

Grozny's Housing Chaos

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Corruption and fake documents means many flats are disputed by two or even more people. Madina Ozdieva, an ethnic Chechen, returned to Chechnya from Kazakhstan together with her young daughter in 2003. She could not afford to buy a place to live and applied to Grozny's municipal authorities for an apartment.

"If I had had brothers or sisters, I wouldn't need a flat," said Ozdieva. "But I have nobody and no corner of my own."

In 2004, she was given a flat in the centre of the city, but instead of this being the answer to her prayers, it signalled the start of a nightmare, as she was caught up in a shadowy world of disputed ownership and bureaucratic obstruction that is Grozny's housing situation.

Ozdieva has never been able to move in to the apartment she was awarded because another woman named Balku Ulubayeva lives there.

The flat is registered in the database of the city authorities as belonging to Ozdieva. But another register, that of the housing department says that it belongs to Ulubayeva.

Madina said Ulubayeva had twice offered to give her another flat in exchange for the one she was in possession of. "One man, who introduced himself as a city hall employee, told me that Balki had occupied 18 flats," said Madina.

Ulubayeva herself insisted she had no other flats besides the one she lived in. "My previous flat was destroyed during the war," she said. "I refused to be recompensed for it, and the administration [of the Lenin District] gave me the new flat."

Ozdieva has hit a brick wall in her legal pursuit to possess the apartment. Her case is a microcosm of a housing chaos which afflicts the entire city, with corruption and fake documents making many flats disputed by two or even more people.

Ozdieva complained to the city authorities that another person lived in her flat. "They had promised that if I had problems, their lawyers would help me," she said. "But I got no help from them. They told me to 'go to court'.

"In order to apply to court, I needed data on Ulubayeva, but neither the housing department nor the technical inventory bureau gave them to me. Without the data I could not lodge a complaint against her in court."

In a further setback, the frustrated would-be homeowner then received notification from the city authorities saying the ownership documents she had received from them for the flat were not valid. She was told that it was registered as hers at a date when it actually belonged to a previous owner.

Ozdieva said that this was the fault of the authorities themselves: when providing her the flat in 2004 city hall officials had backdated the registration to the year 1999.

“I argued with them, telling them to put down the right date, but they assured me this wouldn’t cause me any problems,” she said.

“When they started checking out my housing situation, I cheered up, thinking that justice would be finally done. But it turned out to be the opposite. I can’t afford to go to court, as it is hugely expensive and my salary in the theatre is 3,000 roubles (115 US dollars) a month.”

The city administration concedes that the issue of providing housing for the needy in Grozny, a city devastated by bombing and artillery in two military campaigns is a “tangled knot”.

“Recently, we have come across an increasing number of cases involving forged documentation about the purchase or sale or registration of flats,” deputy mayor Rezvan Bakharchiev told IWPR.

According to the city administration’s data, there are 8,000 units of housing in the city’s housing stock that have been surrendered by their owners for compensation and which can be allocated to those who need them.

“These surrendered flats are provided to persons, who lost their housing during the fighting - the poor, single mothers and orphans,” said Bakharchiev.

According to Bakharchiev, an official commission has annulled 2,000 housing contracts on the grounds that either the owners had obtained the flats illegally or used them for commercial facilities, while living elsewhere. A total of 188 of these cases went to court between March 23 and August 20 this year.

But some experts blame the city authorities themselves for the confusion.

“There are frequent cases, when the same flat turns out to have several registered owners,” said a human rights lawyer who did not want to be named. “For instance, a person has a permission to own a flat dated 1998-1999, but this does not stop the city hall from issuing an order for the same flat to some other person.

“Another common problem is that people who bought their housing before [the start of the first Chechen war in] 1994, mainly, from Russian-speaking residents, find out that the flats they have lived in for 10-15 years have been given up [to the authorities] by their original owners, who fled the republic and received compensation for them.”

The reconstruction work underway in Grozny has only added to the confusion. Residents of houses scheduled for demolition are often given flats formally belonging to other people. “This has resulted in a great amount of litigation,” said the lawyer.

Zara Tsurova, who used to live in a block of flats that has by now been pulled down, said, “All the residents of our house were given flats of equal value in another district. But all these flats turned out to have owners. Now we all have been spending all our time in court.”

The city administration denies that it’s responsible for solving these disputes.

“We are not a law-enforcement body, not a court, it is not up to us alone to decide,” said the deputy mayor. “If both sides have the documents, an expert study will find out whose documents are authentic. There are law-enforcement agencies, whose competence these matters lie in.”

Unemployed mother of five Sovdat Jamaldinova lives in a temporary accommodation centre for people who lost their housing in the conflict. Two years ago, the city hall gave her an apartment. “It turned out that another woman lived there,” said Sovdat. “She has three orphaned children, and I can’t demand that she leave the flat.”

She said that the apartment she was promised is registered in the name of another woman by one municipal office and in the name of a third person by another.

Bakharchiev acknowledged that the housing chaos is largely a result of too many people seeking too many places to live in a city whose apartment blocks had been ravaged by war. He said that the two thousand apartments that were now available for allocation were simply not enough to satisfy everyone.

“We can’t reassure people that these 2,000 flats will settle our housing problems,” he said. “Before the conflict, the city’s housing stock included 4,900 blocks of flats. Today it’s five times less than that, while since 1994 the population has only increased.”

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Location: [Chechnya](#)

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