

BACKGROUND

Camps and prisons in northeastern Syria and Iraq house numerous citizens of Kyrgyzstan (men, women, and children) who travelled to the region to join violent extremist groups. Bishkek stands out as a global leader in repatriating its citizens, especially women and children, ensuring that once they return home, they undergo successful rehabilitation and reintegration into society. In Kyrgyzstan, there are a significant number of individuals serving prison sentences who are either related to violent extremism or are at risk of radicalisation.

In 2022, the government of Kyrgyzstan extended an invitation to the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) for an introductory meeting. Building upon this collaboration, GCERF has formally accepted the Kyrgyzstan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to join the GCERF Governing Board in 2023.

Kyrgyzstan became a GCERF partner country* in 2023, with our investment beginning in July 2024. GCERF signed grants worth USD 2 million with two local civil society organisations (CSOs) as principal recipients of two consortia to implement our country investment strategy, which contributes to preventing violent extremism (PVE) as part of the country's National Action Plan (NAP).

GCERF pioneers a unique model of investment designed to promote a whole-of-society approach and ensure the sustainability of our programmes. Under this model, in each partner country, we support national governments in establishing a steering committee called the Country Support Mechanism (CSM).

In Kyrgyzstan, the CSM was chaired by the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration, but the Investment strategy extends beyond R&R efforts with a high need to adopt a broader perspective on supporting PVE. In this regard, the CSM is under renewal, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs has taken the initiative and is renewing the composition of the group by including various agencies that will work not only on R&R, but also on PVE.

GCERF'S INVESTMENT STRATEGY IN KYRGYZSTAN

GCERF's investment strategy outlines a comprehensive approach to address the drivers of violent extremism and guides civil society organisations in designing their programmes.

The primary objective of GCERF's investment is to support the rehabilitation, resocialisation and reintegration of returnees from Iraq and Syria; prevent others from becoming radicalised; and support people released from prison. To achieve this, GCERF funds programmes that: promote reintegration of women and children into communities, provide economic opportunities for vulnerable women, and strengthen the capacity of frontline workers.

Objectives of the GCERF investment regarding work in prisons:

- Promote the rehabilitation, resocialisation, and reintegration of individuals convicted of extremist offences through individualised and comprehensive support, both during incarceration and after release.
- Create a sustainable environment that supports their return and social adaptation while preventing radicalisation among other vulnerable groups.



WHERE






- Jalal-Abad
- Chuy
- Osh
- Issyk-Kul






WHO

- Women and children returning from Iraq and Northeast Syria
- At-risk women: strengthening the livelihoods and economic opportunities
- Frontline workers including psychologists, social workers, members of educational institutions
- Authorities: supporting authorities to ensure institutionalisation and sustainability
- Convicts charged with violent extremism or terrorism, or those at risk of radicalisation

*Partner countries are those in which GCERF funds civil society organisations to implement initiatives aimed at preventing violent extremism.

CURRENT GRANTS

 IMPLEMENTED BY		 PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES
Principal Recipient: SOS Children's Villages Kyrgyzstan Sub-recipients: Childhood Institute, Center for Development and Protection of Vulnerable Population Groups		Addressing trauma and providing psychological support to women and children returning from conflict zones. Providing access to education for children returnees. Conducting social reintegration programmes to improve their acceptance and community resilience.
 AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION	 GRANT AMOUNT	 PERIOD OF THE GRANT
Osh, Jalal-Abad, Chuy, Issyk-Kul	USD 1,000,000	July 2024 – June 2026

 IMPLEMENTED BY		 PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES
Principal Recipient: Foundation for Tolerance International Kyrgyzstan (FTI) Sub-recipients: Search For Common Ground, Mutakalim, DIA		Strengthen the capacity of state officials, frontline workers, and national experts to improve the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees. Enhance frontline workers' understanding of peaceful Islamic narratives to counter extremism. Improve the skills and livelihoods of women to address economic challenges, a key driver of violent extremism. Enhance the capacity of psychologists at the State Penitentiary to deliver Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), while promoting socialisation and facilitating the reintegration of inmates during incarceration and after release.
 AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION	 GRANT AMOUNT	 PERIOD OF THE GRANT
Bishkek, Osh, Chuy	USD 1,132,000	July 2024 – June 2026



Training for local task force groups on the reintegration and rehabilitation (R&R) of women returnees from Northeast Syria, led by an expert, Manas © Foundation for Tolerance Kyrgyzstan



Children returned from detention in Northeast Syria drawing in a summer camp, Chuy © SOS Children's Villages Kyrgyzstan

STORY OF CHANGE

Helping children thrive after return from detention in Northeast Syria (SOS Children's Villages)

R., a 10-year-old girl from a returnee family, has faced numerous challenges in her young life. With the help of the SOS Children's Villages programme, supported by GCERF, R.'s story highlights the importance of coordinated assistance in ensuring children heal and thrive after return from detention camps.

