although they take distinct approaches shaped by their national contexts, both initiatives share a profound commitment to remembrance, dignity and action. Together, they amplify a Europe-wide call to prevent deaths and to act earlier, more collectively and more decisively.

The Dying Homeless Project: Counting as Resistance in the UK

The Dying Homeless Project, hosted by the Museum of Homelessness (MoH), is the only year-round record of deaths of people experiencing homelessness across all four nations of the UK. Established in 2017 and led by MoH since 2019, the project combines investigative research with public memorialisation, insisting that every death is a deeply human loss worthy of record and investigation.

Each year, the project gathers information through Freedom of Information requests,



coroners' reports, family testimony, and submissions from frontline services. This rigorous methodology allows MoH to publish annual findings and recommendations that reveal gaps in official statistics, expose shocking trends and, importantly, call for action to prevent future losses of life. In doing so, the project frames counting as an act of resistance that is part of a lineage of social justice projects that make visible the lives and deaths of marginalised and excluded people. The project challenges the idea that some lives are "ungrievable" and insists on memorialisation, visibility and solidarity with those bereaved.

At the heart of the Dying Homeless Project is its digital memorial, where names, tributes and stories are held with care and dignity. Public vigils, remembrance banners and learning events make these deaths visible to decision-makers and the wider public, connecting remembrance directly to political action and accountability.

Collectif Les Morts de la Rue: Dignity, Homage and Collective Responsibility in France

In France, the Collectif Les Morts de la Rue has been carrying out a parallel mission for over twenty years. Founded in 2004, the Collective is a coalition of associations and individuals united by a refusal to accept premature death as an inevitable consequence of life without a roof.

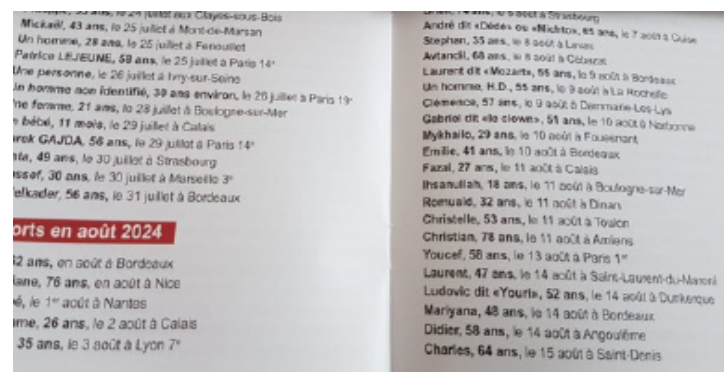
The Collective's work centres on four interconnected actions: recording deaths, paying public tribute, attending funeral ceremonies for isolated people in Paris, and supporting those left behind. Its annual report, *Dénombrer et Décrire*, documents deaths of people experiencing any form of homelessness when they died, while also illuminating life trajectories marked not only by exclusion and systemic failure, but by beauty and creativity.

Death reports come from different sources: most of the information (approximately 36%) comes from institutional partners, 30% comes from other charities, 24% from the media watch and 6% from private individuals. Every source of information is biased, and because those

sources feed the annual report of the Collective, that leads to bias in the report. For example, the main goal of the media is to attract readers. In order to do that, articles are based on sensationalism and often exploit homelessness to fuel security discourse. In certain French regions, articles in the media are the only source of information (Guadeloupe, for instance). It affects the data collection as it causes an over-representation of violent causes of death.

It is important to note that the French legislation doesn't have a Freedom of Information law. The number of deaths counted each year is a lower limit of homeless mortality in France, and putting a name on a report form for a deceased may be easier for the Collective than it is for the Museum of homelessness, as every citizen in France can ask for the death certificate of someone who died in France. This annual report is the basis of our public memorial, as it provides a list of names and descriptions of life stories.

The Collective is particularly known for campaigning around dignity in death. Volunteers attend the funerals of people with no known relatives, organise public homages, and support relatives and friends in navigating grief. These acts powerfully assert that no one should die - or be mourned - in isolation, and that remembrance is a responsibility shared by society as a whole.



Obituary notice for August 2024

Different Approaches, Shared Intent

The UK and French initiatives reflect their differing contexts. The Dying Homeless Project places strong emphasis on national data visibility and investigative methods that challenge government narratives, while the Collectif Les Morts de la Rue draws on a long tradition of civic association, public homage, and accompaniment. Yet the differences are complementary rather than conflicting.

Both initiatives insist that memorialisation and action belong together. Remembrance is not merely symbolic; it is a political act that demands prevention.

Both projects show that understanding how people die while homeless reveals failures in housing, healthcare, migration systems, and social protection that transcend borders.

A European Call to Action

Together, the Dying Homeless Project and the Collective Les Morts de la Rue demonstrate that refusing invisibility is a powerful starting point towards preventing deaths. Their work strengthens arguments made across FEANTSA's European network: that deaths of people experiencing homelessness are preventable, that reliable data and lived-experience-led remembrance matter, and that dignity must be upheld both in life and in death.

At a European level, these initiatives amplify each other's impact. They show policymakers that the deaths of people experiencing homelessness are not a local anomaly, but a shared crisis demanding coordinated responses. By counting carefully, remembering publicly and acting collectively, they remind us that preventing deaths starts with acknowledging every life lost.

In different languages and forms, the message is the same on both sides of the Channel: homelessness kills, but it does not have to. European countries and organizations already have the knowledge and models not just to count and remember, but to prevent future deaths. What remains is the political will to take action against the systemic and individual harms behind every life remembered.