

## 7 Uzbekistan: Social Work and Health in the Penitentiary System

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### *Introduction*

This chapter presents an overview of the development of social work and health services in the prison system in Uzbekistan. It addresses the question of prison reform: to what extent has Uzbekistan made progress in humanising the conditions for its prison population and address this issue through social and medical services.

The chapter is structured as follows: first, the legal framework and organisational structure of Uzbekistan's prison system is presented. Second, the main social and health issues of the prison population are explained. While Uzbekistan has made progress in improving the social and health situation of the prison population, continuous monitoring is still needed. Third, the chapter discusses the development of social work and health care services in Uzbekistan's prison system. The chapter concludes with a short summary and outlook for prison reform in the future.

### *1. The Penitentiary System in Uzbekistan*

The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan establishes the legal framework for the penitentiary system in Uzbekistan. The Constitution guarantees the rights and freedoms of citizens, including the right to a fair trial and the prohibition of arbitrary detention. It also establishes the framework for the organisation and operation of the penitentiary system, including the powers and responsibilities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and other authorities.

In addition to the Constitution, several laws and regulations provide more detailed guidance on the operation of the penitentiary system. These include the Law on Execution of Sentences, which sets out the legal framework for the detention and rehabilitation of individuals who have been deprived of their liberty, and the Law on Execution of Sentences,

which guides the organisation, management, and oversight of penitentiary institutions (Tadjibayeva, 2019; Salaev, 2018).

Overall, the legal framework for the penitentiary system in Uzbekistan is designed to protect the rights and interests of inmates while enabling the effective management and rehabilitation of individuals deprived of their liberty. According to Article 19 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, citizens and the state are bound by mutual rights and responsibilities. As outlined in the Constitution and laws, the rights and freedoms of citizens are inviolable and cannot be deprived or restricted without a trial. In 2017, a decree was issued by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan to improve the activities of internal affairs bodies in relation to the execution of sentences involving deprivation of liberty (Uzbekistan-Geneva, 2021). This was intended to increase the efficiency of protecting the rights and interests of individuals serving sentences in detention centres and to align the penitentiary system with international standards (Uzbekistan AT, 2021). In 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted a resolution on additional measures to ensure transparency and openness in the penitentiary system concerning deprivation of liberty (Tadjibayeva, 2019).

The penitentiary system of Uzbekistan has a hierarchical structure, with different levels of authority and responsibility. At the top of the hierarchy is the Ministry of Internal Affairs, responsible for overseeing the entire penitentiary system. Below the Ministry of Internal Affairs, there are several regional departments, each of which is responsible for overseeing the penitentiary institutions within its geographic area. These provincial departments are responsible for implementing national policies and regulations within their jurisdictions and providing support and guidance to individual penitentiary institutions.

Individual penitentiary institutions, such as prisons and detention centres, are responsible for carrying out the day-to-day operations, including the management and rehabilitation of inmates. These institutions are typically organised into various departments, such as security, administration, education, and health, each of which has specific responsibilities.

Overall, the organisational structure of the penitentiary system of Uzbekistan is designed to provide a transparent chain of command and to ensure that inmates' rights and interests are protected, while also enabling the effective management and rehabilitation of individuals who have been deprived of their liberty.

The organisational structure of the penitentiary system of Uzbekistan has changed since the Republic became independent in 1992. According to the Department for the Execution of Sentences under the Ministry of

Internal Affairs, today, there are 54 correctional colonies in the Republic, of which 18 are with strong regime, 25 are colony settlements, and 11 are pre-trial detention centres (Podrobno, 2022).

The penitentiary system of Uzbekistan includes several different types of prisons, each of which serves a specific purpose. The main types of prisons within the system are:

- **General regime prisons:** This is the most common type of prison in Uzbekistan, and they are designed to accommodate a wide range of inmates, including both male and female offenders. General regime prisons typically have a range of facilities and services, including education and vocational training programmes, health care services, and recreational activities.
- **High-security prisons:** These prisons are designed to hold offenders who have been convicted of particularly serious crimes or who pose a significant risk of escape or violence. High-security prisons have a higher level of security than general regime prisons, and they may also have additional facilities, such as specialised workshops or medical units.
- **Juvenile prisons:** These prisons are specifically designed to hold offenders who are under the age of 18. Juvenile prisons typically have a more rehabilitative focus than adult prisons, and they may offer a range of educational, vocational, and therapeutic programmes.
- **Women's prisons:** These are designed to hold female offenders and typically have facilities and services tailored to women's needs. Women's prisons may offer programmes and services related to childcare, health care, and education, as well as providing support for women who have experienced trauma or abuse.

