



## Collapsing Collective Centres

DRC investigates deplorable living conditions of IDPs and socially vulnerable families in collapsing collective centres.

### Years of Living in Despair

A collective center in the former Kvvari hotel on a busy Tbilisi street has been home to 11 IDP families for more than 19 years. The lack of maintenance combined with poor construction methods means the building has deteriorated dramatically and is currently in a deplorable condition. According to the Samkharauli Bureau of Expertise the structure is dangerously unsound and requires demolishing.

DRC visited the building in October and found very poor living conditions: a leaking roof, decrepit toilets shared by all residents, no bathrooms, cramped, unsanitary living conditions and walls with structural cracks. Inhabitants said the whole building shakes when larger vehicles pass.

### No-One's Land

As well as IDPs settled by the State, non-IDPs have taken up residence in the building without permission or registering. The exact number of these informally settled families is not known.

Many of these non-IDP families residing in the former Kvvari hotel are extremely poor and are living below the poverty line. While they qualify for a little financial support under the state program for socially vulnerable families, they endure the conditions because they have no alternative place to go.

Due to the building's unsound structure, the Ministry for Internally Displaced Persons, Accommodation and Refugees (the MRA) will not allow IDPs to privatize their living spaces. This means that, within the framework of its ongoing durable housing allocation programme, the MRA is required to offer these IDPs alternative accommodation. However, the MRA has no obligation to non-IDPs and consequently, unless they find an alternative, this group will become homeless once the building is closed.

The 2006 Law on Social Assistance

defines someone as homeless if they are without a permanent place of residence and are registered as homeless with their local government authorities [1]. Article 18 of the Law obliges the local government to provide them with shelter. However, due to an overwhelming lack of state social housing stock and budgetary resources to build social housing, local government is often unable to meet the housing needs of homeless people [2].

It is indeed a paradox of State policy that the Government of Georgia invests State as well as donor funds to





solve the housing problems of IDPs but is passive in creating a housing fund for homeless families. As a consequence, some of the most vulnerable in society are forced by circumstances beyond their control to live in dangerous conditions.

Some local government units have solved the homeless issue for small groups of homeless people by providing funds to rent an apartment. [3]

However, these funds usually cover only a few months and then the support is withdrawn, leaving families exposed again to homelessness and forcing them to move into potentially dangerous accommodation such as collapsing collective centers.

Clearly this cycle of homelessness and uncertainty impacts the educational, psychological and social development of children in these vulnerable families and places an intolerable burden on households – many of whom are headed by women.

### Counting Numbers

According to data provided by Tbilisi City Hall to the Georgian Public Defender's Office, up to 10,000 families assumedly both homeless and facing homelessness applied to the City Hall requesting shelter in 2012-2013. However, only 46 families were assisted, 22 with one-time compensation [4]. Likewise, according to the Public Defender's Report on the Right to Adequate Housing, in January-September 2013, 194 persons applied to Kutaisi City Hall requesting shelter but none of them received it, due to a lack of available housing stock or financial resources to pay rent [5]. According to the same report 83 families applied to Zugdidi Municipality requesting housing in 2012-2013 and only 48

families were compensated with apartment rent [6]. The statistics of these three cities exemplifies the scope of the problem.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in partnership with local self-government bodies has carried out the "Social Housing in a Supporting Environment" programme to tackle the problem of homelessness. This programme constructed social housing in 7 cities in Georgia: Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Zugdidi, Rustavi, Bolnisi and Gori.

However, while representing a significant step forward in addressing the issue, the houses accommodate only a small number of homeless people: 75 homeless families, including IDPs were accommodated in the Tbilisi social houses in 2009-2015 and 14 families in Kutaisi in 2010-2014<sup>7</sup>. As the statistics show above, the need for social housing is high.

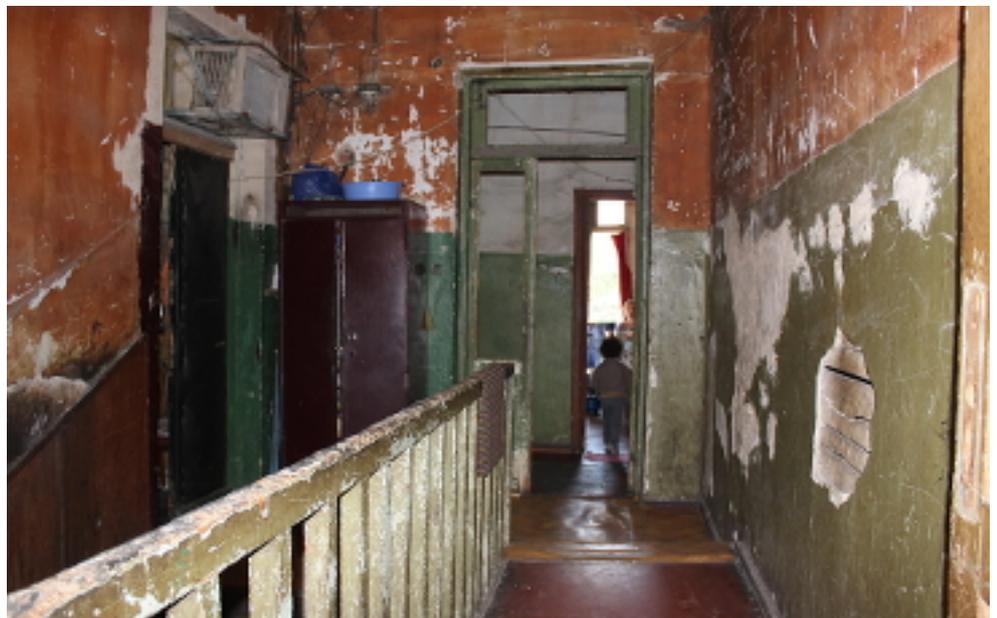
On December 12, 2013 the Government of Georgia issued a

normative act regarding activities to assist homeless people during the winter of 2013-2014. As a result, temporary shelter in the form of tents was set up. But this and the monetary compensation programme while providing much needed immediate relief were only temporary solutions.

