

# Supporting the Improvement of Service Provision for Women Offenders Who Have Experienced Violence and Discrimination and Their Vulnerable Children

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*External project evaluation report*

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## Acronyms

CJR	Criminal Justice Reform
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EC	European Commission
GAWB	Georgian Association Women in Business
GPPA	Georgian Professional Psychologists' Association
ICPS	International Center for Prison Studies
LEPL	Legal Entity of Public Law
NORLAG	Norwegian Mission of Rule of Law Advisers to Georgia
NPM	National Preventive Mechanism
PRI	Penal Reform International
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
ROM	Results-Oriented Mission
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

## Executive Summary

The project *Supporting the Improvement of Service Provision for Women Offenders Who Have Experienced Violence and Discrimination and their Vulnerable Children* was implemented by PRI and its four partner civil society organizations with the European Commission's financial support. The project aimed at improving access to support services by women offenders who were subjected to violence and discrimination and their vulnerable children through providing access to comprehensive package of services and advocating for improved coordination among state and non-state service providers. The project activities were carried out in the capital and four regions of Georgia: Tbilisi, Kvemo Kartli, Shida Kartli, Kakheti and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti.

The evaluators were tasked to look at the project implementation and achieved results with respect to relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. The evaluators also focused on challenges encountered by the project team and the most valuable lessons learnt that can be informative while designing future interventions targeting women in the justice system and their children.

The evaluation took place in September – October 2019. The evaluation was of a qualitative nature and based on results of desk review (analysis of project related documents and reports pertaining to the penal system in Georgia) and semi-structured interviews with the following groups: program management team including PRI and four partner organizations, and project direct beneficiaries: former prisoners and probationers.

The evaluation found that over 300 women prisoners, former prisoners and probationers received various services including legal aid, psychological counseling, financial support to cover costs for medical tests and medication. More than 500 participants attended various vocational training courses and business management trainings. 97 underage children of women offenders received psychological counseling and/or social assistance such as food, hygiene products, educational materials, toys, wood for heating etc. 43 former prisoners and probationers received financial support to startup or expand own businesses. Over 10 information meetings and four round tables were organized to discuss the project findings and improvement opportunities for support service provision for women offenders with the participation of state and non-state stakeholders.

The findings of the evaluation suggest that almost all project outputs were delivered by the project end date. All three main outcomes were reached creating the foundation for the achievement of the specific objectives. Based on the feedback received from the project team and beneficiaries it was evident that the impact of the intervention was ensured by initiating change in a behavior and attitude in two different ways: (1) empowering beneficiaries with knowledge and skills to address challenges related to access to state supported social programs, employment, and parenting; and (2) raising awareness of state and non-state actors on gender specific approaches to rehabilitation programmes.

The assessment of the project managerial experience based on the feedback from PRI and partner organizations indicated that well-developed methodology and solid knowledge of specifics of targeted groups were the biggest strengths of the project team. Previous engagement with beneficiaries and already well established cooperation with relevant state agencies were contributing factors to achieving effectiveness of the intervention. Presence and active involvement of PRI in all project activities, as well as sharing international experience and expertise in gender specific approach were highly appreciated by the partner organizations. The management style employed by PRI was participatory and decisions were made on elaborations and consultations with the partners to ensure their buy-in of approaches and activities. Though it is also important to highlight that further formalization of relations and communication between partners could have led to improvements in gathering and sorting project related data as well as responsiveness to emerging challenges including delays in implementation timetable.

Considering the project scope and the specific approach applied during the implementation process, significant experience has been accumulated on support service delivery to women offenders and their children that can be of a great value for PRI project team as well as other stakeholders, including state actors. In particular, documenting and sharing experience of provision of comprehensive package of services targeting most vulnerable group of women offenders and encouraging close relations between imprisoned mothers and their underage children, will be the most valuable.

The research findings also highlight challenges that the project team have experienced during the project implementation process. Most of these challenges are of cultural and structural nature requiring a systemic approach to yield long-term and sustainable solutions. On the one hand, stigma associated with women offenders is strongly present in Georgian society that hampers rehabilitation and re-socialization process of former prisoners and probationers. On the other hand, ambiguousness related to the ongoing reform in the penal system creates uncertainties, disrupts cooperation between state agencies and non-governmental organizations and creates threats for decreasing transparency and accountability of already quite closed institution.

Despite the structural, and cultural challenges faced during the implementation process, the project team and beneficiaries have great interest in engaging in similar initiatives in future. In particular, interviewees expressed the commitment to contribute to the process of improving access to support services for women offenders and their children. The respondents, moreover, saw great potential for joint projects between PRI, partner organizations, central state agencies and municipalities on local levels.

## Introduction

The following document is an external evaluation report for the project *Supporting the Improvement of Service Provision for Women Offenders Who Have Experienced Violence and Discrimination and their Vulnerable Children*. The evaluation was commissioned by the project implementing organization Penal Reform International. The overall objective of the project was to empower women offenders who were subjected to violence and discrimination and their children, through improved access to support services. Two main strategies were used to achieve the project objective: (1) delivery of comprehensive package of support services and (2) capacity building and advocacy among service providers to improve cooperation and coordination. Women prisoners, former prisoners and probationers were recipients of services provided by the project team. Major state and non-state actors working in penal system were direct beneficiaries of advocacy and capacity building activities. The project covered the capital and four regions of Georgia: Tbilisi, Kvemo Kartli, Shida Kartli, Kakheti and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti. The project was a 26-months initiative. The implementation process started in December 2016 and was finalized by May 2019.

The external evaluation of the project was carried out four months after the project end date. The objectives of the external evaluation were laid down by the implementing organization in the ToR for an External Evaluation. It aimed to measure achievement of project outputs and outcomes, identify strengths and weaknesses of carried out activities, assess effectiveness of applied methodology and gather necessary evidence for future planning. Thus, the report provides a comprehensive overview of implemented activities and their contribution to the achievement of the overall objective.

The evaluation was carried out in September-October, 2019. The process was closely coordinated with PRI management to ensure that all key issues of organizational interest were addressed, though designing the assessment methodology, selecting the strategy and data gathering activities were held independently by evaluators.

The first part of the report provides the executive summary of research findings followed by the description of methodology. Section on relevance and rationale of the project provides analysis of project environment and assessment of relevance of the intervention. Chapter on analysis of outputs and outcomes presents the general overview of implemented activities and evaluation of their contribution to the process of improving access to support services for women offenders. The chapter follows the project's three specific objectives. The project contribution to the initiating change in the Georgian penal system is assessed in the chapter focusing on the empowerment of women offenders and the project impact. It illustrates the project's contribution to changing behavior and attitudes among main stakeholders. Analysis of the project management is presented in the chapter reflecting on the overall and day-to-day administration of project activities, also highlighting the specific role played by PRI. The chapter is followed by the case of

Tanaziari presenting the overview of a partner's contribution and approaches that could be informative for PRI's future programming especially outside the capital Tbilisi. Chapter focusing on lessons learned reflects on experiences of PRI and partner organizations gained throughout the project implementation process that might be interesting for other stakeholders working in the field. Recommendations and ideas for future projects are presented in the respective chapter. A section on conclusions wraps up the report.

