

Equal Before the Law: Access to Justice in Central Asia

The Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia (EFCA) is working to improve the situation of vulnerable groups, including children, women, and people with disabilities in rural areas of Central Asia. Equal-Before-the-Law is a joint program of the Eurasia Foundation and the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. EFCA implementing partners are the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, and Bishkek-based legal clinic “Adilet”. The project team also works in close cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development, the Institute of Ombudsman, the Kyrgyz State Law Academy, and the Kyrgyz National University.

Context

Vulnerable populations are facing many problems in access to justice in Kyrgyzstan, and in the other two focus countries – Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan –.

- Women rarely seek help from law enforcement agencies, for example, in the case of domestic violence, despite the fact that the Kyrgyzstani government adopted a national plan for the prevention of discrimination against women.
- Children are lacking access to key education or health services due to lack of registration. There is an increasing number of abandoned children, and widespread exploitation of child labor.
- In Kyrgyzstan over 130’000 people with disabilities (PWDs) are facing discrimination in employment and admission to educational institutions across the country.



Goal and main objectives

The program goal is to increase access to justice for vulnerable populations. The two main objectives are:

- Increase the alignment of national law and practices with international law and best practices;
- Increase citizens’ ability to access national law to defend their rights and interests.

Equal Before the Law: Access to Justice in Central Asia” - is one of the flagship programs of Wider Europe Initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. The program takes its name from the Finnish constitution, which states that “everyone is equal before the law”.

Activities

The EBL program work to enable access to justice at grassroots level and to advocate best international practices in the area of protection of vulnerable groups to government institutions. Among other activities, the program implements the following:

- Training of judges and advocacy to government officials to implement key principles of international justice in Kyrgyzstan;
- Teaching human rights issues to law students and professors and promoting related revision of law school curricula;
- Provision of free legal assistance to vulnerable individuals including rights-based consultations and court proceedings;
- Provision of training and support to local NGOs through a small grants program.



Results and achievements

- Over 3000 Kyrgyzstani citizens received free legal advice through the established network of lawyers and partner NGOs;
- Set of recommendations developed to improve living conditions of people with disabilities at an international conference in Bishkek;
- Research conducted on access to justice and social services to vulnerable citizens;
- 4 local NGOs were given grants totaling 65'616 US\$ for research and advocacy purposes.
- Publication of study on the performance of courts of elders;
- Publication of 3 dedicated training manuals for law students;

“As part of our project, which is sponsored by the “Equal Before the law”, we provide legal and other support to children in boarding Krasnorechensk to help them prepare for the social adaptation. Children from orphanages go nowhere after they reach age of 18 years. They have no home, no work, and some have no documents, that is, legally they do not even have a name.”

Director of the PF “Institute of Childhood” Nurzhamal Dzhakubova.

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