

# Kyrgyzstan



Located in Central Asia on the historic Silk Road, Kyrgyzstan is a mountainous country famous for its natural heritage including its high peaks, glaciers, lakes, snow leopards and other attractions. The Kyrgyz Republic gained its independence in 1991 and embarked on a transition to a democratic system of governance and a market economy.

Today, the country of 5.3 million is host to a growing private sector and a vibrant civil society. The economy has grown at an average rate of 4.4 percent since 2000, and the percentage of the population living in poverty has slipped from 52 percent in 2000 to 39.9 percent who live on less than \$2 a day in 2006.

## COUNTRY FACTS

Population: 5,356,869 (July 2008 est.)

Capital: Bishkek

Area: 77,181 sq miles

Ethnic groups: Kyrgyz 64.9%, Uzbek 13.8%, Russian 12.5%, Dungan 1.1%, Ukrainian 1%, Uyгур 1%, other 5.7% (1999 census)

Languages: Kyrgyz 64.7% (official), Uzbek 13.6%, Russian 12.5% (official), Dungan 1%, other 8.2% (1999 census)

Religions: Muslim 75%, Russian Orthodox 20%, other 5%

After the collapse of Soviet communism, Kyrgyzstan cut a variety of social benefits, leaving families with fewer resources to pay for housing. Access to basic services such as water and sewage is limited in Kyrgyzstan, especially for impoverished people and those living in rural areas. It is estimated that less than 20 percent of rural households have access to running water in their homes. Seeking relief from rural poverty, many people have moved to informal settlements on the fringes of Bishkek and other large cities, where they lack secure tenure and decent housing. Some settlements are built in areas where severe flooding can occur.

Nearly 70 percent of Kyrgyzstan's population lives in substandard housing or is homeless. It is not unusual for three generations to be crowded into a single room with no heating or water supply.

## Habitat for Humanity in Kyrgyzstan

Habitat for Humanity Kyrgyzstan was established in 1999. To date, more than 900 housing interventions have been completed, ranging from new house builds, completion of half-built homes, renovations to condominium block buildings, and the installation of ecologically friendly toilets. Habitat Kyrgyzstan has also partnered with the Open Society Institute to provide decent homes to families where one or more members have a mental health illness – some of the most vulnerable people in society.

In 2004, HFH Kyrgyzstan started an innovative building method incorporating cane reed. Houses are built using a local grown cane reed, which is environmentally friendly, energy-efficient, seismically stable, affordable and easy for volunteers to use in construction. Using this technology, families save about 40 percent on

## HABITAT FACTS

Families Served to Date\*

**1,275**

\* new houses, rehabilitations, repairs, technical, financial and other services

International Volunteers Hosted to Date

**350**

construction costs. To reduce energy consumption, an under-floor heating system is installed. Combined with the cane reed construction, it saves 75 percent in energy costs. The floor heating system is also unique, using extra thin locally produced pipes, minimizing the volume of circulated hot water used for the heating. These pipes are connected with an electric heater, which uses only 30 litres of water. Habitat Kyrgyzstan's innovative cane reed project won a \$116,389 World Bank Award in Washington D.C. in 2006.

Habitat also works with condominium associations to identify and repair their buildings' most serious problems, usually the result of a lack of maintenance of common areas. Renovations, such as fixing a roof, allow Habitat to serve scores of families in a single building for one, low cost. Many of these basic improvements, such as upgrade or installing new sanitation pipes and appliances, repairing and installing heating systems, have a dramatic effect on health and safety.

In rural areas of Kyrgyzstan, many communities have no access to central water and sewage systems. In response to this need, Habitat developed in partnership with another NGO an ecologically friendly toilet. The eco-toilet is an innovative, low-cost solution that provides clean, sanitary conditions and also prevents pollution of soil and water from waste products. The design is simple and can be constructed using local materials.

People with mental disabilities are among the poorest and most marginalized in every society, especially in Central Asia, where they are often isolated from society. Many people with disabilities and their families have trouble obtaining and keeping paid work because of the stigma associated with mental health issues and additional responsibilities on family members to offer care. Without means of earning income or adequate social assistance, many mentally disabled people live in apartments that are in desperate need of renovation and



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lack adequate living space for all members of the families. By the end of 2007, Habitat and its partner had renovated four apartments and two houses in Bishkek.

### Global Village

Global Village is the name for Habitat for Humanity's international short-term volunteering program. Global Village is an active program involving students, churches, individuals and corporations from all over the world that come and work with local volunteers to bring a change in the lives of families in need of housing.

HFH Kyrgyzstan hosts every year up to 15 international teams of volunteers from the United States, Great Britain, Ireland, and Japan. The fabulous nature along the ancient Silk Road and the tremendous need of the people are two constants that capture visitors' hearts and help them commit to become long-term partners of Habitat for Humanity. HFH Kyrgyzstan is the host of an annual Women Build event that brings women from all over the world and Kyrgyzstan to Bishkek in the first week of July. The Women Build is a high-profile event showing the power of women to change the world.

### HABITAT HIGHLIGHTS

- Habitat Kyrgyzstan's innovative cane reed project was recognized at the prestigious World Bank Development Marketplace competition in Washington, D.C., in 2006. The project was among 30 winners chosen from 2,500 applicants from 55 countries.
- So far, three condominium towers – all in Bishkek – housing 529 families have been served.
- A microfinance partnership for home improvements has served 23 families to date.
- Three eco-toilets were built in 2007, with another 25 set for 2008.
- Six apartments for mentally ill people and their families were renovated in 2007, with 12 more planned in 2008.

### National Office in Kyrgyzstan

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