

### 3. Social housing

#### Description

Social housing is intended to help people who are unable to secure adequate accommodation for themselves. It serves as a counterbalance to the market driven allocation of housing and may be needed if people on low incomes are unable to afford private rents. There is no single definition of social housing, and it varies in form from one country to another. It is generally built by government agencies or non-profit organisations and may include both privately and publicly-owned dwellings. The authorities define rules that govern the type of housing built and its allocation. Social housing units may be partially or fully subsidised, and tenants may or may not pay for utilities, services, maintenance and repairs. Where social housing stock or land for construction is available, it improves disadvantaged IDPs' access to decent and affordable accommodation.



Photo: Social housing in Varketili district, Tbilisi. SDC, 2010



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## Case study: Social housing in supportive environments (Armenia, Georgia, Serbia)

Snapshot	
<b>Practice</b>	Social housing in supportive environments (SHSE) (Serbia, 2002; Armenia, 2004 to 2008 and 2010 to 2012; Georgia, 2007 to 2012)
<b>Main actors</b>	Government agency for IDPs, other ministries and municipal authorities Local social work centres Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) Housing Centre (Serbia)
<b>Context</b>	The most vulnerable IDPs in protracted displacement live in inadequate temporary shelter and private accommodation. Return is not possible for IDPs in Georgia in the absence of a solution to the conflict, and not desired by some IDPs in Serbia because of insecurity. Government policy in Georgia and Serbia has shifted towards accepting local integration as a settlement option. There is a complete lack of public housing stock as a result of privatisation following the transition from the socialist system
<b>Target group</b>	Vulnerable IDPs and refugees who wish to integrate locally rather than return and are in need of housing assistance, plus vulnerable members of the local population
<b>Summary</b>	SDC developed the SHSE model as part of its humanitarian programme in Serbia. It aims to improve housing conditions and social inclusion for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society through non-institutional protection in an assisted living environment. Beneficiaries receive support from municipal social workers and from a “foster family”, which is at the centre of the supportive environment. Foster families are allocated an apartment in the same building based not only on need but also on the social, psychological and technical skills they can bring to their roles. The SHSE model has been replicated in Armenia and Georgia. In all three countries the buildings are owned and maintained by the municipal authorities, and families are accommodated rent-free as long as they meet the criteria for such assistance, which are reviewed each year.
<b>Strengths</b>	The practice provides <b>tenure security</b> in <b>habitable</b> housing and social protection for IDPs and vulnerable members of the local population. It fosters <b>social integration</b> by facilitating interaction between IDPs, foster families, social workers, neighbours and the wider community. In Armenia it led to the demolition of temporary housing and recovery of urban landscape.
<b>Key challenge(s)</b>	IDPs in Georgia were the most critical of SHSE and would have preferred to own their own homes. They felt the potentially limited tenure in social housing was <b>culturally inappropriate</b> . Other housing programmes for IDPs in Georgia offered housing ownership, which left some SHSE beneficiaries feeling they were being offered a less attractive option and treated unfairly. Foster family inputs varied because their role was not always clear. There is evidence that such arrangements do not negate the need for professional social workers. Considering the high level of vulnerability of this group, it is unlikely that they will move on from the SHSE. The implication is that this programme will require long-term and continuous investment from authorities. In areas where housing stock had been recently privatised, it was difficult to generate political interest in social housing programmes and policies. Stable and sustainable financing from the municipal budget to maintain SHSE has been an issue, including for social workers’ salaries.
<b>Factors for potential replicability</b>	Highly vulnerable IDPs in need of improved access to adequate housing Social housing is accepted as a culturally appropriate housing option Municipality ability and willingness to allocate land, provide infrastructure and manage social housing buildings

### Overview

The fall of the Soviet Union and the break-up of Yugoslavia led to numerous conflicts in the Balkans and the Caucasus that caused significant displacement. In Armenia, around 575,000 people were internally displaced as a result of its 1988-1994 conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh and an earthquake in the north in 1988. More than 360,000 refugees also arrived from Azerbaijan as a result of the conflict.

In Georgia, the conflicts in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia that began in 1991 forced several hundred thousand people to flee their homes. NATO air strikes that forced the withdrawal of Yugoslav troops from Kosovo in 1999 and the subsequent conflict displaced people both within Kosovo and to Serbia proper. Serbia also received around 600,000 refugees from conflicts in other countries of the former Yugoslavia.