Overall, the different types of prisons within the penitentiary system of Uzbekistan are designed to meet the specific needs of groups of offenders and to provide a range of rehabilitative services and programmes. According to the second part of Article 45 as amended by the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated 28 August 2019 (No ZRU-558 – National Legislation Database, 08/29/2019, No 03/19/558/3662), institutions for the execution of punishment include colonies for the execution of punishment, educational colonies, prisons, and specialised hospitals for convicts.

Colonies for the execution of punishment are divided into colony settlements – colonies of general, strict, and special regimes – and are intended for the detention of convicts who have reached the age of majority. Educational colonies are intended for the detention of juvenile convicts. Prisons are designed to hold adult convicts.

The prison system in Uzbekistan is organised as follows:

- The Ministry of Internal Affairs is the primary government agency responsible for the prison system in Uzbekistan. The Ministry is responsible for the overall management and oversight of the prison system, including developing and implementing policies and regulations, allocating resources, and coordinating activities with other agencies.
- The General Directorate for the Execution of Punishment is the agency within the Ministry of Internal Affairs responsible for the prison system's day-to-day operation. The General Directorate is responsible for the management of individual prisons and other institutions, as well as for the provision of services and programmes to inmates.
- The Penitentiary Service is the agency within the General Directorate for the Execution of Punishment responsible for the security and management of individual prisons and other institutions. The Penitentiary Service is responsible for supervising inmates, maintaining order and safety, and enforcing rules and regulations within the prison system.

The prison system in Uzbekistan plays an essential role in the country's criminal and legal policy. After gaining national independence, the government began to reform its penal system, recognising the need to update its regulatory framework and develop a long-term strategy (UzbekistanAT, 2021).

According to national legislation, the tasks of the criminal-executive system in Uzbekistan include executing criminal penalties such as fines, imprisonment, and compulsory public works, as well as supervising the behaviour of conditionally convicted persons and ensuring law enforcement and safety in prisons. The system also focuses on providing education and vocational training to convicts, ensuring their health. These goals aim to strengthen and protect the rule of law in Uzbekistan (Salaev, 2018).

The development of the prison system has evolved with time the first known prisons appearing in ancient civilisations. Over time, the purpose of prisons began to shift, and they began to be used not only as places of punishment but also as places of rehabilitation. This trend continued throughout history, with the development of various forms of punishment and rehabilitation, such as the use of solitary confinement and the introduction of parole and probation. The prison system has evolved in modern times, now emphasising rehabilitation and reintegration into society. However, the specific developments and practices within the prison system can vary significantly from country to country. Modern Uzbekistan has a post-Soviet prison system and ideology and a legal system.

Over the past four years, long-term, purposeful, and large-scale work has been carried out in this area, based on a profoundly analytical and systematic approach. In particular, three laws, five Resolutions of the President, eight Resolutions and Orders of the Government, and 14 other legal acts aimed at further expanding convicts' rights and legitimate interests and improving their living conditions were adopted. In particular, the 'Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners', adopted by the resolution of the UN General Assembly on 17 December 17 2015, were implemented in the national legislation. For the first time, the right to vote was granted to persons serving sentences for small- and medium-gravity crimes and less severe crimes (Uzbekistan-Geneva, 2021).

## 2. *The Population of the Penitentiary System*

Over 29,000 convicts are kept in penitentiary institutions in Uzbekistan (Salaev, 2018; Podrobno, 2022). It is reported that more than 7,000 people are in correctional colonies, and 22,000 are in other penal settlements (Widespread, 2016). In 2018, there were, on average, 140 prisoners for every 100,000 residents of Uzbekistan (Clark, 2020).

In the first half of 2022, criminal courts considered 29,783 criminal cases against 38,077 persons in Uzbekistan. As a result, 8,929 people went to jail, 19,070 were given other types of punishment, and 737 were given suspended sentences, according to the Supreme Court (Sputnik Uzbekistan, 2019); Sputnik Uzbekistan (2022).

