



Reducing torture and ill-treatment

Strengthening preventative monitoring mechanisms in Georgia and Armenia

In October 2016, Penal Reform International began a project that aims to strengthen preventive monitoring mechanisms in Georgia and Armenia. The project is being carried out in partnership with the Civil Society Institute in Armenia and is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Netherlands.

This summary outlines the findings of a mid-term evaluation of the project conducted by PRI's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer in June 2017.

The project is being implemented through a multi-pronged approach, and aims to:

1. Strengthen the legal and normative framework for torture prevention in both countries.
2. Increase capacity of oversight bodies to monitor places of detention effectively.
3. Work with the media to improve awareness of the importance of monitoring as a form of torture prevention.

Purpose and methodology

The mid-term internal evaluation was conducted to assess progress of the project so far, provide evidence on PRI's contribution to outcomes, and identify lessons learned and recommendations for the second year of the project.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with PRI staff and staff from the Civil Society Institute (CSI), as well as representatives from monitoring bodies, government ministries, national NGOs and media outlets. Data was also collected from project documents and relevant external publications.

“The training in Armenia on monitoring psychiatric institutions will be very important and useful for us and our Armenian colleagues.”

Member of the Georgian National Preventative Mechanism.



Key project activities

- Producing a baseline report on current monitoring of police units
- Organising annual roundtable/workshop events with high-level stakeholders, monitoring bodies and civil society groups in each country
- Producing factsheets on country-specific policy issues
- Advocating for legislative change in Parliament, participating in Parliamentary working groups and drafting inputs to legal and normative amendments
- Organising and participating at side events at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the UN.
- Organising a regional conference to discuss the work of National Preventative Mechanisms (NPMs), facilitate the exchange of good practices and experiences in the region, raise awareness, and produce recommendations for reform
- Training NPM and monitoring board members on monitoring psychiatric institutions and the conditions of prisoners with mental health needs
- Developing new monitoring tools and updating existing monitoring methodologies for NPMs
- Developing a monitoring handbook in both Georgian and Armenian, which contains guidelines and tools for monitoring, based on a collection of tools which have been analysed and adapted to local contexts and challenges
- Facilitating expert input into the development of Armenia's NPM annual reports
- Supporting media outlets to write articles on torture prevention

Preventive Monitoring Mechanisms

In Georgia

Georgia ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) in 2006 and designated its NPM in 2009. The NPM is part of the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia and includes a six-member advisory council and a 36-member Special Prevention Group made up of lawyers, mental health professionals, social workers and minorities' rights experts who conduct visits with permission or at the invitation of the NPM.

In Armenia

The Armenian NPM was designated in 2008 as part of the Human Rights Defender, after Armenia ratified the OPCAT in 2006. It functions as an Ombudsman plus model, with a council of experts comprising civil society members. Armenia also has independent monitoring boards for police detention and prisons, led by representatives from Armenian civil society organisations.

Key stakeholders

The project works directly with the NPMs of both countries, as well as the prison and police monitoring boards in Armenia, the Ministry of Corrections in Georgia, and the Ministry of Justice in Armenia. Two Georgian human rights news outlets have been engaged to raise awareness of torture prevention through the media. The project is also making use of international experts on detention monitoring to deliver training and update monitoring tools for monitoring bodies.

“ This project will have a positive impact on our visits.”

Member of prison monitoring group, Armenia.



Key findings

01

The capacity needs of NPMs and monitoring boards in Armenia have been very well understood and activities have been tailored and adapted to meet these needs

The main training workshop for NPM and monitoring board members, which had not taken place at the time of the evaluation, is on monitoring psychiatric institutions and conditions for prisoners with mental health problems. This topic was not specified in the original proposal, but the needs assessment conducted at the start of the project, as well as interviews for this evaluation, revealed that the main knowledge and skills gap of members was in this area. The project's managers were successfully able to amend the project to meet these needs and engage experts on this topic for the training workshop. Nearly all interviewees from monitoring bodies stated that training and updating of existing monitoring tools were the most necessary parts of the project for them, and would likely have the biggest impact.

02

The original project design was ambitious in its aims to improve the legal and normative framework, namely the reestablishment of civil society monitoring mechanisms in Georgia and the strengthening of the framework for monitoring police detention units in Armenia

In recent years there have been steps towards increasing the involvement of civil society in the Georgian NPM and the Ministry of Corrections; however there is currently no appetite in the Georgian government to allow independent civil society monitoring. In Armenia, the composition and mandate of the police monitoring board is very weak. Although it is unlikely that these outcomes will be achieved in the timeframe of the project, the coordinators should not be put off by these ambitious targets as progress can still be achieved in these areas.