In 2014-2015 the MRA requested the Samkharauli Bureau of Expertise to inspect 70 buildings where IDPs live and which have questionable structural integrity. 61 buildings are collective centres (CCs) and the remaining 9 have been informally settled by homeless IDPs and non-IDPs. 37% of these buildings are either in the process of or have already been vacated (26 buildings). Of the remaining 44 buildings the investigation found 38 to be in poor condition ranging from "collapsing" to being in an "unsatisfactory condition" - the majority being CCs.

According to the MRA's records, approximately 800 IDP families live in these buildings (termed 'collapsing collective centres' or CCCs) comprising around 2,500 persons<sup>8</sup>. The MRA though does not possess accurate data on the number of informally settled families residing in them. However, following DRC visits to collapsing and non-collapsing CCs it can be assumed that many if not all CCs contain some non-IDP socially vulnerable people.

Furthermore a few years ago, monitoring by DRC, EUMM and the PDO of 70 CCs found nearly all were unsound. However, the number of non-IDP families, was not recorded at the time. Furthermore a few years ago, monitoring by DRC, EUMM and the PDO of 70 CCs found nearly all were unsound. However, the number of non-IDP families, was not recorded at the



time.

During its monitoring visits, DRC identified the following problems with regards to collapsing CCs:

1. Lack of data giving a clear picture of the scope of the problem, in particular, how many non IDP families live in CCs and CCCs;

2. Lack of systems which enable coordination between relevant bodies such as the MRA, local governments and the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs.

3. Lack of clear procedures to formalise coordination between the above bodies when it comes to closing CCs and CCCs where non-IDP families reside and who face homelessness once the building is closed;

4. Lack of referrals which will ensure that all families who have a right to shelter receive it regardless of their status.

### DRC's Position

1. The Danish Refugee Council believes that all vulnerable people, irrespective of their status are entitled to

receive their rights as set out under International and domestic law, agreements, protocols or norms;

2. DRC believes that when any Collective Centre, irrespective of its condition is closed, the most vulnerable residents should not be left behind to a life of uncertainty and homelessness simply because they are not IDPs.

3. That when a CC is closed, IDPs are provided housing which integrates them into non-IDP society.

### DRC Recommendations

- Create a Collapsing Collective Centre Task Force to look at the issues highlighted with regards to collapsing CCs and their non-IDP residents;
- Develop relevant policy solutions with a corresponding action plan and budget with close coordination between local governments, MRA and other relevant bodies;
- Establish the number of non-IDP families live in collapsing and other CCs through a rigorous profiling exercise. DRC with its extensive profiling experience is ready to assist

the government;

- Create a mechanism where Government bodies and other key stakeholders share relevant experiences, systems and expertise to address policy reform;
- Create a referral mechanism to inform local authorities about socially vulnerable and other potentially homeless families that reside in the collapsing CCs;
- Create a coordination mechanism among duty bearers to ensure that as collapsing CCs are closed, non-IDP vulnerable groups are not ignored but receive the support they are entitled to;
- Create a social housing stock which will house homeless families in a way which will integrate them into broader Georgian society;
- Find policy solutions for homeless families including considering allocating empty State owned IDP accommodation to homeless non- IDP families.



Six year old **Reziko** has been living in the former Kviri Hotel since he was born. He lives with his IDP father and non-IDP mother. DRC came across Reziko and his mother Nino in the small hallway of the hotel (similar to the one you see on the picture) where Nino was cooking food as there is not enough space in their room.



**Angelina**, a female IDP from Abkhazia has been living in this one room without windows with her IDP husband and two small children (11 and 3 years old) for several years. Originally Angelina was registered as an IDP in Pakhulani village in Samegrelo but has never lived there. Their only source of income is TSA.



**Eter T.** is a socially vulnerable non-IDP originally from the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region of Georgia. She informally settled in the Kviri Hotel more than 19 years ago together with IDPs. Since 2011 she has been a recipient of Targeted Social Allowance (TSA) for socially vulnerable families.

Eteri lives in two rooms that total just 20 square metres together with her daughter (23) and son (35). She says her family's only source of income is TSA and she has no other place to go (she doesn't have any property in her home village) and if she is evicted she will be homeless.

## Endnotes:

1. Paragraph P of Article 4 of the Law on Social Assistance.
2. Source: Georgian Public Defender's Special Report on the Right to Adequate Housing, p. 13. Tbilisi, 2015.
3. Source: Georgian Public Defender's Special Report on the Right to Adequate Housing, p. 14. Tbilisi, 2015.
4. Source: Georgian Public Defender's Special Report on the Right to Adequate Housing, p. 12. Tbilisi, 2015.
5. Source: Georgian Public Defender's Special Report on the Right to Adequate Housing, p. 13. Tbilisi, 2015
6. Source: Georgian Public Defender's Special Report on the Right to Adequate Housing, p. 13. Tbilisi, 2015
7. Source: Georgian Public Defender's Special Report on the Right to Adequate Housing, p. 15. Tbilisi, 2015
8. MRA October 16th, 2015/ Letter # 01-02/08/27040

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