Return remains impossible for most refugees and IDPs in these countries, which in addition to the conflict and displacement they experienced were also undergoing the transition from a socialist political system and planned economy to democracy and market-based economy. Displacement was one problem among many, and funds to address it were extremely scarce.

Temporary shelter offered in Armenia, Georgia and Serbia gradually became long-term accommodation for IDPs unable to find decent housing on their own or return to their places of origin. In Armenia, they lived in various types of temporary shelter including converted shipping containers or *domiks*, while in Georgia and Serbia collective centres were set up in public buildings such as schools and hospitals.

Such accommodation served its original purpose but was never intended as a long-term solution, and over time living conditions deteriorated significantly. Residents did not invest in improvements because they hoped to return or did not feel ownership of their space, and the government increasingly neglected them. Authorities in Georgia and Serbia pushed for IDPs’ return and initially had little incentive to improve living conditions in collective centres which could have facilitated their local integration.

Around 130,000 people, or half of Georgia’s IDPs, have been housed in collective centres for the duration of their displacement. In Serbia, the figure was around 100,000 refugees and 15,000 IDPs. There are no clear figures for the number of people accommodated in *domiks* in Armenia. Those who were able to do so on their own have left their temporary shelter, but many still require assistance to secure decent housing.

Public housing played a major role in the socialist system in all three countries, and the vast majority of stock was privatised and sold to sitting tenants during their economic transition. The privatisations were not, however, accompanied by plan for the development of the housing sector. No new national policies to provide affordable housing were put in place. The region has since experienced a construction boom and a rapid rise in property prices. New property is rarely affordable for low or middle-income families, and even less so for vulnerable social groups, such as IDPs, who have few options to secure decent housing.

The social systems of all three countries have also been heavily burdened by their economic transition, and increasing numbers of vulnerable people have largely been left to fend for themselves in the changing environment. They include IDPs, single elderly people, single parents, disaster victims, families without breadwinners, orphans and people with disabilities.

A policy shift in Serbia and Georgia towards acceptance of IDPs’ local integration - and that of refugees in the case of Serbia - opened the way for housing projects to be set up in the areas where they were living. Serbia adopted a national strategy on refugees and IDPs in 2002, which included the closure of collective centres. Five years later, Georgia adopted its state strategy on IDPs, which reflected a commitment to provide durable solutions through return, local integration and settlement elsewhere in the country. The subsequent action plan for the strategy’s implementation included measures to close some collective centres and relocate IDPs to improved housing, and to renovate and privatise others. Further housing solutions have been implemented since then.

### Programme design

The “social housing in a supportive environment” (SHSE) model was developed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) as part of its humanitarian programme in Serbia. Its aim was to improve housing conditions and social inclusion for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society, including IDPs, through non-institutional protection in an assisted living environment.

Beneficiaries receive social support from a “foster family”, a central element of the programme which has been key to its success. Foster families are allocated an apartment in the same building based not only on need, but also the social, psychological and technical skills they can bring to providing a supportive environment for the other residents.

In addition to its principle aim, the model’s other objectives are to contribute to the implementation of state policies on IDPs; contribute to the closure of IDPs’ tem-



porary accommodation; provide a housing scheme that governments can take over and replicate; and build local authorities' capacity in social work. Having found the model to be effective and sustainable in Serbia, SDC incorporated it into its work in Armenia and Georgia. The Serbia programme was a finalist in the 2009 and 2014 World Habitat awards.

The project has two components, the construction and provision of social housing units and the creation of a supportive environment to facilitate the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. The design of the housing encourages integration and communication between residents. The buildings have a range of different-sized apartments and special attention is given to shared spaces such as common rooms, laundries and outdoor areas where social contact takes place.

Foster families and social workers are trained to support other residents in rebuilding their lives and to monitor their progress. They help with day-to-day problems, encourage the building of networks and relationships and ensure that community guidelines are respected.

The municipality allocates land for the development, and is responsible for the installation of utilities, phone line and roads; building maintenance and repair; the selection of beneficiaries and foster families; the provision of financial and other support to foster families; the appointment of a focal point for social care; and the establishment of a mechanism for utility and other payments. It also pays the social workers' salaries in some cases.