## Methodology

The project assessment methodology was designed in accordance to the purpose and the scope of the evaluation outlined in the ToR for an External Evaluation developed by PRI. Assessment of the project impact and outreach, as well as identification of lessons learnt and recommendations for future interventions were the primary objectives of the assignment. Capturing PRI's contribution in the achievement of the project outcomes and relevance of the project activities for stakeholders were also the focus of the assessment. Specific evaluation questions identified by PRI were coupled with the OECD/DAC 5 Criteria for Evaluation of Development Assistance and guided the entire process. Assessing the *relevance* (importance and the role of the project for the context in the country as well as for the contribution to the achievement of the overall goal), *effectiveness* (achievement of the specific objectives outlined in the project proposal), *efficiency* (cost-benefit assessment of the resources used and outputs delivered), and *long term impact* (contribution to the change in the behavior of targeted groups) of the project as well as *sustainability of achieved results* (application of the achievements beyond the project implementation timeline) were the key aspects that were addressed during the evaluation. All 5 criteria were used to assess the project as a whole, as well as its contribution in accordance to the following three specific project objectives:

- 1. To provide relevant rehabilitation and re-integration support services to 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 for better service provision for vulnerable women offenders and their children.*

The project evaluation strategy was defined based on the examination of the project related documents, in particular project proposal, project logical frame, internal mid-term evaluation report and EC Results Orientated Mission (ROM) report. Research activities, including data collection, analysis and reporting were coordinated with the project management at PRI. PRI management provided access to all necessary project related documents and coordinated outreach to involved stakeholders.

Two main strategies were applied for data collection: *desk review* and *semi structured interviews*. In addition, field visits were carried out to *observe and assess* the project outputs. Data was collected in September-October, 2019.

Desk review was carried out on the initial stage of the research. Following project related documents were thoroughly examined: project proposal, intermediate report to the donor organization, regular progress reports of partner organizations, case files, internal mid-term evaluation report, EC ROM reports and needs assessment report. Academic articles, reports of national and international organizations as well as state decrees related to treatment of women



offenders in the Georgian criminal justice system were also examined. Information gathered was used to familiarize evaluators with the relevance of the intervention, project objectives, and the progress reached. It was also used to develop a tailored strategy for collecting information from involved stakeholders. Even though the project framework identified number of assessment indicators with quantitative means of verification (mainly in relation to measuring satisfaction of service beneficiaries), due to the sensitivity of the services provided and ensuring privacy of recipients, it was decided to use only qualitative data gathering methods through semi structured interviews and observation.

The second stage of the research was focused on data collection from various actors enrolled in the project implementation process. In total three different group of stakeholders were identified. Each group combined individuals that could provide different perspectives to the project implementation process, relevance of its objectives and impact of its activities due to the diverse role played and level of involvement:

1. **Program management:** project implementation team composed of staff members directly involved in the project implementation process from PRI and four partner organizations. They were the primary contacts to collect project related documents. They were addressed to share experience and provide insights into project objectives, implementation process, project achievements, challenges faced, anticipated long term impact, lessons learnt and recommendations for future interventions.
2. **Project beneficiaries:** women who received services within the project framework including: legal aid, medical, psychological counseling, educational, and/or financial support. They were primary sources to confirm the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the project activities. They were also consulted to provide feedback on the project implementation process and ideas for future interventions.
3. **State institution representatives:** decision makers, holding senior positions with the Special Penitentiary Service, Women's Prison #5, LEPL Center for Crime Prevention and LEPL National Probation Agency at the Ministry of Justice of Georgia to be addressed to share their knowledge about the project, its relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. They were identified as key informants to provide insight on the role of the project and similar initiatives by other developmental organizations played in addressing the needs of women offenders who have experienced violence and/or stigma and discrimination.

A separate interview questionnaire was developed for each group. The questionnaires were used as a guideline for the interviews with open ended questions designed in a way to allow room for elaboration and flexibility. The interviews were carried out in the settings creating a comfortable and safe environment for respondents to share their experiences and ideas. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the project team and project beneficiaries. **In total 12 interviews with participation of 16 respondents were held** (full list of interviews can be found in Annex 1). Interviews with the project team were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Interviews with beneficiaries were not recorded, and notes were made manually. In order to ensure openness of

beneficiaries, they were offered to remain anonymous, only few of them decided to share their names. All interviews were held with probationers and former prisoners. No interviews were organized with beneficiaries residing in the Women's Prison #5 as no required permission was granted by the Ministry of Justice of Georgia. One third of interviews with beneficiaries were conducted over the phone that proved to be more convenient for respondents: they were more open to share their emotions, details of their experiences and reflect on services received. Two field visits were organized to meet beneficiaries and observe the outputs of the project. One was held at Tbilisi Flee Market - "*Mshrali Khidi*" where training participants and small grant recipients work, and the other - in a shelter. It is important to mention that all beneficiaries interviewed during the evaluation process were identified by partner organizations. The project team members outreached to them in advance and shared contact with evaluators only after securing permission for an interview. Thus intrinsic bias in selection process cannot be overruled. Moreover, during the field visits one representative of a partner organization was present when interviews were carried out, nevertheless, her presence contributed to creation of a safe and trusting environment rather than distress.

Unfortunately no interviews were carried out with the third group of stakeholders. With the support from PRI management, official letters requesting the interview with representatives of National Probation Agency, Special Penitentiary Service and Women's Prison #5 were sent to the Ministry of Justice. Even after regular follow up requests and personal phone calls, no official answer was issued and the request remained pending for more than one month. Thus the position of relevant state officials regarding the relevance of the project and their reflection on sustainability of its achievements are missing from the report.

## Relevance and the rationale of the project

### Background and Context

Georgian government has come a long way for the past years towards implementing a comprehensive criminal justice reform (CJR) with the help of EU and other international donor organizations. These efforts were strengthened in 2014 when EU-Georgia cooperation was brought to another level by the signing of the Association Agreement and renewed again in 2015 with the financing agreement between the EU and Georgia that invited engagement of CSOs in the justice sector reforms by supporting the development of capacities of the penitentiary and probation agencies, empowering prison administrations and improving conditions at detention facilities, expanding rehabilitation and re-socialization services and developing efficient probation and non-custodial sentences. National Strategy for Human Rights for 2014-2020 emphasizes the significance of ensuring gender-sensitive approaches to the penitentiary and probation system and importance of the rehabilitation and re-socialization of inmates and former convicts<sup>1</sup>. The CJR's revised strategy highlights the needs of the offender's protection, a more balanced attitude towards the execution of sentences and human rights and decrease in the rate of re-offending through effective rehabilitation and resocialization measures. Accordingly, the strategy action plan for 2014-2019 stresses on better living conditions for prisoners, maintenance of contact with society, rehabilitation and resocialization programs, educational opportunities, and risk-oriented psycho-social services. The action plan pays special attention to the specific groups such as juveniles and women offenders<sup>2</sup>.

### Women in the justice system

When it comes to the specific groups in prisons, women continue to represent very small portion of prison population worldwide (in different jurisdictions it ranges from 3.7% to 9.1% (ICPS, 2008). However, many prisons around the world fail to meet the specific needs of women, since they are tailored for the male population and does not always respond to gender-specific necessities. Women offenders are characterized as having experienced multiple inequalities and suffering from complex and very often gendered traumas such as poor mental health, physical and sexual abuse, unhealthy and sometimes violent intimate partner relationships, low self-esteem, drug and alcohol use and abuse, high levels of unemployment, and mental health problems (Bevan and Wehipeihana, 2015). Hence, their needs may have less in common with general prison population

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<sup>1</sup> Decree #2315-IIS adopted by the Parliament of Georgia, 2014. Document is available at: <http://myrights.gov.ge/uploads/file-manager/Strategy2014-2020.pdf> last access 31.10.2019

<sup>2</sup> Source: Ministry of Justice of Georgia. All annual strategies and action plans are available at: <http://www.justice.gov.ge/AboutUs/Council/237> last access 31.10.2019

priorities and the problems described above make it difficult for countries to provide holistic and high-quality service for women and girls in prison and after release.

Women make up about 2.5-3% (the number varies from year to year) of the total prison population in Georgia. The majority of offenders are placed in the Women's Prison #5 (very small number can be housed in Kutaisi prison N2 before sentencing). In 2015 a monitoring mission in Women's Prison #5 revealed a series of problems faced by women inmates including full examination, absence of conjugal meetings, insufficient hygiene items, late/inadequate medical treatment, communication problems with foreign national prisoners, and insufficient information about their rights (Human Rights Center, 2016). The special report carried out under the NPM also highlighted the need for improved conditions of specific vulnerable groups such as women living with their children (women may have their children with them in prison up to the age of three), sexual, religious and ethnic minorities (Public Defender of Georgia, 2015).

