

Equal Before the Law: Access to Justice in Central Asia



Photo by Ebi Spahiu

3 countries



Legal consultations
for 10,000 Tajik
people



1 textbook
written for Tajik
universities and
police academy

29 trainings
for over 700
people in
Tajikistan



4 research
reports in
Tajikistan

“Equal Before the Law: Access to Justice in Central Asia” is a flagship program of the Wider Europe Initiative of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The program sought to improve access to justice for vulnerable people in Central Asia and especially in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Special focus is given to rural women, children at risk and people with disabilities.

The EBL program sought to bring this affirmation closer to reality for the citizens of Central Asia in two key dimensions: first, by strengthening the **links between international norms and national law**; and second, by **analyzing and improving** the way national laws are experienced by vulnerable citizens. Targeting interventions simultaneously at the state and citizen levels ensured the program delivers concrete results in the lives of vulnerable people while assisting governments in the region to meet the needs of citizens and fulfill state obligations under international agreements.

EBL combined top-down and bottom-up approaches to decreasing the gap between international ideals and vulnerable people's everyday experience. International conventions provide the framework, while data gathered from research and legal consultations show where and how gaps appear in human-rights protection. With that, EBL also emphasized coordination between national governments and local civil society.



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Specifically, the EBL activities in Tajikistan:

- Monitored implementation of conventions on the rights of the child, the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, and on the rights of persons with disabilities.
- Trained court and government officials on international best practices, implemented by the Venice Commission. Trainings included study tours to European institutions, as well as in-country trainings.
- Improved law school curricula. EBL improved the ability and interest of future lawyers in defending the rights of vulnerable people. Activities include opening student legal clinics that serve vulnerable people, teaching English, and sponsoring Central Asian law students to serve rural communities via internships.
- Researched into how lack of documents and registration can block access to justice, and how informal leaders can impede or promote access to justice in rural areas.
- Promoted reform in documentation requirements and procedures, to lower this specific barrier to justice, and other barriers to justice.
- Provided legal assistance via a network of lawyers.
- Trained local NGOs and government officials on rule of law.
- Provided small grants to ten NGOs with the goal of extending the reach of EBL to other marginalized groups.