SDC financed the construction of the initial housing units, and managed and coordinated the implementation of the programme and its funding. Relevant ministries were also involved as well as autonomous regional and municipality governments. The buildings are owned by the municipality and families live there rent-free as long as they fulfil the criteria for such assistance, which is reviewed on an annual basis.

### Serbia

The Serbia programme began in 2002 and included IDPs from Kosovo as its main beneficiaries from 2006. By 2014, more than 1,000 apartments had been built in 42 municipalities. Refugees and IDPs who had been living in collective centres make up 80 per cent of beneficiaries, and the remainder are members of the local population. Neither the beneficiaries nor their foster families pay rent, and each municipality determines whether the foster families, who are themselves refugees or IDPs, are paid for their services.

Local Centres for Social Work allocate housing units to elderly people and couples, self-supporting single parents

and families with ill or disabled members. Foster families take part in capacity building workshops focussing on topics such as being a good host, providing help and encouragement, establishing dialogue and the amicable resolution of conflicts.

Special care is taken to ensure that the housing provided is in keeping with national standards in order to avoid stigmatisation and social segregation. The programmes are integrated into the host town or cities' urban planning strategy and the developments are set among other residential buildings with access to the transport network and other public services. Due attention is given to the needs of the people with disabilities. The building ground floor is barrier-free and the apartments are accessible for the disabled.

The main partners in the project were the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Commissariat for Refugees of the Republic of Serbia, UNHCR and local Centres for Social Work. Municipalities were selected based on the number of refugees, IDPs and collective centres in their area, their interest and capacity to participate in the programme, the land available, the vulnerability of potential beneficiaries and the commissariat's strategic plans. SDC led the programme in terms of construction until 2004 when its office closed, after which the local NGO Housing Centre, UNHCR, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Intersos and others took over.

### Armenia

Following a study tour to visit the programme in Serbia, the SHSE model was first implemented in Armenia from 2004 to 2008 in the Kanaker-Zeyton district of Yerevan. It was then replicated in Goris, Syunik region from 2010 to 2012. In Kanaker-Zeyton, the NGO Mission Armenia was the owner and operator of the social housing, while in Goris it was the municipality. The two areas were chosen because they had a significant number of IDPs and refugees unable to return to their homes because of persecution, the threat of violence, difficult socio-economic conditions and the presence of landmines.

A committee made up of representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Urban Development, regional and municipal government, local NGOs and SDC selected the beneficiaries and foster families. They were chosen from IDPs, refugees and other marginalised people living in poor conditions in *domiks*, administrative buildings and private accommodation. The *domiks* were removed as part of the programme, allowing urban space to be recovered.

In Kanaker-Zeyton, one social housing building was built. Each one had a lower ground and ground floor devoted to social and health facilities and two upper floors with

14 two-person apartments, two larger apartments for foster families and one communal room per floor. In Goris, three two and three-storey buildings were built with apartments of various sizes and a basement with laundry facilities, storage rooms and a common room. The facility housed 101 beneficiaries, including two foster families. All apartments have kitchens, bathrooms, telephone lines, TV antennas and a gas central heating system, and are accessible for people with disabilities. Shops and social facilities on the ground floor and a mobile phone carrier cellular antenna placed on the roof generate income for building maintenance.

The Syunik regional government is also a signatory to the programme agreement, sharing a commitment with the municipality to contribute land and infrastructure, support urban planning and expand local authorities' role in social housing. The Goris programme provides social housing and protection in line with the long-term strategies of the urban development and social affairs ministries, and both agreed to refer to its results in Armenia's policies on social and affordable housing.

In July 2010, a social housing policy was adopted by the government of Armenia. It was based on experience with the SDC programme. Later, three social housing units were built financed from the state budget in the town of Maralik, in the northern Shirak region. The SHSE model and selection criteria were replicated.

### Georgia

Based on the experience in Armenia, similar programmes were implemented in Georgia from 2007 to 2012 over several phases. SDC chose to work in Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Zugdidi, Gori, Rustavi and Bolnisi, given their high numbers of IDPs. The pilot project comprised four two-storey buildings with 28 apartments and communal facilities with space for around 70 IDPs and vulnerable members of the local population. Ten two-storey buildings, each with 14 apartments, were then constructed

in five locations. Over its three phases, the programme provided housing for over 250 IDPs and 120 local people.