Mental health issues, psycho-social rehabilitation, vocational and employment opportunities, as well as access to information are major shortcomings experienced in Georgian prisons (Public Defender of Georgia, 2018). Insufficient rehabilitation and re-socialization lead to a reoffending and trapping women in the cycle of violence. Women offenders are often re-victimized by the society as well as state institutions or subjected to violence. 2014 survey of inmates carried out by UN Women illustrated that over 26% of respondents had been a victim of abuse from prison staff, 19% from family members, 11% from other prisoners, and 7% from other members of society (UN Women, 2014). Stigma and discriminative approach towards women in the penitentiary system, hampers their reintegration in the community after the release.

The project, thus, is in line with the CJR in Georgia and a wider EU initiative supporting the reform (under *Complementary Rehabilitation and Re-socialization Support in the Criminal Justice Sector* programme launched in 2016). Moreover, while there have been many projects implemented in the country to support state and non-state actors to improve conditions in penitentiary institutions and social integration of former inmates in general, much needs to be done to address problems and challenges faced by women prisoners, former prisoners and probationers constituting a particularly vulnerable group of the society. **With this respect the project is uniquely placed to provide support to this particular group of women and notably their children whose special needs and vulnerabilities remain highly overlooked by state and non-state actors alike.**

By designing interventions addressing needs of women in the justice system who experienced violence and discrimination, and their vulnerable children, through improving access to rehabilitation and protection the project filled the gap in the field through addressing to women's gender-specific needs.

## Rational for the project strategies/activities

The following two main strategies were applied by the project team to engage in the process of improving access to support services for women offenders and their vulnerable children: (1) delivery of comprehensive package of services including basic medical and psycho-social care, legal counseling, temporary shelter, educational and vocational trainings, and employment support and (2) advocacy for increasing access to these services as an important precondition for successful rehabilitation. The services were selected to meet the needs of women prisoners revealed through the UN Women study: treatment of health problems (47%), vocational and educational courses (40% and 38%) and legal aid (35 %) (UN Women, 2014). By offering various support services the project responded to the unmet needs. Moreover, diversity of these services increased their effectiveness and contribution to the empowerment and rehabilitation of beneficiaries.

Provision of shelter to former prisoners was also an important intervention. Women leaving the prison are often left without housing that is linked to the absence of a social network and is in correlation with stigma, criminal background, as well as economic dependence on other family members that refuse to receive them back. Finding appropriate accommodation/shelter in some cases is urgent especially when they have children. Having no secure place for living, hamper placing children back into mother's care. The project activities oriented on providing a safe space and helping former women prisoners and their children to break the cycle of violence and not to go back to violent households or other dangerous environments, can be assessed as a highly relevant component.

Supporting beneficiaries to find employment and providing small grants to start their own business were extremely valuable contribution. The UN report on "Monitoring the Impact of Economic Crises on Crime" finds that economic factors play an important role in the evolution of crime trends (UNODC, 2012). Moreover, stigma and substance dependency are often mentioned as the main obstacles for employment and reintegration for women in Georgia. The stigma and distrust towards former prisoners exist in both - the public and private sectors. Considering unemployment and financial liabilities, former inmates often struggle to meet their basic needs which increases risk of re-offending (Harding et al., 2014). Consequently, all project activities designed to facilitate labour participation of beneficiaries were in line with existing priorities in the field and relevant to Georgia's reality.

Specific needs of prisoner mothers and their underage children were also addressed by the project. Facilitating the improvement of contacts between women prisoners, probationers, former prisoners and their underage children through individual and group therapy sessions; setting up a day nursery for imprisoned mothers and their children under age three and developing positive parenting skills were valuable contributions to increasing the access to support services for the most vulnerable groups. These activities were important not only for the direct recipients of the

services but also for illustrating benefits of maintaining close relations between imprisoned mothers and their children to various stakeholders including family members, and social workers employed in the penal system.

Lack of coordination mechanisms of government bodies, as well as cooperation challenges with the civil society and other sectors were the other shortcomings addressed within the project framework. According to the 2014 UN Women study: *“There is no dialogue or cooperation established with the business/private sector on the most important factors in the female prisoners’ socialization process, particularly with regard to finding employment and shelter”* (UN Women, 2014). Policy-level dialogue, as well as coordination between the project implementing organizations, was a core direction of the project which complemented all other activities and tried to ensure the sustainability of the action, as well as advancement in service delivery for women offenders and their children. All relevant stakeholders (both state and non-state) were involved in the roundtable discussions and information meetings where the specific needs of beneficiaries, shortcomings in service delivery and opportunities for improvements were discussed. Moreover, the platform was used to share international experience in the field and illustrate the benefits of approaches used by the project team, reinforcing the relevance of the intervention.

## Analysis of outputs and outcomes

### Provision of rehabilitation and reintegration services to women offenders who have experienced violence and discrimination

One of the three objectives of the project was to provide reintegration and rehabilitation services to women offenders that experienced violence and discrimination. The project envisioned empowering women prisoners, former prisoners and probationers with skills, knowledge and employment opportunities. It also aimed at providing help to meet their basic social and medical needs. In particular, the project offered delivery of multi-care support services including psychological counseling, legal aid, medical services, vocational courses, financial support for business initiatives and temporary shelter if needed. The need for offering a comprehensive package of services to beneficiaries was evident based on previous experience of PRI and its partner organizations as well as identified in the baseline research of priority issues of women in prison in Georgia carried out in 2014.

All services were delivered by partner organizations with coordination from PRI. Each organization was responsible for services in accordance to its expertise. Article 42 provided legal aid, GAWB offered vocational trainings, employment assistance and shelter, Tanaziari and GPPA were responsible for the assessment and provision of medical care including psychological counseling. Three of four partner organizations carried out activities in all targeted regions (Tbilisi, Kvemo Kartli, Shida Kartli, Kakheti and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti) while the work of Tanaziari was limited to only one region – Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti.

All anticipated outputs contributing to the achievement of the project objectives were delivered by the end of the project. **The number of recipients of the multi care services significantly exceeded the set target.** The project aimed to provide assistance to 300 women prisoners, former prisoners and probationers and during the project implementation period over 849 services were delivered. **Some beneficiaries received multiple services from the partner organizations.** Number of beneficiaries attended more than two training courses, applied for psychological as well as legal counseling, and/or received medical assistance. Besides the fact that beneficiaries' engagement in project activities were multilateral, their final number still exceeded the initial target.

Psycho-social services were delivered to over 170 beneficiaries by social workers and psychologists from GGPA and Tanaziari. Individual and group psychological counseling were aimed at helping prisoners, former prisoners and probationers to overcome anxiety, PTSD, frustration and suicidal tendencies. Sessions were organized to help them develop anger management, conflict resolution and positive childcare skills. Counseling were offered to the beneficiaries' family members too, to rebuild relationships and facilitate rehabilitation process. Social services entailed identification of basic medical needs of beneficiaries and covering the costs of medical tests, medication, and

surgeries if necessary. Essentials such as food, hygiene products, clothing and school supplies were also provided to underage children of beneficiaries that were not under the state protection.