Of every 30 people currently serving sentences in places of deprivation of liberty, 29 are men and one is a woman (Clark, 2020).

Among the prisoners in Uzbekistan in the first half of 2022, 25,564 were men, 5,945 were women, 11,695 were young people (including 971 minors), and 854 were over 60 years old (Sputnik Uzbekistan, 2019; Sputnik Uzbekistan, 2022).

According to the legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, all prisoners have the right to medical care. This is a fundamental human right protected under international law and should be respected and upheld by all governments. However, in practice, this right is not consistently implemented in Uzbekistan, and access to medical care for prisoners may not be consistently provided.

In addition, there have been improvements concerning torture and other forms of abuse in the country's penitentiary system (Uzbekistan AT, 2021). While this is a positive development, it is essential to continue monitoring and addressing these issues to ensure that prisoners' rights

are fully protected. It is also crucial to continue to work towards fully implementing the right to medical care for all prisoners and address any other gaps in the protection of human rights in the criminal justice system.

On 29 December 2020, the President of Uzbekistan addressed the *Oliy Majlis*, the country's parliament, and announced plans to introduce a more humane approach to the penal system. As part of this effort, 25 settlement colonies will be phased out and replaced with probationary supervision for individuals sentenced to imprisonment for the first time. This will allow around 6,000 people serving sentences to live at home with their families under the control of the *mahalla*, a traditional community-based organisation.

The President's announcement marks a significant shift in the approach to punishment in Uzbekistan (Diplomatis, 2021). It is a positive step towards the wider introduction of the principle of humanism into the country's penal system. By providing individuals with the opportunity to serve their sentences in a more humane and rehabilitative manner, the government hopes to reduce recidivism and improve the overall effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

Furthermore, moving away from settlement colonies and towards probationary supervision is expected to positively impact families and communities. Allowing individuals to live at home and be supervised by the *mahalla* (community centre) will help them maintain connections with loved ones and support their reintegration into society. This, in turn, will help reduce imprisonment's social and economic costs and promote a more sustainable and inclusive approach to punishment.

Overall, the President's announcement represents a significant step forward in the ongoing effort to reform the penal system in Uzbekistan and align it with international standards (Diplomatis, 2021; Uzbekistan AT 2021). By prioritising the principles of humanism and rehabilitation, the government hopes to improve the effectiveness of punishment and promote a more inclusive and humane society.

Many social and health issues in Uzbekistan's prison system affect prisoners and incarcerated individuals. Uzbekistan is building a culture of human rights, but concerns about political prisoners, torture, forced labour, and corruption remain, experts of the Human Rights Committee say (United Nations, 2020).

Prisoners may not have access to adequate health care, which can lead to the spread of infectious diseases and other health problems. Lack of education and vocational training can also be a significant issue in prisons, making it difficult for individuals to reintegrate into society after they

are successfully released. This can lead to high rates of recidivism, where individuals return to prison after being released.

Overall, the social and health issues in prisons are complex and multifaceted. Addressing them requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the underlying causes and seeks to promote rehabilitation and successful reintegration into society.

### 3. *Human Rights Situation in the Penitentiary System*

Incarcerated individuals are often subject to a range of human rights violations, including inadequate access to health care, lack of education and vocational training, and physical and sexual abuse.

Many prisoners also face restrictions on their freedom of movement and association and may not have access to adequate legal representation or other forms of support. This can make it difficult for them to assert their rights and seek justice when violated.

Additionally, prisoners may be subject to overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions, which can have a negative impact on their physical and mental health. These conditions can also lead to an increased risk of violence and other forms of abuse.

Overall, the human rights situation in prisons is often a cause for concern. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that prioritises the rights and well-being of incarcerated individuals.

There are reports on torture in prisons (USCIRF, 2003). Torture and other forms of abuse are reported to be widespread in the prisons of Uzbekistan. According to a report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), many prisoners in Uzbekistan are subjected to torture and other forms of abuse to extract confessions and information. This abuse is often carried out by law enforcement officials in order to achieve their goals, and it is done with impunity.

