

November

Towards a national system of rehabilitation and reintegration for former prisoners in Kazakhstan

Karla Nur / Voxpopuli

Rehabilitation centre for former prisoners, Pavlodar, Kazakhstan.



Funded by the Norwegian Embassy in Kazakhstan, November's meeting was just one of a number of high-level meetings, events and training courses organised by our Central Asia office last year as part of a two-year project to support the successful re-integration of former prisoners into the community.

Kazakhstan has had considerable success in reducing its prison population over the last few years. Whilst good news, this has led to increased pressure on the limited services supporting former prisoners. In 2010, 18,898 prisoners were released from Kazakh institutions and 15,185 in 2011. Four out of ten newly released prisoners have no home to go to, seven out of ten are unemployed, six out of ten are drug dependant and one in five have a disability or need medical care.

In 2011, responsibility for support services for former prisoners were decentralised from the Prison Service to the 'akimats' or local authorities, many of which were ill-informed about their new role. Often rehabilitation services were and continue to be provided by small NGOs with limited capacity to cope with increasing demand.

Our project in Central Asia aims to work with government – both national and local – through a combination of advocacy, training and expert support, to create a government-led programme of rehabilitation and reintegration for prisoners following their release.

In November, PRI brought government officials, local authorities and third sector organisations together with international experts to develop a national plan to improve reintegration services for former prisoners in Kazakhstan.



Akimat officials discuss reintegration, Kazakhstan, 2012



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Our achievements

Greater official commitment to investing in the reintegration of prisoners

→ PRI's Central Asia team have worked closely particularly with the Prime Minister's office, providing expert support and helping to bring greater attention among state officials to the need for improved reintegration of former prisoners.

→ Reintegration has been recognised in the 2012-2015 National Strategy for Prison System Reform. In November, the Prime Minister's office directed all local authorities to report on their progress towards developing reintegration programmes for prisoners.

→ We also worked closely with parliamentarians from across the country. Inspired by the project, the Senate – the Kazakhstani parliament's upper house – organised a conference on crime prevention and rehabilitation, and PRI partnered with the parliament's lower house (Mazhilis) to organise a national conference on reintegration which was attended by 100 participants, including mayors and deputy mayors from all regions.

Rehabilitation centre saved from closure

→ When a rehabilitation centre in Shymkent was facing closure, PRI's Central Asia office took part in the negotiations with the city authorities to save it. Following this intervention, the centre is continuing to operate and the local authority is committed to supporting the service.

A small grants programme is supporting local organisations providing services

→ Five small grants were awarded to local NGOs from different regions to support their rehabilitation work. Organisations were deliberately chosen to cover work on different aspects of rehabilitation and reintegration.

Five small grants – five ideas for supporting former prisoners

1 **The Regional Centre for Information Technology** in North Kazakhstan set up a project to identify and document the needs of current and former prisoners upon release.

2 **The Committee on Monitoring Criminal Justice Reform and Human Rights** in Pavlodar surveyed former prisoners to identify educational needs, previous work experience and rehabilitation needs.

3 **The Centre for Monitoring Human Rights** in Almaty is supporting 145 young offenders to readjust to life outside prison, providing, for example, support to address aggression, and help accessing jobs and training.



4 **Kyzylorda Regional Society for the Protection of Consumer Rights** is supporting 12 prisoners with housing needs and social reintegration.

5 **Credo** in Karaganda piloted a practical project running a half-way house for 10-15 former prisoners and their families and offering educational courses.