**Psycho-social service delivery was the essential component that ensured effective implementation of other project activities.** Only after addressing pressing social and mental problems, beneficiaries were able to engage in educational courses and ask for legal counseling. As a result of therapy sessions they felt more empowered and motivated to follow daily routine and plan for future. **Reconstructing bridges with family members prepared grounds for effective resocialization and rehabilitation:**

*“They [GGPA psychologists] saved my relations with my child. Without them I would not have left the prison with the mental state I did... They helped me and my child when he had to leave prison after turning three. . . They paid for my child’s transportation to visit me. With each visitation my child was more calm and joyous. I was also getting ready for the meetings, I was dressing up. . . Then I asked them to help me get in touch with Article 42” (anonymous, interview, Tbilisi).*

**Engaging inmates in project activities was less challenging than probationers and former prisoners.** Women’s Prison #5 has social workers and psychologists to provide support for inmates, but according to GGPA and beneficiaries the trust toward state employees are extremely low. They feel lack of empathy and respect from officials:

*“Even ordinary citizens distrust state institutions. They do not expect support or help from them. This attitude is stronger among our beneficiaries. They were imprisoned by the state and think that entire state machine works against them” (Anna Tvaradze, Article 42, interview, Tbilisi).*

**Thus, provision of psychological counseling services by a non-governmental organization created a necessary support system and increased their access to professional help.** Prisoners were outreaching to GGPA psychologists themselves following the advice of other inmates or prison staff. The project team faced more challenges while attempting to engage probationers and former prisoners in project activities. They are more exposed to the stigma and discrimination from the society and are reluctant to engage in any activity associated with their criminal background. Others have no financial means to go to the therapy session and or a training workshop, or is in a severe traumatic condition that prevents them from seeking help.

**Vocational training courses and small business management skills development were the main educational activities delivered by GAWB.** Trainings were organized in Tbilisi, administrative centers of targeted regions and Women’s Prison #5. Courses offered participants development of practical skills in felt production, tailoring, embroidery, hairdressing, make up and cosmetics, pastry and cooking, and medical massage. Duration of courses varied between 72 to 144 hours and corresponding certificates were granted to graduates. Based on their performance, participants managed to secure recommendations for potential employers. In addition to the vocational courses, computer skills and business management trainings were offered to beneficiaries. One



week long business management trainings focusing on registration of an enterprise, legal regulations, taxes, marketing, and budgeting were offered to former prisoners and probationers. From the first session, all participants were encouraged to think about their business ideas and develop it throughout the training. The last day of the training was dedicated to development of business plans and filling out the forms initially developed by GAWB and later used for the small grant competition to finance business startups initiated by beneficiaries. In total 519 participants attended the trainings and received certificates.

GAWB was a lead in delivery of trainings as well as selection of courses. The decision was based on the organization's expertise and general overview of the Georgian labour market needs. Based on the data provided by GAWB, **over 20% of training participants managed to find a job or start own business.** Majority were employed in a sewing shop owned by GAWB on the premises of Women's Prison #5 and had an opportunity to put their training in practice. Acquiring felt production skills also proved to be beneficial due to the increased demand for felt accessories among tourists. But others found it difficult to find practical application of newly adopted skills:

*"None of the vocational courses I took while in prison helped me to find a job. Any job I had was low paid manual employment and I was getting on-spot training depending on the needs and requirements of the assignment" (interview with a former prisoner, Tbilisi).*

**Vocational courses and trainings were important services for beneficiaries not only for creating opportunities for employment but for personal empowerment and socialization.** They encouraged participants to engage with women having similar experiences and explore new avenues for self-expression:

*"Even if I am left all alone, no one can take my crafting away, it's like an art therapy" (interview with a former prisoner, Telavi).*

**Providing financial support for small businesses was the most effective tool for securing employment for beneficiaries.** Due to the stigma associated with women offenders strongly present in Georgian society, it is extremely difficult for former prisoners and probationers to find and maintain a job. Employment in state institutions is not even considered as providing criminal record is one of the requirements during the application process. In order to safeguard any position in a private sector, women offenders have to conceal their criminal background. But eventually it is revealed and they have to leave:

*"I was not able to keep a job for more than three months. As soon as they know my past, they put me in a position so that I have to leave" (interview with a former prisoner, Tbilisi).*

Owning a business is the most sustainable way for former prisoners and probationers to secure regular income. Moreover, **when expanding they employ other women offenders** they met while in prison or during trainings. Thus providing financial assistance to beneficiaries to start-up own

businesses or extend already registered ones, significantly increased the number of women able to improve livelihoods for themselves and their families. According to GAWB, all 43 recipients of the small business grants are still operating and functional five months after the project end date.

GAWB owned sewing shop in Women's Prison #5 is one of the main employers of inmates. Graduates of the vocational trainings are working here giving them a unique chance to earn money and even financially support their families. Unfortunately, as a result of changes instigated by ongoing structural reforms pursuant to the merger between the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Corrections, sustainability of the enterprise is compromised. Due to the prioritization of employment of as many inmates as possible, the managers of the sewing shop have difficulties to compete on the market and secure orders even from state institutions that used to be main purchasers before the reform.

Assisting in job application process and providing recommendations were other activities carried out by GAWB to facilitate employment of its beneficiaries. With the help of professional network of small enterprises and regular monitoring of online job search pages, GAWB staff was able to identify applicable vacancies for beneficiaries. They were making enquires with potential employers and providing recommendations. **But even with the recommendations from GAWB team, applications were often unsuccessful that, on the one hand, can be attributed to the high unemployment rate<sup>3</sup>, and stigmatization of women offenders on the other.**

GAWB was responsible for providing a shelter to former prisoners and probationers that had no place to go when leaving the prison. The shelter has the capacity to accommodate 12 women and their under aged children. It provides lodging, space for common activities and basic medical supplies. Beneficiaries can stay in the shelter for six months, but stay can be prolonged for another six months if needed. Women leave shelter when they are able to afford own accommodation, but there are cases of their return when they lose jobs and regular income. GAWB staff members are active in motivating shelter residents to attend vocational trainings and assist them in finding employment. Shelter residents are usually women who lost connection with families and relatives after experiencing domestic violence or serving long term sentences (10-15 years). When leaving prison they have no place to go, some of them did not even have enough money to pay for public transportation from the prison to the city. By the project end date 12 women were residing in the shelter and by the time of the external evaluation there were eight. Majority were employed on minimum wage jobs or part time, one was unemployed and actively looking for a job.

GAWB operated shelter is the only one offering accommodation and assistance to women offenders. No other state or non-state institution offers similar services. **It plays essential role in rehabilitation process of women offenders that are left alone without support system from families**

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<sup>3</sup> According to the official statistics unemployment rate in Georgia is 12.7% (National Statistics Office of Georgia). But it is believed to be significantly underestimating the real situation as 21% of the population reports to be unemployed and actively looking for a job (source Public Attitudes in Georgia, NDI, 2019 available at: [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_Issues%20Poll%20Presentation\\_December%202018\\_English\\_Final.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_Issues%20Poll%20Presentation_December%202018_English_Final.pdf)).

**and/or friends.** During the interview, one of the shelter residents mentioned: *“I stayed with friends and relatives. Only for few nights. You feel they do not want you there. I even slept in front of a metro station out in the street”*. Residents receive services from shelter staff members, but most importantly support each other in resocialization process by inviting to community activities, for example a grape harvest in a village. Sharing common experiences helps to build a community spirit, understanding and empathy.

Legal counseling was provided by lawyers from Article 42. Throughout the project implementation process 147 women prisoners, probationers and former prisoners received individual consultations, out of which further legal proceedings were initiated for 10 cases. Issues related to divorce, guardianship and parental rights, inheritance, application for social protection schemes and taxation were raised by beneficiaries with the lawyers. Consultations were offered to all women offenders without prior assessment of their background, but legal proceedings were initiated only for those who were victims of violence and discrimination. Along with individual consultations, Article 42 lawyers also organized 10 training workshops in all targeted regions with participation of probationers and former prisoners to discuss issues related to violence and discrimination.

All beneficiaries of legal counseling were extremely grateful for the support received. **Along with resolving number of administrative issues** such as charges for unpaid utility costs, collecting ID cards, changing last name to a maiden name, applying for social protection programs, etc., **women felt more empowered.** Overcoming long term pending issues contributed to their rehabilitation process. Beneficiaries mainly appealed for individual consultations and were more reluctant to participate in trainings. They considered attending to legal issues less pressing compared to basic social needs including psychological assistance or lack of funds to cover public transportation costs to go to the meeting.