The USCIRF report states that methods of torture used in Uzbekistan's prisons included beatings, suffocation, electric shocks, and other forms of physical abuse (USCIRF, 2003). In addition, prisoners has been subjected to psychological abuse, including threats and intimidation. Many prisoners are also held in inhumane conditions, with little access to medical care and poor sanitation. This abuse is particularly prevalent in the case of prisoners who have been arrested on religious or political grounds. Many of these prisoners are subjected to torture and other forms of abuse to force them to renounce their beliefs or to provide information about other individuals.

In conclusion, torture and other forms of abuse are widespread in Uzbekistan's prisons. These abuses are often carried out by law enforcement officials to extract confessions and information, and this is done with impunity.

#### 4. *Informal Governance Structures in Prisons*

Informal governance structures in Uzbekistan prisons can exist to regulate decisions outside the formal rules and regulations the prison administration sets and how prisoners and correctional officers interact with each other (Moczydłowski, 2015). These structures can take many forms and can vary from one prison to another.

The division of penal facilities into “red” and “black” is a legacy of the Soviet system, and although it is an informal, unofficial classification it is respected by prison authorities and inmates alike (IWPR, 2015). Prisoners may form informal hierarchies based on factors such as race, gang affiliation, or other criteria, and these hierarchies can significantly influence the daily lives of prisoners. Informal governance structures can also arise in relationships between prisoners and correctional officers, with prisoners using various means to gain favours or special treatment from officers. Overall, these informal governance structures can significantly impact the functioning of prisons and sometimes create challenges for the administration in maintaining order and control within the facility.

#### 5. *Social Work in the Penitentiary System*

Social work services in the penitentiary system include social and medical services. For instance, there is a state social service that helps people in prison to follow professional training and acquire a new professional specialization as a form of resocialisation. In addition, medical services are provided in the penitentiary system. However, medical care in the prisons leaves much to be desired.

For example, Uzbekistan has faced criticism for its handling of torture in its prisons (CABAR.asia, 2020). To address this issue, the ombudsman for human rights in the country has proposed transferring medical services in prisons from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Public Health. This proposal continues to be ignored by the authorities. A deputy in the country's parliament has called for action on the proposal, arguing



that the current arrangement contributes to the prevalence of torture in the country's prisons. Human rights activists have also criticised the lack of transparency and accountability in handling allegations of torture.

Despite promises to improve legislation and prevent torture, little progress has been made in addressing the issue, and doctors in Uzbekistan can earn money from sick prisoners (Acca Media, 2022).

Sick female prisoners in Uzbekistan reportedly experience serious difficulties with accessing medical care. Human rights activist Tatyana Dovlatova has claimed that there is a high level of corruption in the hospital of Zangiata district in Tashkent region, where patients from nearby penitentiary institutions are treated. Dovlatova has reported that patients are forced to pay for their own medication, which is often overpriced and of poor quality. She has also described medical staff showing contempt for prisoners and denying them the necessary treatment. These reports highlight the need for improved access to medical care for prisoners in Uzbekistan.

Prone of the examples of the medical service work is Fazilkhoja Arifkhoyev, a prisoner of conscience in Uzbekistan, who is forced to do physical labour in a brick factory despite being in poor health and constant pain. He has a deformed spine and has been repeatedly tortured, yet the regime has denied him the necessary medical care. Arifkhoyev's family has made repeated requests for medical treatment, as required by the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Mandela Rules). Yet officials have denied any knowledge of these rules and continue to refuse Arifkhoyev the care he needs. In addition to this mistreatment, Arifkhoyev has also been attacked by other prisoners with offensive insults, at the instigation of a senior regime official.

These actions violate Uzbekistan's legally binding international human rights obligations established under the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. No officials suspected of involvement in Arifkhoyev's torture have been arrested and imprisoned.

## 6. International Organisations and the Penitentiary System

UNODC also provided technical assistance and support to national partners in developing gender-sensitive legislation, policies, and procedures in the criminal justice sector (Nelson Mandela Rules, 2008).

In addition, UNODC closely collaborates with civil society organisations to increase awareness of gender-based violence and promote victims'

rights (Women and Imprisonment – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008). This included providing training and support to crisis centres and shelters for women and children and collaborating with national partners on developing comprehensive services for victims of gender-based violence.

