

## **Hungry Kyrgyz Reduced to Eating Pets**

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Desperately poor Kyrgyz consume dog and cat meat in order to survive.

Alexander Sinitsyn had spent the day trying to find any odd job to earn enough to feed his two small children. He didn't earn a penny, so he went home, killed his neighbour's boxer dog and stewed it for the family dinner.

"His name was Gray," said Sinitsyn's neighbour Maria Zenchenkova. "He was a member of our family. His head and skin were found in a trash can out front. That's sick."

Sinitsyn, an unemployed Bishkek resident, was given a suspended two-year prison sentence for killing his neighbour's dog. He told the court that he did so because he couldn't find a job and had no money to feed his children.

Sinitsyn's plight is unexceptional in Kyrgyzstan. The economy has been going downhill for 10 years. According to UN figures, more than 80 per cent of Kyrgyz live below the poverty line, and 20 per cent of those are desperate straits.

The authorities recently adopted a special programme to slash the numbers of poor people by half by the year 2010. But so far, there is little indication that it is having any success.

Kachkyn Bulatov, coordinator for the Kyrgyz committee for human rights in the Narynsk region, told IWPR that hundreds of people were forced by poverty to dogs.

Last month, the Agym newspaper carried a letter from the village of Kochkor in Narynsk reporting that many desperate families in the village were resorting to this in order to survive.

"I first tasted dog meat at a friend's house," Askarbek Jumabaev, one of the authors of the letter, told IWPR. "We caught a young vagrant dog and butchered it. Then we boiled and ate its meat. People here have no jobs and nothing to eat. "

Bulatov said he knows many people who eat not only dog meat, but also donkeys, marmots and cats. "I live in Kochkor, where marmot has, of late, become common food for the poor, while stray dogs have been an easy target for years," he said.

The killing of her pet was an eye-opener for Maria Zenchenkova. She has since noticed that the numbers of cats and dogs on the street have been dwindling fast. "They are vanishing one by one. I think this is a serious problem, and the government should take heed," she said.

Kyrgyz papers, radio and television are full of advertisements for lost pets. It's anyone's guess how many of those missing animals ended up being eaten by poor families.

For abandoned dogs, the chance of falling prey to hungry humans is even greater. The only agency looking after vagrant cats and dogs in Kyrgyzstan was closed down about ten years ago for lack of funds.

Opponents of the government say the widespread consumption of domestic animals should serve as a wake-up call.

"Instead of putting people like Sinitsyn on trial, why don't they take care of the underprivileged," said Kyrgyz deputy Bektur Asanov. "It's humans, not dogs, who need help in the first place. I think Sinitsyn's verdict was unfair."

The deputy minister of employment and welfare, Melis Junushaliev, said the government was trying to help the poor, but they must also help themselves.

"We have a vested interest in reducing the percentage of poor families, but we need them to come to us and get registered as unemployed, otherwise we cannot pay them benefits," he said.

But Junushaliev added that the authorities were powerless to help those who did not want to work to lift themselves out of poverty. "Not even a million dollars would save them," he said.

Government critics, however, say that the real cause of high unemployment is the weak state of the economy. They point out that long cue of jobless who gather every morning on one of the main streets of Bishkek hoping to get any manual job is a proof that authorities can not provide them with work. As for the meagre benefits, they argue, they are not worth the hassle of going to collect them.

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**Location:** [Kyrgyzstan](#)

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