SDC led the implementation of the programme. Its partners included the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees, the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, the Adjara autonomous region's Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, UNHCR, UNDP, the Italian Development Cooperation and the municipalities involved.

With SDC funding, during the last phase of the programme UNDP trained municipal staff in the basics of social work and the management of SHSE facilities and drafted guidelines for social housing and future agreements between beneficiaries and municipalities. SDC and UNDP also advised the government on possible amendments to national legislation on social housing.

The Georgia programme also included advocacy to promote the SHSE approach among government officials. Given that the government does not provide social housing and there is only limited state funding available for the repair of IDPs' shelters, SDC focused its efforts on pushing for a national social housing strategy and the creation of a dedicated government unit responsible for the issue.

### Impact and challenges

An external review of the programmes in all three countries was conducted in 2009. For Armenia and Georgia, it concluded: "Continuation of the project is justified by its demonstrated effectiveness, the magnitude of remaining needs, pending achievement of the main policy goal and a generally positive outlook regarding the project's impact and sustainability."<sup>1</sup>

For Serbia, it found: "Services of social protection through SHSE have provided an adequate response to the needs of extremely vulnerable refugees, internally displaced



Social housing in Goris, SDC

persons and domicile population ... This form of social protection has provided a high level of beneficiaries' social inclusion and has significantly influenced improvement of their living conditions."<sup>2</sup>

### Improved living conditions

The SHSE approach improved living conditions and quality of life for IDPs and other vulnerable people in all three countries substantially, and the 2009 external review in Serbia found that beneficiaries gave the programme seven out of ten for satisfaction. They highlighted better housing conditions, convenient transport, healthcare facilities and post offices,<sup>3</sup> and the fact that their children attended primary and secondary school regularly. Some families also invested in the installation of telephone lines and cable television, landscaping and construction of auxiliary buildings.

One beneficiary in Georgia had suffered from cancer and could not work for five years. She believes the improved living conditions the SHSE programme provided were instrumental in her going into remission. Another said she had been renting a crowded and dilapidated apartment with relatives before becoming a programme beneficiary, and that she "felt better" in her new housing and was "very satisfied" with the conditions, particularly the furniture and hot water. She said she did not see an opportunity to move elsewhere because she was unable to afford to pay rent.<sup>4</sup>

Beneficiaries in Georgia were less satisfied with the lack of livelihood and employment opportunities, the fact that they are not able to buy their apartments and uncertainty about how long they will be able to stay given the annual review of their eligibility.<sup>5</sup> Those who benefitted from programmes implemented before 2005 also complained about the small flats, shared electricity meters and the expectation that two unrelated people would share accommodation.

It took more than two years to build a sense of community among the new inhabitants, and meantime some families were moved out because they disturbed other beneficiaries or failed despite warnings to respect the house rules.

### Foster families

Some foster families in Serbia have been exceptionally active. They have informed social workers about tenants' financial issues, cooperated with NGOs on income generation activities, led the development of project proposals, held training sessions and literary competitions, helped tenants access the local soup kitchen and initiated joint cleaning and maintenance.<sup>6</sup>

Others have focused solely on maintenance issues, and have not organised other activities or engaged in media-

tion and have generally relied too much on social workers. Tenants often do not understand the foster families' roles, leading to unrealistic expectations.

The initial plan was for beneficiaries to pay their foster families for their services in proportion to their income, which was meant to engender responsibility and trust. In reality, however, it created tension and open conflict when it emerged that the municipality was paying for the foster families of less well-off beneficiaries. Some municipalities now pay all foster families in addition to offering free housing, while others provide them only with free housing in lieu of their services. Foster families reportedly fulfil their role better when they are paid for their work.

In Georgia, the foster family element of the programme was cancelled shortly after the first four housing units were built in Tbilisi and other municipalities did not appoint them.

### Preference for property ownership

The general preference for home ownership in all three countries was one of the main barriers to acceptance of the programme. Many people perceive ownership as the only means of guaranteeing tenure security, and mistrust of government institutions is widespread. Beneficiaries complained that they would neither be allowed to own their housing nor be given unlimited tenure, and some felt that social housing offered them second-best, compared with other projects that led to ownership. They were also sceptical that the programme would solve their poverty and shelter needs.