UNODC also supported the implementation of the regional strategy on HIV and AIDS in Central Asia, focusing on reducing the stigma and discrimination faced by people living with HIV. This included providing training to law enforcement and justice sector officials on HIV-related issues and collaborating with national partners to develop and implement policies and programmes that support the rights of people living with HIV (United Nations, 2011).

Overall, UNODC's work in Central Asia in 2021 demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment and ensuring the protection of the human rights of all individuals, particularly vulnerable populations.

### *7. Participation of NGOs in Prison Social Work*

The situation for NGOs in Uzbekistan is challenging, with various obstacles and hurdles hindering their ability to operate and make a meaningful contribution to society. These include unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles, a lengthy registration process, language barriers, low legal literacy, and a lack of legal support. In addition, unwritten rules about 'expertise' complicate the formation of a genuine civil society in the country. Despite efforts to improve the situation through the adoption of legal acts, the third sector in Uzbekistan still needs to be developed.

Self-initiative NGOs, unlike state-organised NGOs, need more resources and organisational potential to significantly contribute to the country's development. The main reasons for this situation are the lack of financial assistance and support from the government and the dominating of control functions over developing partnerships and dialogs with civil society institutions. Authorities in Uzbekistan need to support and encourage self-initiative NGO activities to foster the growth of a vibrant and active civil society.

The Organisation "Barqaror Hayot" is one of the few well-established, successful NGOs in Uzbekistan. The NGO assists victims of human trafficking and former prisoners with rehabilitation and reintegration into normal life, supports anti-human trafficking efforts, and prepares labour migrants to adapt to working abroad. Barqaror Hayot's director Oliya Il-

muradova is enthusiastic about the new law: 'The new law will expand our opportunities to work with the population, the youth, and the vulnerable people.'

The simplified requirements will create a truly enabling environment both for the existing and newly initiated NGOs, which will impact the overall development of civil society in Uzbekistan. DVV International is the Institute for International Cooperation of the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V. (DVV), the German adult education association. DVV represents the interests of the approximately 900 adult education centres (*Volkshochschulen*) and their state associations, Germany's largest further education providers.

On 1 January 2019, probation services and their territorial divisions were established to assist in the social adaptation and employment of former convicts and minors released from penitentiary institutions, which includes organising professional trainings. To improve the legal mechanism aimed at guaranteeing the protection of the rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests of convicts when they are corrected in the system of execution of punishment and social adaptation in society, as well as to strengthen the protection of the rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests of convicts, the prohibition of the unreasonable use of physical force and special means during searches – the law 'On Introducing Amendments and Additions to the Penitentiary Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Aimed at Ensuring Reliable Protection of the Rights and Legitimate Interests of Convicts' – was adopted.

The DVV branch in Uzbekistan implements the project 'Interaction between State Bodies and Civil Society Institutions in the Resocialisation of Convicts and Those Released from Places of Deprivation of Liberty'. The project is implemented with the support of the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), in partnership with the Republican Information and Educational Center 'INTILISH' and the NGO 'Institute for Democracy and Human Rights'. The institute was founded in March 2015. The director of the institute is Sayora Khodjaeva. The organisation is engaged in improving the legal culture of the population, advocating for the protection and culture of human rights. Legally, the institute is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation with four branches across the regions of the Republic. One of the institute's research projects is dedicated to developing the national parliamentary system. The goal is to analyse the Uzbek experience and foreign practice in parliamentary democracy. According to Khodjaeva, the institute will contribute to the implementation of the tasks set in the concept, initiated by the President of Uzbekistan. 'For this, we brought

together highly qualified lawyers, undergraduates from law schools, and human rights experts,' she emphasised (DVV International, 2022).

The goal of the project is to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations to protect the social, economic, and cultural rights of vulnerable groups of the population – convicted and released from places of execution of punishment through the establishment of social partnership and cooperation with government agencies and the provision of adapted services to target groups.

Sayora Khodjaeva turned to the head of the NGO for help (the head of the NGO asked that they neither mention their name nor the name of the NGO). According to the head of the NGO, there is an unspoken rule throughout the country not to allow them to carry out social work or provide it to convicts in prisons. Permission can only be obtained in a colony with minors and when joining an international program, as is the case with DVV International, which, in cooperation with several NGOs, ensures their participation in social work with convicts

### *8. Reintegration, Rehabilitation, and Re-entry*

Reintegration, rehabilitation, and re-entry refer to the process of helping individuals who have been incarcerated to transition back into society successfully. In Uzbekistan, this process should involve providing individuals with the tools and support they need to rebuild their lives, find employment, and avoid returning to criminal behaviour.