Resettling and navigating change

R. and her family, originally from Issyk Kul, moved to Tokmok in the Chui region after living in a poor, adobe house without basic amenities. Her mother was unable to work, and the family's financial situation was unstable. The move brought new challenges. R., one of four children, had to adjust to a new school while coping with her poor eyesight and social isolation. Her vision was severely affected by an eye condition, and her classmates kept their distance, leaving her withdrawn.

Helping overcome health and emotional needs

When the SOS Children's Villages team conducted a needs assessment, it became clear that R.'s physical and psychological well-being needed immediate attention. R.'s eye condition needed urgent treatment, and her social isolation required attention. The programme arranged for her to receive medical consultations, treatment, and eyeglasses. Recognising her emotional needs, R. was enrolled in art therapy to help her build relationships with her new classmates and express her feelings.

Social integration through creative expression

Initially, R. was very withdrawn in the therapy sessions, observing others quietly without engaging. Over time, however, she began to show positive changes. Her anxiety decreased, and she started to participate more actively in both the sessions and with her peers. Through art therapy, R. was able to express herself creatively, and her classmates began to see her differently. While still reserved, she gained confidence and started to navigate social interactions more successfully.

A holistic approach

The programme did not just address R.'s health but also her academic and social challenges. She received

school supplies, clothing, and emotional support to help her adapt. While her teachers observed improvements in her behaviour and engagement, R.'s reintegration wasn't without challenges. She still struggled with emotional difficulties and required adult support in stressful situations. To further assist, she was also given speech therapy to help with articulation and breathing exercises.

Progress and ongoing needs

R.'s story shows that successful reintegration is possible when children are given the right support. Despite the challenges she still faces, R. has made significant progress. However, many children like her are still in limbo, waiting for the opportunity to rebuild their lives in a safe environment.

R.'s reintegration highlights a broader issue: the need for urgent repatriation of children from the detention camps in Northeast Syria. These third-country national children remain deprived of basic rights like education and healthcare. The success of reintegration programmes demonstrates that with the right care, children can overcome significant challenges. It is crucial to ensure that every child has the opportunity to reintegrate safely in their communities and home countries, as R. has, and not be left behind in uncertainty.



Children repatriated from detention in Northeast Syria participate in a summer camp, organised to support their social reintegration, Chuy © SOS Children's Villages Kyrgyzstan

KEY RESULTS

Cumulative from July 2024 to June 2025

242

women and children returned from Syria participated in psychosocial counselling to overcome trauma and heal

130

local government members received training on rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) and trauma- and violence-informed care (TVIC) for effective R&R of returnees



GCERF'S VALUE PROPOSITION

GCERF'S UNIQUE MODEL OF INVESTMENT PRIORITISES:

Community ownership and localisation: We invest in trusted grassroots civil society organisations that prioritise the needs and grievances of communities most affected by violent extremism. Many of these organisations have never received international funding before.

Sustainability: Our programmes involve all groups of society and strengthens trust between government, civil society and community members to build stronger, more resilient societies. This ensures that initiatives and structures continue to be relevant and effective.

Robust monitoring and evaluation processes: Our multi-layered monitoring and evaluation system, operating locally and globally, provides continuous feedback on programme effectiveness, identifies areas for improvement, and ensures objectives are consistently met.

Knowledge sharing: Our global network of civil society organisations working on PVE facilitates the exchange of good practices and lessons learned, fostering collaboration and enhancing the effectiveness of interventions. We also share our experiences through our participation in various conferences, publishing of articles and research papers in reputed journals to advance the understanding of PVE.

Capacity strengthening: We strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations to manage large-scale grants and implement effective initiatives, while also enhancing government capacity to develop comprehensive, holistic strategies to prevent violent extremism.



GCERF
Preventing Violent Extremism
and Terrorism

Find out more about becoming an investor, our work, and the collective impact we make at:
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