

Country profile: BULGARIA



Country facts

Capital:
Sofia

Main country facts:
Joined NATO in 2004, joined the EU in 2007

Population:
More than 7 million

Urbanization:
71 percent live in cities

Life expectancy:
73 years

Unemployment rate:
9.1 percent

Population living below poverty line:
14 percent

Habitat facts

When the program started:
2001

Highlights:
In 2009, Habitat Bulgaria's photo exhibition went on display at the national airport.

Families served:
More than 850

Global Village volunteers hosted:
More than 70

Housing solutions:
New houses
Renovations and repairs
Energy-efficient housing
Microloans to vulnerable groups

Habitat for Humanity in Bulgaria

Habitat for Humanity Bulgaria has been active since 2001. It runs a diverse, innovative program tailored to meet the local housing need. Habitat works with families and individuals to improve the housing situation by offering support to single mothers, people with disabilities, and low-income and vulnerable groups.

The housing need in Bulgaria

During the communist days, the government provided loans for families to buy low-income housing in poor-quality prefabs. Once a market economy took hold, the responsibility for housing fell on the local authorities, who have no resources to deal with the problem. As a result, more and more homes need major repairs while many homeowners cannot afford even basic maintenance of their flats. The EU accession significantly increased the cost of property in Bulgaria, especially in the capital, pricing more and more families out of the market.

The majority of Bulgarians own a house or a flat, but they struggle to maintain them. Many live in big blocks of flats constructed 40-50 years ago. Maintenance of these buildings has become a severe challenge for the homeowners, as the structures are rapidly deteriorating.

Despite the new initiatives for making public space more accessible, most of the homes of people with disabilities do not meet their special needs. At the same time, over the past 20 years, rural areas experienced a major loss of employment, income and services. Living standards in villages are below the 1990 level.

How Habitat addresses the need

Habitat Bulgaria is working in partnership with local non-governmental organizations and government and microfinance institutions to provide assistance to low-income and socially disadvantaged families for improving living conditions through a variety of projects.

Here are some examples of Habitat projects in Bulgaria:

Preventing child abandonment

Bulgaria has the highest number of institutionalized children among the European countries. Some 16,000 children are in some way separated from their families; almost half by living in state institution. Bad living and housing conditions are one of the most common reasons why children are being taken away from their parents. Over the next three years Habitat Bulgaria and its 5 local partners will identify families at risk and provide them with small home improvements loans to improve their housing conditions and thus prevent child abandonment and institutionalization.

Educating about energy-efficient upgrades of flats and condominiums

It is estimated, that almost 50 percent of energy consumption in Europe is related to housing. The energy savings resulting from home retrofitting are estimated between 40 to 60 percent. Through its project, Habitat Bulgaria will increase awareness and knowledge of condominium managers of the benefits from energy efficiency upgrades and encourage them to start EE renovations. The project aims at training some 450 managers from 15 different districts of Bulgaria.

Financial education trainings

With financial support from the Citi Foundation, Habitat for Humanity Bulgaria runs financial education training and seminars for low-income families. The seminars focus on building awareness as to how low-income households can gain control of their financial resources and better manage limited capital. Training is designed to give knowledge, skills and attitudes to adopt good money management practices for family earning, spending, saving, borrowing and investing.

Housing microfinance

HFH Bulgaria aims to improve living standards of low-income households throughout Bulgaria. The project offers low-income families access to loans with reasonable terms and interest rates. These loans will allow 720 families to finance self-help home improvement activities and energy efficient renovations to improve their living conditions.

Meet a Habitat family

Zoya and Slavcho Iordanov and their two boys Emil (3) and Ivan (8) live in a two-room apartment that is part of a small block of flats with. The apartment is very damp and has mold in the room where the family sleeps with the two kids. The bathroom is also in bad condition.

Zoya's parents are still supporting her family - they always help them in case some unforeseen situations occur. Her mother, Temenuzhka, is even the guarantor for the home renovation loan they received from Habitat. Zoya is hoping that after the renovation the mold will disappear and the bathroom will finally become cleaner and more comfortable and that her children will finally have a safe place to sleep in.



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Habitat for Humanity International is a global charity dedicated to eliminating poverty housing. Since its foundation in 1976, Habitat has built and renovated more than 400,000 houses worldwide, providing simple, decent, affordable shelter for 2 million people.

In Europe and Central Asia Habitat for Humanity International works with families in need in 23 countries, building and repairing houses, offering housing microfinance services, improving water and sanitation, working on disaster response and advocating for affordable housing. In this region, Habitat has served more than 11,000 families together with volunteers and homeowners. Find out more at www.habitatueurope.org.