Reintegration should focus on helping individuals reconnect with their communities and rebuild relationships with friends and family. This can involve providing access to housing, education and vocational training, and other support services. Rehabilitation, on the other hand, focuses on addressing the underlying causes of criminal behaviour and helping individuals to develop the skills and coping mechanisms they need to avoid returning to crime. This can involve providing access to mental health and addiction treatment, as well as education and vocational training. Re-entry refers to the actual process of returning to society after being incarcerated. This can be a challenging process, and many individuals face barriers to finding employment and housing, as well as discrimination and stigma. To support successful re-entry, it is often necessary to provide individuals with access to support services, such as job training and placement, housing assistance, and mental health care.

Overall, reintegration, rehabilitation, and re-entry are important components of a comprehensive approach to criminal justice that seeks to reduce

recidivism and promote successful reintegration into society. Providing individuals with the support and opportunities they need to rebuild their lives makes it possible to promote a more just and inclusive society.

### 9. *What Kind of Social Work Services are Provided in the Prisons?*

In general, social workers in prisons may provide a range of services, including mental health and addiction treatment, family support and reunification, education and vocational training, and assistance with re-entry and reintegration into society.

Various professionals may provide these services, including psychologists, counsellors, and other mental health and social service providers. In some cases, these services may be provided by government agencies or contracted out to private organisations. In other cases, they may be provided by non-profit organisations or community-based groups.

Overall, social work services in prisons aim to provide individuals with the support and resources they need to address the underlying causes of their criminal behaviour and successfully reintegrate into society. Providing access to these services can reduce recidivism and promote a more just and inclusive society (Nelson Mandela Rules, 2008; United Nations, 2011).

In 2003, the Head of the Representative Office of DVV International in, Uwe Gartenschleger, initiated the project 'Creation of a Training and Production System in Penitentiary Institutions in the Republic of Uzbekistan' (DVV International, 2022). After discussing the possibility of cooperation with the Main Directorate for the Execution of Sentences of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the administration of institutions, the project began its life and is currently ongoing, with the financial support of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). NGOs that officially cooperate with DVV International can take part in the project.

DVV International has been active in Central Asia since 2002, with a regional office in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. In 2009 and 2012 respectively, DVV International country offices were opened in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Regional cooperation plays an important role in Central Asia. The exchange between adult education providers and various stakeholders from different countries is an important part of the work of DVV International in the region. In 2018 the regional office moved from Tashkent to Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan.

The annual summer academies are significant exchange forums that bring together experts, trainers, and other players involved in adult educa-

tion. The topics of these regional events include, for example, methods of adult education, networking, lobbying, or the international education agenda.

Examples of regional cooperation are the projects for improving educational provisions for prisoners in all three countries in the region. Intensive exchange and mutual consultation take place, both among the civil society partner organisations and the competent public authorities, as well as the teams responsible for project implementation.

Another pillar of the regional approach is to support cooperation between national adult education associations from Central Asia and regional and national partners and networks in the field of adult education. Special mention should be made here especially of PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia), based in India and ASPBAE (Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education). Cooperation takes place within the framework of joint study tours, summer schools, and workshops (DVV International, 2022).

#### *10. Barriers to the Development of Social Work in Prisons*

There are many barriers to providing effective social work services in the prisons of Uzbekistan. Significant barriers include inadequate funding, lack of trained personnel, and limited access to programmes and services (Acca Media, 2021).

One of the significant challenges facing social workers in Uzbekistan prisons is inadequate funding. Jails can be underfunded and lack the resources to provide adequate support to incarcerated individuals. This can make it difficult for social workers to provide the services and support that individuals need to address the underlying causes of their criminal behaviour and successfully reintegrate into society (Acca Media, 2021).

Another barrier to practicing social work in prisons is a lack of qualified social workers or other mental health and social service professionals to provide the needed support. The lack of social workers is a problem for all other spheres of Uzbekistan (Faizieva, 2020). This can make it difficult for individuals to access the services they need, leading to inadequate support and higher rates of recidivism.