*“There were many beneficiaries with whom we managed to work only after they received psychological counseling. Others had some legal issues to resolve but only after their social needs were addressed. Accordingly the success of our component was ensured by the comprehensiveness of services offered within the project framework” (Sopho Aleksidze, Article 42, interview, Tbilisi).*

**The coverage area of the project activities went beyond the targeted regions.** Initial selection of regions was motivated by the number of potential beneficiaries. According to the project management, the statistics indicate that majority of women offenders are residing in the targeted regions: Tbilisi, Kvemo Kartli, Shida Kartli, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, and Kakheti. After the release from prison, women choose to live in the capital or large administrative centers. Those who were subject of discrimination and violence tend not to return to their previous residence. They try to stay in the city and build a new life. But rehabilitation process of beneficiaries was often directly linked to rebuilding contacts with their family members living in regions that were not covered by the project proposal. Thus the project team had to travel to other regions and facilitate re-establishment of relationship between them.

## Increased access to support services for vulnerable children of women offenders

Along with providing support to women offenders, the project aimed at improving the situation of children of imprisoned mothers. The activities were designed to rebuild contact of children with imprisoned mothers, facilitate their inclusion in relevant state services and increase their access to education and healthcare. The objective was defined based on the findings of needs assessment carried out in 2014 revealing that underage children of imprisoned mothers face challenges related to behavior, emotions, education, housing, and finances. These challenges are extremely severe among children from socially vulnerable families and families with experience of domestic violence that are left under the state protection or custody of relatives following mothers' imprisonment.

**All outputs designed to contribute to the achievement of this specific objectives were met by the project end date.** 97 children of imprisoned mothers (target: 100) received psycho-social assistance. Psychologists involved in the project implementation process provided therapy to children experiencing behavioral disorders including learning and speaking difficulties, social interaction and anger related problems. They facilitated rebuilding communication and relationship between children and their mothers by organizing joint sessions as well as providing transportation for regular visitations. Social workers conducted assessment of beneficiaries' social conditions, identified basic needs for improving their livelihoods and delivered food, toys, books, clothing, school supplies, wood for heating, etc. They also assisted children and their families in applying for relevant state programs to increase their access to education and healthcare services.

All actors involved in the project implementation process agree that addressing social and mental challenges of underage children and rebuilding their relationships with imprisoned mothers was one of the most valuable accomplishments of the project. **Project team observed improvements in academic achievements and social interactions among their beneficiaries.** They believe that these interventions were more effective because of the long term engagement, persistence and resilience of the team to overcome stigma experienced by children whose imprisoned mothers were seen as unfit parents.

Child Development Center (on the premises of the Child and Mother's Unit of the Women's prison) was set up and equipped on the premises of Women's Prison #5. The Unit is designed to accommodate mothers and their children under the age three with private lodging, communal kitchen and space for children to play. During the project implementation process the Unit hosted five mothers and their children. The project also provided the services of a childminder to help mothers develop skills in childcare and spare time to take care of their own needs. By the time of the external evaluation only one woman remained in the Unit. The childminder employed within the project framework was no longer working after the end of the project.

**The prison administration failed to fulfill the responsibility under the pre-agreement with the project management to take over provision of childminder’s services after the project ended.** As the request to organize an interview with the administration failed to be approved during the evaluation process, the reasons for this shortcoming can only be speculated and attributed to the limited number of beneficiaries (only one mother) and/or ongoing reform caused by merging the competencies of two ministries: the Ministry of Corrections and the Ministry of Justice. The sustainability of this component can still be achieved by maintaining the facilities of the Unit that can be used for the benefit of imprisoned mothers and their accompanying children under the age three when needed.

In order to contribute to the institutionalization of child care standards in prisons, the project team developed the guidelines for the Child Development Center. The guidelines are based on international standards, experience of other countries, as well as Georgian legislature regulating upbringing standards of children under age three in pre-school settings. The document outlines the principles and ethics to be followed by prison staff working with children of imprisoned mothers. It was presented to the Ministry of Justice for consideration to be adopted as an internal regulation document for the Child Development Center at Women’s Prison #5. Advocacy activities also included promoting the idea of maintaining close relations between imprisoned mothers and their underage children. The project team used various platforms to raise awareness of families of imprisoned mothers, social workers, and prison administration about the benefits of maintaining these relationships for the mental and physical health of both sides. While significant advancement in changing attitudes were reached among project beneficiaries, the belief that prison is not the place for children is still strongly present in the society.

### Improved capacity and coordination among state and non-state service providers

The third objective of the project was to improve the capacity and coordination among state and non-state service providers aimed at increasing the access to their services of vulnerable women offenders and their children.

Organization of information meetings and round tables were the main activities carried out to achieve effective coordination among various service providers. In total 10 information meetings were organized in targeted regions with participation of relevant state institutions including various departments at Women’s Prison #5, National Probation Agency and Center for Crime Prevention. Information about the services offered within the project framework were shared during the meetings. Participants were encouraged to refer potential beneficiaries under their supervision to relevant providers. Information leaflets with the description of offered services and contact details were distributed during these meetings. Four round tables were organized with participation of senior officials of Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs and representatives of international donor

organizations and national non-governmental organizations working with women offenders. Needs of women prisoners, probationers and former prisoners that were victims of violence, discrimination and stigma were raised during these round tables. Opportunities to improve psycho-social service delivery and other support systems contributing to the rehabilitation of this vulnerable group were also discussed. The platform was used to raise awareness of participants about the importance of maintaining relations between imprisoned mothers and their underage children for the benefit of their mental and physical health, and the need for post-release support in general.

**Information meetings and round tables were an important tool for sharing information and expertise among stakeholders.** They supported the process of building professional network of service providers and establishing direct contact among their staff members. Round tables served as additional platforms to the monthly coordination meetings organized by the former Ministry of Corrections with participation of state and non-state institutions. **Unfortunately no regular coordination meetings are held among stakeholders by the time of the evaluation.** With the ongoing reform in the Ministry of Justice, monthly meetings are canceled and coordination among various stakeholders are maintained only through personal professional network. Communication between non-state institutions and the Ministry of Justice became challenging. All partner organizations as well as PRI management face difficulties to receive responses to their official inquires. Moreover, they observe a decrease in openness and readiness of the Ministry to cooperate with non-governmental organizations.

The report on the *Gender Specific Needs of Women Victims of Violence, Stigma and Discrimination in Conflict with the Law* was the main analytical output prepared within the project framework that initially was planned to be a baseline study for the project. The document presents the analysis of the Georgian legislature on rehabilitation and resocialization of women convicts in regard to international standards, results of the survey carried out among women prisoners, probationers and former prisoners and overview of state social security programs. The report presents the challenges in the system and recommendations to all stakeholders. The document is a complex study that can be used as an advocacy tool to shape reforms and increase gender-sensitivity in the penal system in Georgia.

## Empowerment of women offenders and the project impact

Throughout the last decade, positive changes have been observed in the provision of support services to women offenders. **Improvements have been observed by majority of the interviewees.** Introduction of individual sentence planning in 2015 was named as the major shift in this regard. As a part of individual sentence planning, rehabilitation programs are tailored to individual offenders and designed based on the information about their crime, family background and psychological condition. It is believed to be an important institutional tool to increase effectiveness of rehabilitation and resocialization efforts offered either by state and non-state actors. **The tool has been introduced only recently and its successful implementation depends on equipping prison staff with relevant skills and knowledge and maintenance of political will,** which remains uncertain following the ongoing structural reform in the system.

Increased engagement of non-governmental organizations in rehabilitation process of women offenders is another positive trend observed by partner organizations. Throughout the last decade the number of Georgian NGOs implementing developmental projects to empower women prisoners, probationers and former prisoners has increased. Projects aimed at raising public awareness about the discrimination and stigma experienced by women offenders has also increased. But the **engagement of international donor organizations remains limited.** According to PRI management, NGOs face difficulties to raise funds for projects targeting women offenders. Moreover, during the project implementation process three partners out of four failed to secure co-funding required by the donor.

