

Olympics Bring Renewal, Resettlement

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Khlystov's lack documents proving ownership of their house, which was demolished for the Sochi Olympics. **Artur Levedev**

SOCHI — The workers arrived at Sergei Khlystov's gate on a Friday evening to bulldoze his home and clear a path for sewage pipes to the Olympic village being built in Sochi.

Khlystov and his 33-year-old son-in-law, Maxim Samokhval, at first tried to block the bulldozers but then stood aside and watched as the two-story house was destroyed.

The earthmovers ended Khlystov's battle to stay in his house, one of the last razed in the Mirny neighborhood to make way for the Winter Olympics in 2014.

New homes are being provided for Sochi residents displaced by the reconstruction of their town. But such is the importance attached to the Olympic project that people who don't want to move have no option but to get out of the way of the bulldozers.

What sealed the fate of the Khlystov family was the fact that they had failed to prove they

owned their property. Samokhval's wife, Tatyana, enlisted the help of the local priest and local authorities, but to no avail.

"She went to the spiritual authorities and the secular authorities," Samokhval said. "One said 'pray' and the other said 'sue.'"

All along this stretch of the Black Sea coast, houses have been torn down and thousands of people have been resettled as a result of the Olympic building boom that has overtaken this city of 340,000 in the shadow of the Caucasus Mountains.

The air in Mirny is thick with cement dust. An overpass was built near Khlystov's home, and the house shook violently when holes were drilled for its pylons.

Construction of the Olympic venues and infrastructure alone is expected to cost more than \$6 billion, and half that amount will be privately financed.

The final bill for hosting the Olympics in Sochi, most of whose spas and resort hotels date from the days of Stalin, who died in 1953, is likely to end up much higher.

Just out of sight of Khlystov's garden, the Iceberg Stadium, the jewel of the Olympic Park, glows pale blue in the dark and seems to hover over the churned-up mud around it.

An undulating steel structure encased in glass, it will host the figure skating in 2014 and is one of six stadiums to be built at the complex as venues for ice events and Olympic ceremonies.

Hotels, sports facilities and general improvements are under construction in the city, and work is going on in the mountains above Sochi, where other events will be held.

This means upheaval for some residents. The cost of resettling 1,500 families in the path of the bulldozers has been borne by the government of the relatively wealthy Krasnodar region, in which Sochi lies.

Such programs are not unusual for an Olympics. Rights groups criticized China for forced evictions before the 2008 Beijing Games, with some estimates indicating that 1.5 million people were moved, many against their will.

The Chinese government said the demolition of homes in parts of Beijing earmarked for development before the Olympics was carried out fairly and legally.

A few London residents were also rehoused because of construction work before this year's Olympics in Britain.

In Sochi, not everyone is unhappy about having to move into new homes in exchange for being uprooted.

Viktor Altunyan, an employee in the Sochi Department of Culture, was moved from a small house in Mirny to a newly built village a short distance away near the border with Georgia's Abkhazia region.

He now lives in a house more than twice the size with his mother, wife and young child,

surrounded by almost identical homes decorated with similar paint.

"The president's words came true for me," Altunyan said in reference to President Vladimir Putin's pledge that people should not be moved into worse housing. "It's better here in terms of location and utilities, electricity and water. It's only positive."

Altunyan has put some plants and a young persimmon tree in his garden, and says he no longer misses his old house, which he built himself and lived in for 15 years.

But Khlystov, 52, says he and his family were cheated out of fair compensation by a bureaucratic loophole. They couldn't prove they owned the land on which their house was built, a condition for receiving a new house in exchange.

On marshals' orders, half the house had been bulldozed a few days before the workers, accompanied by police, returned to finish the job on Sept. 21, even though the family continued to live in the house with Samokhval's children, ages 3 and 8.

The New York-based watchdog Human Rights Watch had urged the International Olympic Committee to intervene, saying "the illegal eviction of a family in Sochi casts a dark shadow over preparations for the 2014 Winter Olympic Games."

Other Sochi residents complained that compensation has in some cases been arbitrary, and some have accused the local authorities of damaging the environment and harming wildlife.

But authorities have defended their actions. The Krasnodar region's deputy governor, Alexei Saurin, has been quoted by local media as saying 15.5 billion rubles was spent before the end of 2011 on resettling 90 percent of the people whose homes were demolished.

"The state built villages, perfect houses. I don't have such a house," Dmitry Chernyshenko, President of the Sochi 2014 Organizing Committee, told reporters in Moscow.

Without commenting on the Khlystov case, he said the people being relocated were getting a fair deal but some were trying to take advantage of the system.

"Sometimes people built buildings without permission on land that did not belong to them," he said. "They are trying to earn money from the state."

About 180 cases will be settled in court, most of them disputes over valuation, Saurin said. In cases where cash compensation was not provided, the government built seven new residential developments and apartment blocks, he said.

Khlystov said he had lived in Mirny for more than three decades since being given some land there in the Soviet era.

But Oksana Rafalskaya, a spokeswoman for the Krasnodar regional government's Olympic department, said the Khlystovs never established the right to use the land for a residence, so it remained government property. She said Khlystov's extended family had been offered apartments as compensation.

The start of the games in February 2014 is now less than 500 days away, and officials say construction of the sports facilities is about 70 percent complete.

"When the construction is over, it will be better," said Nina Shishimorova, a neighbor of the Khlystovs in her late 50s. "We already have roads, and they've started picking up the garbage again. Compared with the way the rest of Russia is living, we don't live too badly."

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