In addition, many prisons have limited access to programmes and services to support the successful reintegration of individuals into society. This includes education, vocational training, mental health and addiction treatment, and housing and employment assistance. Without access to

these services, it can be difficult for individuals to rebuild their lives after successful release.

Overall, many barriers exist to providing effective social work services in prisons. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the underlying causes and seeks to promote successful reintegration into society.

### 11. How Can These Challenges Be Addressed?

The creation of the Ministry of Social Protection has been discussed for many years, but it has yet to appear. Uzbekistan needs an updated social protection system and the introduction of educated, professional social workers to work with those in need. There are already professional employees in the country, but due to the lack of a single state body and staff units, they cannot work according to their profession (Umarova, 2018).

The transfer of the CCES (Committee of the Penitentiary System) from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Justice is one of the recommendations of the UN Committee against Torture. In addition, an NGO representative (Yergalieva, Kazakhstan) recalled that at present, among the Post-Soviet countries, only in Belarus and Uzbekistan does the penitentiary system continue to remain under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Upon analysing the data related to social work within the prison system in Uzbekistan, it is clear that improvements need to be made in the work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the penitentiary system as regards the provision of social assistance. To address this issue, several suggestions can be made (EurasiaNet, 2020).

Firstly, it is recommended to strengthen the work of NGOs in the *mahallas*, or neighbourhoods, that assist individuals who have been released from prison. This can include the involvement of psychologists and social workers who can support these individuals as they reintegrate into society.

The rules for establishing NGOs that work within penitentiary institutions should be simplified. This will make it easier for such organisations to operate within the prison system and provide much-needed support to inmates.

Another suggestion is to establish a Ministry of Social Assistance and Protection, which would oversee the provision of social assistance to individuals within the prison system. This would ensure that the needs of inmates are being met and that they are receiving the support they need to successfully reintegrate into society.

Furthermore, the work of prisons should be transferred from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Justice. This would align the work of prisons with the broader justice system and provide a more cohesive approach to addressing the needs of inmates.

Additionally, regulations should be developed to govern the work of NGOs in prisons and their provision of social assistance to inmates. This could include guidelines for providing medical care, additional education, and psychological assistance.

NGOs should also develop a programme to work with individuals who have recently been released from prison. This could include offering assistance with employment, education, and financial support to help these individuals reintegrate into society.

Regulations related to prisons should also be amended to indicate that social assistance and support are an integral part of the work within the prison system. Furthermore, laws related to social assistance should be amended to include provisions for the most vulnerable segments of the population, such as individuals in prison and those who have recently been released, with a focus on resocialisation and rehabilitation.

It is also essential to address the stigmatisation of convicted persons in civil society and to provide social assistance to the families of convicts who are left without a breadwinner.

Lastly, the issue medical and social assistance for convicts suffering from HIV, HBV, and HCV should be resolved, focusing on providing medical rehabilitation and treatment to those who need it.

## *Conclusion*

The Republic of Uzbekistan has been actively making efforts to reform its prison system with a focus on improving prison conditions and promoting the resocialization and rehabilitation of convicts. The government has invested in constructing new, modern prison facilities that meet international standards for prison conditions to provide a more humane environment for prisoners. In addition, various educational and vocational training programs for convicts have been developed. These programs aim to help convicts acquire skills and knowledge that can be useful upon their release, thus reducing the likelihood of recidivism and promoting their reintegration into society.

The government of Uzbekistan has also introduced programs and initiatives to promote convicts' mental and physical well-being. This includes providing access to medical care and sports and recreational activities.



These programs are intended to help convicts maintain their physical and psychological health during incarceration, which is an essential aspect of their rehabilitation.

It is important to note that the process of reforms takes time, and it's important to have a long-term vision and strategy to achieve the goals. It's also essential to have accurate data and statistics to measure the progress and evaluate the efforts made to improve the system. However, it can be said that Uzbekistan has made progress in improving the prison system and promoting the rehabilitation of convicts. However, there is still room for improvement in fully implementing international standards and addressing ongoing issues such as overcrowding and access to medical care. The government and stakeholders need to work together to address these issues and continue to make progress in the ongoing process of prison system reform.

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