All stakeholders interviewed consider the project as a major contributor to the process of empowering women offenders and their vulnerable children. **Support service delivery and advocacy efforts made within the project framework are believed to impact the process by initiating change in behavior and attitudes among beneficiaries.**

Psychological counseling services delivered to women offenders, their children and family members were directly contributing to the change of behavior. As a result of therapy sessions women reported being able to face their frustrations, PTSD, and anxiety. They developed skills to manage negative emotions and rekindled relations with relatives and friends. Changes in behavior and attitudes were also witnessed among their children and family members: improvements in academic achievements were observed among underage children while partners, parents and in-laws became more compassionate to convicted women.

Small grants for business start-ups also significantly contributed to the change of attitudes toward beneficiaries. Due to the stigma strongly present in Georgian society, women offenders have difficulties to find and maintain employment even in low paid jobs. Starting up own business is the most effective option for them to secure regular financial income, feel empowered and become fulfilled members of society. Thus small grants issued within the project framework radically changed their lives as well as their families:

*“This [receiving a small grant for a startup] was a new beginning of my life. I am not afraid anymore. I am standing on my own feet” (anonymous, interview with a beneficiary of a small grant, Rustavi).*

*“After graduating from our trainings and receiving the small grant, we helped our beneficiary to rebuild relations with her family. Her in-laws were against. She was living with her friend and had no contact with children. It took us six months to negotiate. When they [in-laws] saw that the grant awarding ceremony was covered by the local media and was attended by the municipality authorities they changed their attitude. They were so surprised. Now she lives with her family and successfully leads her small business” (Nino Elizbarashvili, GAWB, interview, Tbilisi).*

PRI and partner organizations believe that trust and empathy expressed by project team were essential for achieving positive changes in the behavior of beneficiaries. According to them both these aspects are missing from the similar services offered by the state institutions. Women offenders distrust the state employees and are less open when interacting with them. According to GGPA, during their work with women offenders, they observed lack of empathy that is in line with the stigma strongly present in Georgian society among employees of Women’s Prison #5, National Probation Agency and Center of Crime Prevention. These attitudes remain as barriers to effective implementation of rehabilitation programs managed by the state agencies and call for interventions from NGOs and international donor organizations.

Advocacy efforts made by the project team by organizing information meetings, round tables and production of an analytical publication, supported raising awareness of various stakeholders about the specific needs of women offenders that were victims of violence and discrimination and their children. These platforms were used to share knowledge and experience of implemented rehabilitation programs and challenges faced during the process. As a result of these efforts representatives of state institutions, senior officials, as well as probation officers, social workers and psychologists became exposed to alternative approaches for engaging with beneficiaries and delivering support services. For example, when meeting with social workers employed at Women’s Prison #5, GGPA psychologists were sharing arguments in favor of facilitating close relations between imprisoned mothers and their children being mutually beneficial for both sides and strongly contributing to the rehabilitation process. Thus, through practical demonstration of sympathy and trust toward beneficiaries, and triggering changes in attitudes among various stakeholders, including offender’s family members and state officials, are the major contributions of the project that will be sustained in a long term perspective.



## Project management and PRI

The evaluation also looked at the overall management of the project and PRI's specific contribution. Analysis of the interviews with the PRI management and the partner organizations revealed that the intervention was well coordinated and effectively managed. Majority of the organizations involved in the implementation process had prior experience of cooperation. The professional trust and relationships were already established among the project team across partner organizations creating a fruitful foundation to build on.

The management style employed by PRI was participatory. The partner organizations highlighted the importance of their engagement in every stage of the project preparation and implementation. They were actively involved in drafting the project proposal, identification of the problem and specific objectives to be addressed. Regular communication was also maintained throughout the implementation process. Partner organizations reported maintaining direct contact that enabled them to easily refer beneficiaries to each other and deliver comprehensive package of support services. All project related information was accumulated by PRI that hosted regular coordination meetings to share information about project progress, achievements, challenges and shortcomings. The periodicity of coordination meetings reduced with the time, but direct contact was maintained till the project end date. As a result of **active inclusion of partner organizations in the project design and decision making process they felt that their expertise was valued and appreciated.**

Well-developed methodology and profound knowledge of specific needs of beneficiaries were the biggest strengths of the project team. Majority of the team members had over a decade experience of working with women offenders. They had knowledge and skills to engage with beneficiaries, their children and family members. Continuous presence in the targeted community had built trust and familiarity to their work that was utilized for the project benefit. Having professional network with relevant state institutions was also a contributing factor securing easy access to beneficiaries.

Ongoing methodological and technical support from PRI was valuable to the partner organizations. The organization's reputation and trust it enjoys among state and non-state actors seemed to be of utmost importance. The PRI's expertise in the penal system as well as gender-specific standards and practices were highlighted as extremely valuable by partner organizations. They also welcomed and appreciated PRI's support in addressing unforeseen challenges during implementation process including facilitating necessary amendments to the project budget with the donor.

*"PRI is a huge organization that introduced international experience and reforms in the system. All my professional knowledge is accredited to PRI. The idea to introduce business learning to inmates was our idea back in 2007. PRI liked it and started cooperation with us. PRI and NORLAG were most important supporters of our first*

*steps of working with women offenders. They provided necessary financial support. Projects implemented by PRI were very important. Their work is extremely valuable” (Nino Elizbarashvili, interview, Tbilisi).*

PRI was more reserved in its feedback on project management. Few shortcomings were highlighted that negatively affected the effectiveness of the intervention. Overestimating the importance of following pre-defined sequence of activities was one of these shortcomings that lead to delays in implementation process. While awaiting for the approval from the administration of the Women’s Prison #5 to conduct survey among inmates, other activities were postponed that were not necessarily directly linked to the outcomes of the survey. Deficiencies in streamlining reporting project progress and common practices to register services delivered were the other shortcomings mentioned. This was also spotted by the internal interim evaluation and necessary steps were taken to formalize and standardize reporting across partner organizations for the remaining time. They were also instructed on data to be collected about beneficiaries and services delivered.

Disruptions in communication with state agencies on the final stage of project implementation process was also named as an important impediment to the effective management of project activities. Structural changes initiated in the penal system with the merger of Ministry of Corrections and Ministry of Justice led to changes among decision makers as well as rank-and-file officers. Responsiveness of state agencies on enquires from NGOs also decreased. Thus the project team had to invest in re-establishing contacts and cooperation with newly appointed officials. Regardless of the challenges occurred in cooperation with state officials, the project team managed to deliver all anticipated outputs though the sustainability of achieved results directly linked to the fulfilment of pre-agreed responsibilities by the state agencies remains ambiguous.

## Case of Tanaziari

Tanaziari is a long time and prominent player in the field of women empowerment and rehabilitation of women offenders subject to discrimination or violence. Based in Zugdidi, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region, Tanaziari enjoys trust and confidence among communities it serves as well civil society and state actors in the region and the capital alike. Because of its unique position in the project (the organization is the only partner of the project with permanent presence in the region) and the role of the hub for supporting former women prisoners and probationers, the evaluators decided to highlight Tanaziari's experience which, they believe, can inform PRI's future programming especially outside the capital Tbilisi, where stigma and negative public attitude towards women in the criminal justice system are particularly strong making rehabilitation and integration of this category of women extremely difficult.

Tanaziari is the project's only partner whose main target group consists of former prisoners, prisoners and their family members (they are active in the field since 2002 when they renovated rooms in Zugdidi prison for women). Importantly, the team tries to help former prisoners, especially women, even when there is no project going on, by referring them to partner organizations, whether state or non-state. In addition, they regularly participate in forums, dialogues and TV shows for public outreach and serve as a guide for other organizations who are new to the field.

Tanaziari managed to combine efforts and resources of two parallel projects to support beneficiaries. For instance, they used resources and opportunities of another ongoing and similar project with the Institute of Democracy to provide trainings for those beneficiaries who joined in later after the completion of business training component.

