

Dushanbe's Housing Crunch

Author: IWPR

Buying somewhere to live in the Tajik capital is almost impossible for the average person. Eighteen members of Obid Haibulloev's family all share an apartment in the Tajik capital Dushanbe. Since only three of them are bringing home money, Obid asks, "How can we buy more housing?"

As reporter Rahmatullo Odinaev discovered, there are plenty of people like Obid.

Prices in Dushanbe have skyrocketed in recent years. An apartment that cost 3,000 US dollars in 2000 would now set you back up to 30 times that amount.

Illhom Ibrahimov of Tajikistan's National University says prices are being driven up because the growth of the population is far outstripping the pace of construction.

Ismatullah Sharipov of the city's building department says the only apartment blocks going up are being funded out of the municipal budget, rather than by private entrepreneurs.

When new flats do become available, they go to people placed high on the housing list because their former homes have been demolished under urban redevelopment plans. Others stand little chance of getting one.

Tajikistan has passed legislation which should make it easier to get a mortgage, but the banks have shown themselves to be in no hurry either to issue more loans or to lower their interest rates.

In any case, most people are on such low incomes that they could never afford to take out a mortgage, however advantageous the terms.

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Blackouts Provoke Protest in Northern Town

Residents of the town of Kairakkum have protested about persistent electricity outages to the municipal authorities. They are afraid that when winter really sets in, they will be left to freeze in their home.

Reporting from this town in northern Tajikistan Kamari Ahrorzoda found that residents were particularly irked by the fact that they have to pre-pay for utilities like electricity and gas. Some argue that once a service has been paid for, failure to provide it is illegal.

Unlike many settlements in Tajikistan, where people often live in low-rise houses, nine out of ten residents

of Kairakkum live in multi-storey apartment blocks. That means that when the lights go out, they do not have the option of installing a wood-burning stove or making a fire.

Mumin Toshmatov is in charge of the electricity grid for Leninabad region, which includes Kairakkum. He blames local government for failing to follow instructions to ensure a steady supply of power, gas, coal and central heating over the winter months.

“To date, the gas supply network hasn’t been working at full capacity, whereas we are supplying as much electricity as we can,” he said.

Protesters say the Kairakkum town authorities have been unresponsive. One of them said officials told her, “We can’t provide you with power. Four hours a day is all we can manage, so just get on with that. We can’t promise to improve things.”

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Backlash Against Violent Films

Parents in Kulob, a southern town close to Tajikistan’s border with Afghanistan, are worried about the violent content of pirate DVDs and are trying to control what their children watch.

Reporter Safarali Rajabov spoke to local parents who said the violence and lack of morals of modern films was contrary to everything they believed in – and some harked back to Soviet times when the content of feature films was rigorously controlled.

“At home we’ve placed a total ban on the kids watching films on DVD. We don’t allow them to see it,” said local man Murodali Rajabov. “Kids buy these films, watch them and fall under their evil influence.”

Psychologists and educationalists say children in Kulob can often be seen imitating the violence they see in films, trying out karate moves on each other and jumping out of high windows.

Much of what the kids get to see comes from local kiosks selling DVDs. One stall owner happily admitted that the disks are home-made pirate copies taken from satellite TV channels.

“The boys buy them; they always come and buy violent films and gangster films. The girls prefer Indian films,” he said.

Khairullo Tohirov, who heads the culture department in Kulob’s town administration, says the local authorities are powerless to curb the DVD sellers as they are licensed by the national films agency.

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