

WINTER OLYMPICS MILAN CORTINA 2026

Redimensioning and real sustainability demanded

CIPRA, the Alpine Commission for Protection of the Alps, has for years had a clear position on large-scale sporting events in the Alpine region: this region is not suitable for hosting major sporting events as it is a highly sensitive area. Today CIPRA shares the concerns expressed by local associations and committees in denouncing the possible devastation of the Dolomites. It demands that the projects planned for the “Winter Olympics Milan Cortina 2026” be reconsidered to incorporate a downsizing.

Previously, in [2014](#) and [2016](#), CIPRA has taken very clear positions on large-scale sporting events, concluding with an explicit invitation to the municipalities and regions of the Alps to abandon their candidatures for the Winter Olympics. This opinion has not changed: for just a few days of competition, the events in the mountain areas involved require infrastructures that are neither environmentally nor socially compatible. What would be needed is a fundamental rethink of the bidding and implementation process, based upon already existing decentralised venues and respect both for local conditions and the economic and ecological limits.

Certain populations show reluctance: it is all too expensive, causing too much damage

The experiences of recent decades have shown that the Alps are not suitable for hosting these major events that are harmful to the environment and have serious consequences for communities. Even during the last Winter Olympics held in the Alps – in Turin in 2006 – mountain areas were left with large debts and white elephants such as bobsleigh tracks and ski-jumping facilities.

Local populations are realising the extent of the negative impacts. Popular consultations in the Swiss cantons of Wallis ([2018](#)) and Graubünden ([2013 and 2017](#)), in the Austrian Tyrol ([2017](#)) as well as in Salzburg ([2005](#)) and in Munich in Germany ([2013](#)) have shown that large sections of the Alpine population are no longer willing to passively accept the negative consequences of the Winter Olympics. Nevertheless, Italy won the bid for the 2026 Winter Olympics in the Alps, but without holding a referendum.



Sustainability: fine words – but short on delivery

Article 5 of the Tourism Protocol of the Alpine Convention requires attention to be paid to the development of sustainable tourism, in particular the socio-economic impacts on the resident population, the impacts on soil, water, air, natural balance and landscape, as well as the impacts on public finances. Art. 6 requires the contracting parties – including Italy – to “undertake to promote, as far as possible, projects which enhance the countryside and are environmentally acceptable”. These are conditions that must be met.

The fact that the Games will be held in several locations (Milan, Valtellina, Cortina, Val di Fiemme) and the large number of existing facilities (for sports, transport and accommodation) should ease the burden on the mountain environments concerned and maintain an economically responsible approach to the organisation of the Games. But, in reality, this will not be the case. While some aspects of the organisation of the Games by the “Fondazione Milano Cortina 2026” show an intention to make the Olympics more sustainable, similar attention is not being paid to the competition facilities, which are to be built by the “Infrastrutture Milano Cortina 2026” company. At least two of the fourteen competition venues raise serious doubts as regards their economic and environmental sustainability: the rebuilding of the “Eugenio Monti” bobsled track in Cortina and the ice oval for speed skating in Baselga di Piné, in Trentino. The new bobsled track in Cortina, commissioned by the Veneto Region and the Italian Olympic Committee, is merely the most striking example of the unsustainability of the event. Local and other policymakers show an increasing lack of willingness to actually reinterpret the Olympic Games model in terms of sustainability.

In addition to the “essential” infrastructures, there are numerous “related” and “contextual” infrastructures that will have an impact. Examples include the roads and ring roads in villages such as San Vito di Cadore, where hectares of grassland would be sacrificed, or the proposed three new ski links for Cortina-Badia, Cortina-Arabba and Cortina-Alleghe Civetta in the heart of the Dolomites. There is also the speculative new building induced by the Olympics, such as the project envisaged at Passo Giau for the construction of a hotel with a volume of 40,000 cubic metres at an altitude of over 2,000 metres, all in a unique landscape where there already exists a refuge-hotel that was closed ten years ago.

For this reason, CIPRA International, together with all its national and regional member organisations, took the following position at its meeting held on 12 November 2021:

- **The mistakes of the past should not be repeated, and the needs of the affected areas and the concerns of their inhabitants should be taken seriously and promoted, especially with regard to true environmental, social and economic sustainability.**
- **CIPRA shares the concerns expressed by the local associations and committees that marched in Cortina on 24 October 2021 to condemn the possible devastation of the Dolomites.**



- It demands that the projects planned for the 2026 Winter Olympics be reconsidered, with a downsizing in terms of costs and interventions that are not strictly necessary.
- Based on the IOC's Agenda 2020 and in particular its 'Recommendation 1', points 2 to 5 on the use of existing sports facilities and infrastructures, the construction of removable facilities, the approval of extraterritorial sports facilities and other environmental and labour law concerns should actually be implemented.

CIPRA reiterates its demand that the Alpine region should never be used as a venue for this type of event unless there is a drastic rethink in terms of the resources used for preparation and implementation. Sustainable Winter Olympic Games should involve far fewer disciplines and people directly on site (especially in terms of accompanying persons and spectators) and should be held on a regular basis at existing facilities only in climatically suitable areas of the world. They could nevertheless successfully reach a global audience via electronic media. Finally, full respect for human rights in the candidate or implementing states is a basic prerequisite.