The team at Tanaziari believe that the situation with respect to public perceptions towards women in justice system are far more negative in Zugdidi compared to Tbilisi where women are subject to criticism and negative public attitude regardless of the gravity of crimes (most of them served or are serving sentences for smuggling tobacco from the Occupied Territory of Abkhazia which is adjacent to Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region). The stigma is serious to the extent that owners of cafes and restaurants refuse to give a waitress' job to a former prisoner or a probationer fearing that clients will give up on his place (even though they are convinced the qualification of potential employees that Tanaziari offers them is sufficient enough). When asked what the project's most important component was, Khatuna Bechvaia, Tanaziari's director whom the evaluators spoke said it was **providing a space for women who would otherwise have no other venue to talk and share and have a feeling that they are supported**. Tanaziari's beneficiaries include women from all over the region who were connected through the penitentiary system (inmates from the same region would recommend others to seek help at Tanaziari).

Bechvaia believes that **the project has been unique in that it provided medication and lab tests to women who would otherwise** not be able to access those since the Universal Healthcare Coverage

in Georgia provides very limited opportunities (if any) for either. However, what remained particularly challenging (and Tanaziari advocated for this issue to a ministerial level but to no avail) is dire dental problems experienced by women who left prison either in Tbilisi or Zugdidi, especially from middle-aged to elderly women with only 10% of their teeth remaining. The concern is that women with this problem have even lower self-esteem and are not willing to participate in trainings or other joint activities because of embarrassment and shame. Sadly, dental care is not covered by the national insurance scheme and only partially by private medical insurance while quality dental care is extremely expensive and unaffordable to women who are vulnerable and living below the poverty line

Tanaziari is very well connected to both state and non-state agencies, especially with Crime Prevention Centre which often refers beneficiaries to Tanaziari while the partnership with the National Probation Agency stretches over 15 years. The cooperation with these agencies has been smooth under the project as well.

While talking about the partnership under the project, Bechvaia said she never doubted the qualification and expertise of the rest of the project partners and enjoyed working together. However, she believes that **having a local lawyer** to consult with women from the target group would have been more helpful because the distance between Zugdidi and Tbilisi did not allow more frequent visits of Article 42 lawyers. Tanaziari would collect three or more cases for a lawyer's visit sometimes caused mild discontent from beneficiaries for their waiting period. In addition, Tanaziari team feels there was longer period of time than anticipated in between business trainings and actual funding for grant recipients to set up own businesses.

Bechvaia believes that the most important lesson learnt from the project which she is certain she and her team will use in future programmes is a strong buy-in among the project partners that PRI ensured right at the onset of the designing phase of the project by bringing all partners to discuss the proposal and have a say in outputs and outcomes. In addition, registration of beneficiaries, case studies and entering every piece of information to create a full story of the beneficiary is found to be extremely useful by partners not only with respect to follow-up and internal communication, but also, for future applications, statistics and consistency as well.

Because of their reputation and excellent networking, Tanaziari is very well connected to local authorities and police departments of all municipalities in the region and local knowledge allows them to use all available opportunities to help the project beneficiaries. For instance, for outreach they have used a mayor's representatives in hard to access villages where their beneficiaries live. To save funds Tanaziari would solicit help from drivers of public transport to deliver medication to beneficiaries at minimum (if any) cost.

As for a vision for future, Bechvaia says that **there is a worrying trend of diminishing funding for projects supporting women in the justice system which will negatively affect vulnerable women**. She thinks that the state should be doing more for this category of women. Ideally the state should

develop more diverse support programme or outsource CSOs with considerable experience in delivering projects targeting former female prisoners and women probationers.

**If given an opportunity to continue this line of work, Tanaziari would increase funding for business start-up for women to ensure that more women have an opportunity to develop resilience through financial independence.** Advocating for amending tax legislation in order to introduce tax benefits for business who are willing to give jobs to female probationers and former prisoners is also believed to be an effective step towards successful reintegration of this category of women.

## Lessons learned

1. Interviews with the partners have revealed the importance **a complex approach to problems** experienced by the project's target group. The evaluators were told that if it had been a just a legal aid, or medical service, it would not have been as successful as it was proved in the case of a complex approach.
2. **Investing in building resilience in individual beneficiaries has proven to be more effective than relying heavily on working with official structures which are prone to instability and failure in the face of structural and organizational changes.** The ongoing reform and the failure of the governmental bodies to continue much needed coordination meetings with CSOs and state agencies is a good example of this failure. On the other hand, the evaluation found that if empowered to run their own business, former female prisoners or probationers are more likely to resist social stigma and help others as well. They are also less dependent on employers and fear less to lose a job should their employers find out about their past.
3. **While delivering services which also constitute the competency of state agencies, a careful approach is required in order to avoid disempowerment of respective state bodies.** While state programmes/agencies are slow to respond to the needs of beneficiaries (e.g. it would have taken three months for emergency assistance service to provide baby formula in the particular case), PRI, its partners and all relevant actors should consider carefully whether their activities entail a potential risk of disempowering state actors. Social workers and psychologists employed by the state agencies, operate in an environment of major human and financial resource deficit. Lack of professional capacity and limited exposure to new developments in the field, feeds already existing distrust between them and beneficiaries. By providing alternative sources for service delivery that are more comprehensive and easier to access, can contribute to increasing the gap between the state and women offenders. Thus to avoid disempowerment of state agencies, capacity building projects focusing on state employees should be prioritized.
4. **Meeting expectations from former female prisoners was mentioned as a major frustration by the project partners.** This is particularly true in the situation whereby, once released, former inmates cannot receive services and assistance because of the project's phasing out. The partners agree that there should be at least some plan in place for such cases so that vulnerable women do not feel abandoned. The partners felt that it would have been better to find out about existing alternative services (possibly offered by other NGOs) to those who would be released after the completion of the project.

## Recommendations

1. **Institutionalize relations with local municipalities and especially Gender Councils so that they can include support to vulnerable women especially former prisoners or probationers in their social programmes.** Municipalities can offer shelters and in addition, prison administration is obliged to notify local authorities on the release of the inmate registered in the self-governing unit. However, this legal provision is mostly overlooked. While there are special programmes for single parent households and socially unprotected women, only handful of municipalities help former female prisoners or probationers. The evaluation has found that the project partners (especially Tanaziari who operates in a region) communicate with municipalities and use their support, however, this relationship is rather voluntary and ad-hoc. At the same time, all parties involved must take all measures to ensure that issues related to women in the justice system are treated with sensitivity and due respect to confidentiality.
2. Along with providing vocational and entrepreneurship trainings for target groups, **invest in providing soft skills training including communication and conflict management, teamwork and problem solving, as well as financial literacy.** While these themes are cross-cutting and apply to every sector of employment, they are mostly overlooked since the players in the field prefer to provide specific vocational trainings based on labour market requirements. At the same time, those beneficiaries who manage to find jobs are given specific on-the-job training regardless of their previous training records.
3. **Invest heavily in small business opportunities for former prisoners.** The evaluation has found that former female inmates who have been successful in running their own business tend to give jobs to women released from prison. Even though limiting social interactions solely to former offenders may be seen as an impediment towards the reintegration of these women in wider society, self-esteem and resilience that women develop as a result of employment will contribute to speedy integration in the community.
4. **Advocate to state institutions to prioritize purchasing services and goods produced by women prisoners which may not be cost-efficient in monetary terms, but the benefit of giving them skills and higher self-esteem is greater for the society than employing a private company at lower cost.** Sewing shop operated by GAWB on the premises of Women's Prison#5 is the example of such enterprise that employs inmates contributing to their rehabilitation, skills development and financial empowerment. Unfortunately they face difficulties to compete on the market. Thus encouraging state institutions to give priority to the product prepared by inmates will secure operation of the sewing shop and create opportunities for other initiatives.
5. **Expand advocacy activities to the Parliament of Georgia.** Introduction of relevant amendments in Georgian legislature can support institutionalization of changes that can improve access of socially vulnerable women offenders and their children to support services. Thus initiating close cooperation with members of parliament and facilitation of their active inclusion in policy discussions might contribute to structural changes.
6. **Advocate for paid legal services for women offenders from socially vulnerable households.** The evaluation has found that most women requiring legal aid would not have been able

to do so had they had to pay court fees or costs incurred while obtaining official documents.