The issue was particularly salient in Georgia, where displaced families were more critical and reluctant to participate in SHSE programmes than members of the local community.<sup>7</sup> Social workers reported that beneficiaries regularly asked if they could be given ownership of their housing, and expressed fear of having to move elsewhere, which they referred to as "another displacement".

The same fear emerged strongly in Serbia during monitoring in 2005 and led to the criteria for continued eligibility for the programme and conditions for termination being revised. Concern may have dissipated since, given that most beneficiaries have remained, though some young people have moved out to pursue higher education or get married.

### Dependency syndrome

Following their experiences of war, displacement and poor living conditions, the capacity of many IDPs to adjust to their new environment is low. Instead they rely on state benefits as their main source of income. Their dependency on state assistance is also linked to their vulnerability which is one of the key beneficiary selection criteria for

social housing. In Georgia and Serbia, social workers said that unemployment was the biggest issue for beneficiaries, who asked for more financial help despite already receiving assistance with access to healthcare and utility payments. Some residents have difficulty in meeting their basic needs and paying communal services. Some beneficiaries of the Serbia programme have found employment,<sup>8</sup> but many have not regained their self-reliance. Self-reliance is not a goal of the SHSE social housing model, rather it is a solution for the most vulnerable IDPs who are unlikely to reach self-reliance.

### Law and policy

None of the three countries had laws or policies on social housing when the programme was first implemented. A new institutional set-up was needed to ensure social housing was linked with the social protection system. While the programmes ran, Serbia introduced a social housing law in 2009 and Armenia adopted a policy on the issue, including eligibility criteria, in 2010. Local governments have also increasingly recognised their responsibilities towards vulnerable people.

Georgia still has no such framework, but Tbilisi city council asked SDC for technical training that would equip it to design and build social housing independently by 2013. The municipalities of Rustavi, Bolnisi, Batumi and Zugdidi later asked for the same support. This allowed SDC to undertake its planned withdrawal from SHSE activities after transferring its knowledge and technical expertise. It also devised a set of planning and design standards for social housing,<sup>9</sup> which the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development adopted.

SDC also cooperated with academia in the development of two syllabuses, one on social space and urban development, and the other on social housing, social work and homelessness. Both are already being taught at the Tbilisi State, Iliia State and Georgia Technical universities.

### Municipal budgets

Stable and sustainable municipal funding for the SHSE programmes has been an issue. Each municipality pays for building maintenance, and utility costs are highly subsidised. The programmes are not self-sustaining, but they are likely to cost the state less in the long run than caring for vulnerable people when their situations become critical, when health costs in particular would be much higher.

### Conclusion

The SHSE approach is an innovative form of social protection for IDPs in Armenia, Georgia and Serbia. In all three countries it reinforced government policy to help IDPs integrate locally, provided them with adequate and affordable housing, and served as a way of close collective centres in a dignified way for the most vulnerable

people who could not secure housing on their own. The practice was also successful in that it improved the living conditions of other vulnerable members the local population, contributing to social cohesion.

Municipalities' capacity needs to be developed so that they can implement their own social and affordable housing programmes effectively. Significant time and open minds will be required to allow changes to take place, everyday practices to be transformed and new knowledge and skills to be acquired. Training at the initial stages of the programme was key to informing all partners in it about their obligations. Contracts with foster families should define their role and obligations more clearly.

IDPs' main concern about social housing, over ownership and unlimited tenure, also needs to be addressed. IDPs living in private accommodation should be eligible for social housing assistance, because their living conditions and tenure security can be worse than those in collective centres. The programmes took place in an institutional vacuum. Ideally a clear framework would be in place to define municipal budget allocations and the conditions for funding and the termination of right to use.

### Notes

1. SHSE Pilot Projects in Armenia and Georgia, external review report, p.32
2. Housing Centre and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, *Social Housing in a Supportive Environment (SHSE)*, 2010
3. *Ibid*
4. IDMC interview, October 2012
5. Housing Centre and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, *Social Housing in a Supportive Environment (SHSE)*, 2010
6. *Ibid*
7. Institute of Social Studies and Analysis, Survey of Target Groups' Attitudes and Expectations Related to Social Housing, May 2011
8. Monitoring indicators in Serbia showed "a certain percentage" of people capable of work and an increased employment rate among tenants between 2002 and 2005
9. SDC, Urban Planning and Architectural Standards for Social Housing Architectural Design