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- The “more favored” families have their own apartments in new housing districts—desirable, even though commuting to work may take an hour by bus and subway and shopping is difficult because the best stores are clustered in the center of the city.

- The “most favored” citizens live in or near downtown. They are often members of the *nomenclatura*—officials of important political, military, state security, economic, scientific, cultural, educational, and worker organizations. The most heavily subsidized city-dwellers, they pay the same low rent per square meter as those elsewhere in shared apartments. The most advantaged thus become the system’s biggest beneficiaries.

### Closed Cities

Whether they are old inner-city residences or new, prefabricated apartment blocks that seem to have sprung from a single blueprint, most urban housing structures are not “differentiated” for middle-class or working-class folk. In one older building, a typical 450 square-foot apartment with four bedrooms, kitchen, and one bath may house: a retired couple; a factory worker and his divorced wife and their daughter, all still together because he cannot find other lodging; a widow; and a young couple who work during the day and study at night. Another apartment of similar size may have only two families. A third may accommodate just one (privileged) family.

But “differentiation” is increasing. Government departments, the armed forces, the Committee of State Security (KGB), individual factories, and other organizations build apartments solely for their own employees. In the buildings erected by the Writers’ Union on Moscow’s Red Army Street near Dynamo Station, high-ranking people not only get first crack at apartments but can also obtain them for their relatives.

Class also counts in cooperatives, the state-built apartments primarily purchased by professionals and other members of the “intelligentsia” who pay to get better housing faster than do ordinary workers. The down payment for a two-room (plus kitchen) unit may be 6,500 rubles, more than three years’ pay for the typical industrial worker averaging 175 rubles a month. And space in the rare co-op that is near a subway station (most are built in remote districts) may require bribes of 1,000 rubles to the co-op chairman and the inspector who processes the application. Still, owners exhibit much pride of place. A Moscow engineer told a Westerner: “See our block. . . . We live in one made up entirely of cooperative apartments. Around us—over there,

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and there—are workers' apartments. You see the difference very clearly in the mornings. The lights in workers' homes go on at seven, or earlier. In cooperative housing they may not be on until eight or nine."

Most of the Soviet Union's smaller cities and towns are unexciting and short of meat, butter, and better quality consumer goods and services. But the authorities do not want Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Kharkov, and other better supplied centers to be overrun by migrants; permission to move to the Big City is rarely granted. No lists of "closed" cities are published, but entry is controlled by a system built around the *propiska*, a residence permit that is affixed to the internal passport that everyone must carry. To live in a large city one must have a *propiska*. To be eligible for this permit, one must have housing. For that one needs—a *propiska*!

For a would-be migrant from perhaps the Caucasus or Murmansk, success depends on several factors, among them the popularity of the city (Moscow is the hardest to get into) and the person's profession, need, and "trustworthiness" based on his *kharakteristiki* (references). The steps, from acquiring a *propiska* to receiving comfortable housing, may take decades.

Without the sponsorship of, say, a government agency or factory, or an apartment elsewhere to exchange, one's chance of moving to a prized city is next to nil. The more prestigious an individual's job, the greater the demand for his skills, or the higher his party rank, the better his chances. Ordinary laborers may also succeed, if their services are needed—and if dormitory beds are available. A person from the provinces may become a *dvornik*, the live-in concierge who cleans the hallways of an apartment building and serves as an agent for the local police; it has been difficult to get Muscovites to take such work.

### Beating the System

How does the would-be urbanite proceed? First, a residence must be acquired; the *propiska* is always for a specific street address. Thus, to get on a waiting list for an apartment, one must first find a room to occupy as a subtenant. Then one goes to the local housing office to see the *pasportist*, the official in charge of residence permits. He takes the *propiska* application to the district police station, where it is processed.

The next hurdle, for one who gets a *propiska*, is to move into an apartment of his own. If one already enjoys the minimum "sanitary norm" of nine square meters of space, getting on the waiting list for new quarters is virtually impossible—without