

Advocacy toolkit case studies

SUPPORTING EX-PRISONERS IN CENTRAL ASIA

THEMES:

Prisoners
Stigma and discrimination

ADVOCACY APPROACHES:

Building relationships
Educating community members

In Central Asia, prisoners' passports and other identity documents are taken away when they enter prison. This practice dates from the time of the Soviet Union and, although the region has changed since independence, the law has not changed. Upon release, prisoners need a reference in order to reapply for the documents. Without them, they have little chance of rebuilding their lives. They have no income, no registered address and no means of getting a job. They cannot open a bank account or go to a doctor. They have no rights in the eyes of the law and no way of proving their identity.

One of Tearfund's partners in Central Asia developed relationships with the local authorities, the police and the Ministry of Justice in order to help prisoners leaving prison to obtain a reference, recover their documents and make a new start in life. They had to understand how the system worked, what the law said and how to use it to support their cause. They had to gain the trust and respect of the local authorities because they were responsible for authenticating the prisoners' documents and providing them with new ones. It was not easy to challenge this unjust practice, and the law did not change, but prisoners leaving prison were able to rebuild their lives.