

Women offenders and their children

Providing essential rehabilitative services for women offenders and their vulnerable children

Penal Reform International is currently running a project in Georgia to support the improvement of service provision for women prisoners, former prisoners and probationers who have experienced violence, discrimination and stigma. The project, which began in December 2016 and which will end in February 2019, is funded by the European Commission.

This summary outlines the findings of a mid-term evaluation of the project conducted by PRI's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer in collaboration with researchers from the Georgian Association of Social Workers, in March and April 2018.

“It's a partnership of NGOs – there are psychologists, legal aid and job opportunities – we meet all the needs of these isolated persons. This makes them feel more comfortable and trust us more.”

Lawyer from Article 42.

The objectives of the project are:

1. To support relevant rehabilitation and re-integration services for women offenders who have experienced violence and/or stigma and discrimination.
2. To increase accessibility of support services for vulnerable children affected by their mothers' imprisonment or conviction.
3. To improve capacity and coordination of state and non-state service providers to ensure better service provision for vulnerable women offenders and their children.



Purpose and methodology

The evaluation was conducted to establish what change the project has made so far, for the purposes of checking and adapting the design for the remainder of the project. The evaluation examined the achievement of objectives, the quality of services, outcomes for service users and the project's sustainability and management.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with prisoners, former prisoners and probationers and leadership and frontline staff from the partner NGOs and state institutions. Data was also collected from project documents.

Stakeholders involved in the project

- Women prisoners, probationers and former offenders
- Article 42 of the Constitution
- The Georgian Association of Professional Psychologists
- Georgian Association 'Women in Business'
- Development Charity Centre Tanaziari
- The Ministry of Corrections
- Women's Prison No. 5
- The National Probation Agency
- The Crime Prevention Centre

Main project activities

- Needs assessment conducted to establish needs of beneficiary group
- Regular meetings between NGO service providers and state institutions for information sharing purposes
- Services provided to women prisoners, former prisoners and probationers by the partner NGOs under the project, including:
 - legal aid
 - psychological counselling
 - work and training opportunities (hairdressing, beauty therapy, felt-making and sewing)
 - business start-up grants
 - a shelter for homeless former prisoners
 - financial support for healthcare
 - a dedicated nursery and childminder at the mother and baby unit

“ Although there are many partners and players we all act together, from the beginning, we planned topics of courses, we discuss results and progress achieved...[that] the project is managed under a single umbrella and single framework is a big achievement.”

Respondent from the Ministry of Corrections.



Key findings

01

Most women expressed high levels of satisfaction with the quality and frequency of services they had received through NGO partners

Legal aid and psychological counselling in particular proved pivotal in the rehabilitation process for some women, allowing them to overcome long-term problems such as obtaining custody of children, issues accessing identification documents or overcoming a lack of confidence due to the stigma faced by having been in prison.

02

The training and job opportunities helped boost women's self-esteem

Several respondents commented that the skills courses had a therapeutic effect, helped them regain their status as carers for their families, provided structure to their daily routines and gave them opportunities to socialise. Few former prisoners and probationers interviewed had been able to obtain long-term employment, although they were optimistic that the skills courses would be useful for finding work. While there are other factors which play a role in women offenders' ability to obtain jobs, including Georgia's high unemployment rate and age discrimination, the skills courses provided by the project aimed to equip women to become self-employed.

03

The cooperation of state and non-state bodies has ensured comprehensive service provision for women

All stakeholders said that coordination had increased and its quality had improved among NGOs and state providers. This coordination has produced synergies through the joined-up service provision; women accessing one service can be referred on to further services if they require them. There is also huge support from state institutions for this project; the women's prison director, the Ministry of Corrections and the National Probation Agency all commented on how necessary and valuable the services are.

**“ Courses keep us occupied;
I worry less and my psychological
condition improves. ”**

Woman prisoner.



It is too soon to determine the project's long-term impact on women's employment chances or on their long-term rehabilitation, reintegration with their families and communities and risk of reoffending; however, these should continue to be monitored and a plan

for sustainability and continuation of services needs to be developed. It is important that the women continue to feel supported after the end of the project.

Recommendations

- 01** Ensure engagement and participation of all staff involved in the project, including those who may not be high-level decision makers. Junior or front-facing staff may have valuable insights about the target group and their needs, due to their daily interactions with them.
- 02** Establish a comprehensive monitoring plan with achievable indicators which measure outcomes for women. Indicators could include women's confidence levels, feelings of reintegration, and relations with their family and community.
- 03** Lobby state bodies on the importance and necessity of state funding for rehabilitation services.
- 04** Support the sustainability of partner organisations through providing training on fundraising and proposal writing, so that they can continue to function and provide services to vulnerable women.
- 05** Ensure service providers communicate their services in a clear and accessible way to clients, both verbally and in writing. Processes should be explained to women throughout, to ensure they know what they can and cannot expect from the service.
- 06** Monitor the employment of the women to assess the effectiveness of the skills training, among other indicators. PRI should also undertake an assessment of the market to ensure that the skills trainings provided are in demand.

- 07** Lead a discussion with the Ministry of Corrections and Women's Prison No. 5 on allowing social workers to work with prisoners and their families before they are released, to promote healthy transitions back into the community.
- 08** Discuss with the National Probation Agency ways it can deliver services to female probationers without stigmatising or retraumatising them. This could be achieved through probation officers meeting clients in neutral locations or through providing more services through civil society organisations.
- 09** Consider supporting efforts aimed at combatting negative stereotypes towards former offenders by carrying out campaigns in the media. PRI and project partners could also consider working with the private sector and industry to encourage employment of former prisoners and probationers.

“It was not easy to spend seven years in prison doing nothing, [GAWB's] courses were proper rehabilitation.”

Former prisoner living at the shelter for homeless women.

Penal Reform International (PRI) is an independent non-governmental organisation that develops and promotes fair, effective and proportionate responses to criminal justice problems worldwide.

We promote alternatives to prison that support the rehabilitation of offenders, and promote the right of detainees to fair and humane treatment. We campaign for the prevention of torture and the abolition of the death penalty, and we work to ensure just and appropriate responses to children and women who come into contact with the law. We currently have programmes in Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, the South Caucasus and Sub-Saharan Africa, and work with partner organisations in other regions. To receive our monthly e-newsletter, please sign up at: www.penalreform.org/keep-informed.

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Photos: **Page 1:** Exhibition of traditional Georgian handicrafts made by women prisoners. **Page 2:** Sewing workshop at the women's prison © Georgian Association 'Women in Business'. **Page 3:** Roundtable attended by representatives from NGO service providers, PRI and state institutions.

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