7. **Invest in and/or advocate for peer sponsorship programmes to engage with women who have demonstrated higher level of resilience and run their own business.** These women can serve as role models and inspire women released from prisons, women probationers or former inmates to become more independent and resist stigma and negative public attitude.
8. **Take measures to address issues related to stigma and negative public awareness.** The awareness raising should not be limited to the small group of family and relatives of women offenders. It should engage with various interest groups including state officials and business owners. Awareness campaigns should especially be carried out in the regions where women in the justice systems are subject to greater public scrutiny and negative attitudes hampering reintegration of former inmates and especially women. This can be done through a number measures including TV/radio shows, public events, documentaries depicting stories of women subject to discrimination and stigma.
9. **Work closely with Preparation for Release programme** in the Ministry of Justice by, for example, developing a guideline or a catalogue of services so that soon-to-be released women are better prepared for life outside prison.
10. In future programming **add socially unprotected female prisoners as a vulnerability category** since this particular type of women in the justice system are particularly vulnerable and susceptible to recidivism. Continue advocacy efforts to include the need for this specific group of women in the Human Rights Strategy. So far advocacy efforts have not been effective. Experience and lessons learnt from the project can be used as evidence for successful advocacy. Moreover, every project aiming at the rehabilitation of women prisoners, and/or probationers and former prisoners should have **a strong economic empowerment component** especially when it comes to socially unprotected women who are often ripped off their status.
11. Employ mechanisms for Corporate Social Responsibility to raise awareness of businesses to contract enterprises operating in Women's Prison #5.
12. **Create a database of resources to build the local knowledge on raising effectiveness of support service provision and rehabilitation programmes.** PRI's expertise and knowledge of various methodologies as well as gender specific approach were named extremely valuable contribution by partner organizations. Through its international network, PRI has access to the most valuable academic and practical information that can be relevant for Georgian case. Creating a bank of information, making it accessible for various stakeholders and sharing it with decision makers can be beneficial during the ongoing reform and introducing evidence-based policy discussions in the field
13. **Create a shared drive for all reports from partners** (except for sensitive information) so that partners could follow up with cases they are working with together. This will improve cooperation and ownership.
14. When implementing a project/programme with multiple partners, developing a guide for internal communication/protocol for referral of beneficiaries among partners is very likely to prove successful.



## Conclusion

The external evaluation of the project – *Supporting the Improvement of Service Provision for Women Offenders Who Have Experienced Violence and Discrimination and their Vulnerable Children* was conducted 4 months after the project end date. It aimed at providing the implementing organization with analysis of the progress made, identification of strengths and weaknesses of the intervention and recommendations for future actions. Qualitative inquiry was carried out in September-October, 2019 period including desk study of project related materials and interviews with the project team and direct beneficiaries.

The research revealed that all planned activities were implemented securing delivery of all anticipated outputs by the project end date. Over 850 services were delivered throughout the project implementation process. In total, over 300 women prisoners, former prisoners and probationers, as well as their vulnerable children received legal aid, psychological counseling, professional skills' development trainings, and financial support to startup own small enterprises. Additional services were offered to the most vulnerable groups: nursery and services of a childminder for mothers and their children under age three living in prison, and a shelter for former prisoners and probationers having no safe accommodation after release from prison. Parallel to service delivery, the project team carried out regular information meetings and round tables with state and non-state stakeholders working in penal system. Challenges faced by women offenders during rehabilitation process, shortcomings in access to support services, and opportunities for improvement were discussed during these meetings. They were also used as a platform to raise awareness of state officials on importance of facilitating maintenance of close relationship between imprisoned mothers and their underage children for the benefit of both sides.

Analysis of the project environment and feedback received from stakeholders revealed the great relevance of the intervention. Shortcomings and in some cases absence (shelter for released newly prisoners) of provision of support services to women offenders has been identified as a great challenge faced by responsible state institutions. Moreover, it was mentioned that addressing the issue by NGOs was critical, as even with acknowledging it as a problem, the state agencies lack capacity and resources to do so. The effectiveness of the project was achieved by the project team through utilizing their previous knowledge and experience of engaging with women offenders and state institutions; maintaining regular communication with all stakeholders and tailoring engagement methodology to the specific characteristics of the audience. The findings also indicated to the efficiency of the project management securing uninterrupted implementation of activities and flexibility in allocation of funds.

During the interviews, the readiness of the state to engage in a dialogue and cooperation with non-governmental organizations and international donors to improve environment and rehabilitation programs for women offenders, was emphasized as an important precondition for

the success of the intervention and similar projects. Whilst the project team members mentioned that they enjoyed the openness and commitment of state institutions, they observed radical changes in this respect by the final stage of the project implementation process. Ongoing reform in the system that led to the merger of two ministries: the Ministry of Corrections and the Ministry of Justice created uncertainties and confusion. The work of various departments are disrupted by structural changes and frequent rotations of decision makers and senior officials. As a result, access and even communication of non-governmental organizations with the relevant state agencies is disrupted that if maintained can lead to the extremely concerning decrease of transparency and accountability of the system.

Considering these changes in the system, coupled with the stigma associated with women offenders strongly present in Georgian society, there are several avenues for PRI and its partners to engage in future. In particular, PRI can focus its support on increasing the capacity of state agencies to better address the needs of women offenders. Various professional training courses can be offered to officials having direct contact with prisoners, former prisoners and probationers to contribute to changing their attitudes and behavior, become more considerate and sympathetic, and be able to design effective rehabilitation programs tailored to individual beneficiaries and respond to the specific needs of women under their supervision. Parallel, public awareness activities can be initiated among various interest groups to address negative perceptions and stigma present in the society hampering the rehabilitation process of women offenders. Moreover, in order to enhance the project impact, PRI can document its experience of applying various methodologies of effective support service delivery, share it with all interested parties and advocate for their application by state agencies. By utilizing its international network and expertise, PRI can also contribute to building the knowledge in the system, sharing lessons learned from other countries with similar challenges and encouraging evidence-based discussions.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1. List of Interviews

	Date	Location	Respondent	Comment
1	October 2, 2019	Tbilisi, Georgia GAWB office	Nino Elizbarashvili Director, project staff	Interview
2	October 1, 2019	Tbilisi, Georgia Article 42 office	Anna Tvaradze, and Sopho Aleksidze Project staff	Interview
3	October 4, 2019	Zugdidi, Georgia Tanaziari office	Khatuna Bechvaia, Project staff	Skype interview
4	October 7, 2019	Tbilisi, Georgia GGPA	Nino Lortkipanidze, and Anna Kanjaradze Project staff	Interview
5	October 7, 2019	Tbilisi, Georgia Flee Market	Anonymous Produces felt ( <i>teqa</i> )	Interview
6	October 7, 2019	Tbilisi, Georgia Flee Market	Anonymous Produces felt ( <i>teqa</i> )	Interview
7	October 7, 2019	Tbilisi, Georgia Flee Market	Anonymous Produces felt ( <i>teqa</i> )	Interview
8	October 7, 2019	Telavi, Georgia	Anonymous Working on jewelry production ( <i>minanqari</i> )	Phone interview
9	October 7, 2019	Rustavi, Georgia	Anonymous Produces felt ( <i>teqa</i> )	Phone interview
10	October 15, 2019	Tbilisi, Georgia	Anonymous Beneficiary of legal services and psychological counseling for her and her child.	Phone interview
11	October 11, 2019	Tbilisi, Georgia Shelter	3 residents of the shelter	Interview
12	October 22, 2019	Tbilisi, Georgia PRI office	Tsira Chanturia Regional director	Interview