03

The project has engaged local human rights organisations and news outlets to highlight the issue of torture and the importance of public monitoring

The project allowed them to prioritise and carry out in-depth exploration of the issues around torture and its prevention. In Armenia, the partner organisation, CSI, was able to conduct in-depth research into criminal subcultures in Armenian prisons, after publishing an article about the topic for this project.

“The adaption of the tool on monitoring mental healthcare institutions will be very important. This year we have a target for monitoring these...last year the CPT report on Armenia was very critical of this area. The conditions of these institutions and treatment of people is very poor. We have a lot to improve so we think the new monitoring tool will improve things.”

Member of the Armenia NPM.



Lessons learned and recommendations

Lessons learned

Projects that require authorities to reform laws on oversight need substantial and coordinated advocacy from a range of stakeholders, including international and national NGOs and donors. According to representatives from national NGOs, international NGOs like PRI are more likely to be listened to by the governments of Georgia and Armenia, because their voices are seen to carry more weight than national NGOs.

The police monitoring board in Armenia is weak in terms of members, mandate and funding, and has been unable to fulfil its main task of properly monitoring police temporary detention isolators. However, it is still important to engage this group as their existence and monitoring role is essential.

Citizens and governments risk becoming complacent when it comes to hearing about human rights abuses, especially as there have been many human rights abuse scandals in the news in recent years. Although this indicates that freedom of expression and the press are protected, there is a risk that audiences lose interest and become disengaged.

The project is likely to make significant gains in the following year, building on the activities implemented. It is therefore essential that activities are properly monitored to measure the effectiveness and impact of this outcome.

Recommendations



PRI should use its standing as an international NGO with multi-country experience to take the lead and facilitate a renewed discussion – between national civil society and the state bodies of Georgia and Armenia – on the creation of public monitoring bodies in Georgia and on expanding the mandate of the Armenia police monitoring board. PRI could consider establishing and leading civil society fora in each country to achieve this.



PRI should increase its advocacy efforts to strengthen the police monitoring board, and adopt a more strategic and comprehensive approach, together with CSI.



PRI should consider more creative ways to build the communication capacities of monitoring groups so that they can conduct advocacy and communication with the government and the public in more interesting and compelling ways, which may bring about change and spark interest and engagement from the public.



The project team should make use of processes that track the following: government engagement; the knowledge and skills acquired and used by training participants (pre- and post-tests and follow-up questionnaires approximately six months after the training); improvements in the quality of monitoring visits; and the effectiveness of media activities. Monitoring outcomes as they occur makes it easier to build on successes, maintain momentum, appreciate what is realistic and achievable during a project's timeframe, and provide evidence for what works, in order to adjust the project's design.



Media coverage*

GEORGIA

What changes in the revised Code provide for imprisonment

Natia Gogolashvili (24 April 2017)

What has changed for prisoners

Zurab Vardiashvili (1 May 2017)

MIA isolators – what describes the Ombudsman

Zurab Vardiashvili (29 May 2017)

Reintegration, ill-treatment, healthcare – what are the challenges facing the prison system?

Natia Gogolashvili (2 June 2017)

ARMENIA

Criminal subculture in prisons leads to violence, discrimination and ill-treatment

(31 Jan 2017)

Reposted here:

www.aravot.am/2017/01/31/851073

Referred to here:

www.panarmenian.net/arm/news/231401

**All articles are in Georgian or Armenian*

Photos: **Page 1:** Ministry of Corrections of Georgia, 2014. **Page 2:** Left: Women's Prison N5, Georgia. Antonio di Vico. Right: PRI project coordinator, Bakar Jikia, with a member of the Prison Monitoring Group, Armenia. **Page 3:** Ministry of Corrections of Georgia, 2014. **Page 4:** Workshop in Armenia on monitoring psychiatric institutions led by Vladimir Ortakov, a psychiatrist and former member and Vice-President of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT).

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

We promote alternatives to prison which support the rehabilitation of offenders, and promote the right of detainees to fair and humane treatment. We campaign for the prevention of torture and the abolition of the death penalty, and we work to ensure just and appropriate responses to children and women who come into contact with the law.

We currently have programmes in the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the South Caucasus, and work with partners in South Asia.

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