

EVALUATION BRIEFS

INDEPENDENT PROJECT EVALUATION

Support to Victim-Centered Investigations and Prosecutions of Human Trafficking in the Kyrgyz Republic (Segment of XACCA1)

Region: Central Asia

Duration: October 2021 to September 2024

Donors: U.S. State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP)

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Full report:

www.unodc.org/unodc/en/evaluation/reports_year_2024.html

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The project aimed to improve victim-centered human trafficking investigations and prosecutions in the Kyrgyz Republic – a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking, primarily for forced labor and sexual exploitation. The key objectives of the project included training front-line officers, enhancing investigative techniques, fostering international collaboration. The project adopted a trauma-informed, victim-centered approach, addressing related issues like sexual and gender-based violence, violence against children, and bride kidnapping. The project aimed to fill gaps in law enforcement and victim support systems, leading to more effective prosecutions, better coordination, and improved international cooperation.

MAIN FINDINGS

Relevance: The project was highly relevant to both national stakeholders and USAID, aligning with USAID's strategic priorities in the Kyrgyz Republic, especially in combating human trafficking and strengthening

the rule of law. It supported key SDGs, including SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). The focus on victim-centered investigations also aligned with the UNODC Programme for Central Asia (2022-2025). However, stakeholders suggested updating training materials to address emerging types of trafficking, such as cyber-facilitated crimes, and to better support foreign nationals trafficked into Kyrgyzstan.

Efficiency: The project efficiently used its resources, maintaining a 65% implementation rate and disbursing \$490,564 of the \$750,000 budget by March 2024. Despite initial delays due to political changes, the project adapted well, engaging national and international stakeholders to streamline coordination and maximize cost-effectiveness. However, some stakeholders noted that training would have been more effective if conducted in the state language to align with the country's transition from the official language.

Effectiveness: The project made significant progress, training 159 front-line officers and 56 investigators and prosecutors on TIP investigations and victim-centered approaches. The distribution of handbooks in Russian and Kyrgyz further supported law enforcement. However, challenges persisted in applying specialized techniques, particularly in cross-border investigations, with limited confidence in information-sharing and participation in joint investigations.

Sustainability: The project's outcomes showed promise, particularly with the institutionalization of training within the Ministry of Internal Affairs Academy and the ToT approach. However, systemic issues like corruption, inadequate coordination, and limited resources for addressing cybercrimes threatened long-term sustainability. Stakeholders emphasized the need for ongoing capacity-building, especially for emerging forms of trafficking.

Emerging Contribution to **Impact**: In 2024, 20 TIP cases were registered, an increase attributed to improved skills from the project's training. However, no significant cross-border investigations occurred, and a lack of data on joint investigations and victim referrals hindered full impact assessment.

Human Rights, Gender Equality, Disability Inclusion, and Leaving No One Behind: The project effectively mainstreamed human rights and gender-sensitive approaches, with CSO Oasis providing legal support to TIP victims. It focused on the needs of vulnerable victims, including foreign nationals and those facing language barriers. However, data on the impact on groups like people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and LGBTIQ+ individuals were lacking, and stakeholders suggested integrating "Do No Harm" principles and more gender-sensitive investigation techniques.

LESSONS LEARNED

Two important lessons emerged from the project: 1. Insufficient training for investigators often leads to the misclassification of human trafficking cases as lesser crimes like illegal migration or fraud. Investigators face challenges in gathering sufficient evidence to support trafficking charges, especially when tracing complex financial flows or managing international cooperation, which hampers effective prosecutions; 2. UNODC's international expertise played a critical role in facilitating cross-border collaboration. Investigators, particularly in regions lacking established cooperation frameworks, relied on this support to overcome barriers in handling complex TIP cases that span multiple jurisdictions, ensuring these cases were effectively pursued.

GOOD PRACTICES

The project's collaboration with **Winrock International** successfully brought together police, prosecutors, judges, and lawyers in joint, simulation-based training sessions. These sessions fostered better cross-disciplinary collaboration, practical learning, and a comprehensive understanding of the full lifecycle of human trafficking (TIP) cases, from investigation to prosecution. This approach improved coordination and strengthened institutional capacity for handling TIP cases. Additionally, involving the **Association of Female Judges** of Kyrgyzstan in training and research added valuable judicial insights, particularly on gender-based violence and trafficking. Their insights enriched the content of the trainings, ensuring practical legal aspects and the broader complexities faced in the courtroom. Also, their participation ensured the trainings were grounded in real-world judicial experience, with a more victim-centered, rights-based approach.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was conducted between May and August 2024. The evaluation was guided by a Theory of Change and used structured surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions to assess project outcomes. It gathered input from 50 respondents in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Prosecutor General's Office, with 30 interviews and FGDs with stakeholders from UNODC, NGOs, and law enforcement, capturing diverse perspectives on human trafficking in Kyrgyzstan. Following UNEG, UNODC standards, and OECD DAC criteria, the evaluation spanned five phases: preparation, data collection, analysis, reporting, and dissemination. It emphasized Human Rights and Gender Equality. Ethical guidelines ensured confidentiality and cultural sensitivity, aiming to offer actionable insights for future gender equality improvements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Update Training Materials and Build Capacity for Investigating Cybercrime and Digital TIP**
2. **Facilitate the development and implementation of an updated case management system specifically designed for TIP cases**
3. **Increase Gender Sensitivity and Victim-Centered Approaches in Training, and implement joint Gender Audit**
4. **Strengthen Support for TIP-Specific CSOs and Enhance Service Delivery**



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