

RESEARCH CENTER FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES



Annual report 2022-2023

Research Center for Religious Studies



The Research Center for Religious Studies is a research hub and a community of independent scholars, researchers, educators, and volunteers. Implementing educational, research and information projects, we generate unbiased knowledge about religion, enhance relationships between the government and religious communities, and facilitate inter-religious dialogue.

The Center is active in the following 3 areas:

- conducting **studies** on the history of religion in the Kyrgyz Republic, on activities of religious organisations, and on inter-faith and inter-religious relations
- **enhancing relationships between the government and religious communities as well** as supporting the State in religion-related issues
- **promoting religious studies education** and awareness among the population.

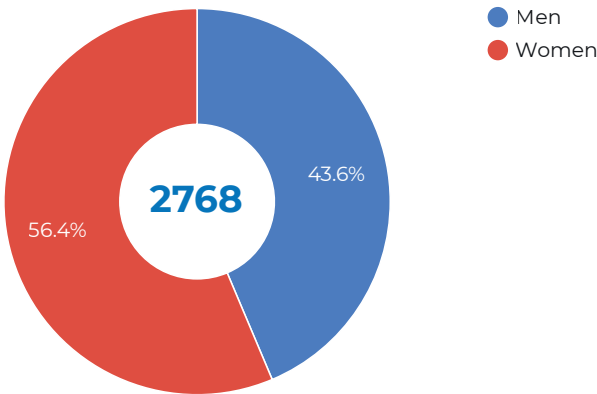
BRIEF OVERVIEW

In 2022-2023, the Center focused on working with communities in the regions of Kyrgyzstan:

- religious leaders;
- religious women;
- youth;
- authorised government agencies
- local authorities;
- social workers (see pages H-H for more details).

DIRECT BENEFICIARIES - 2768

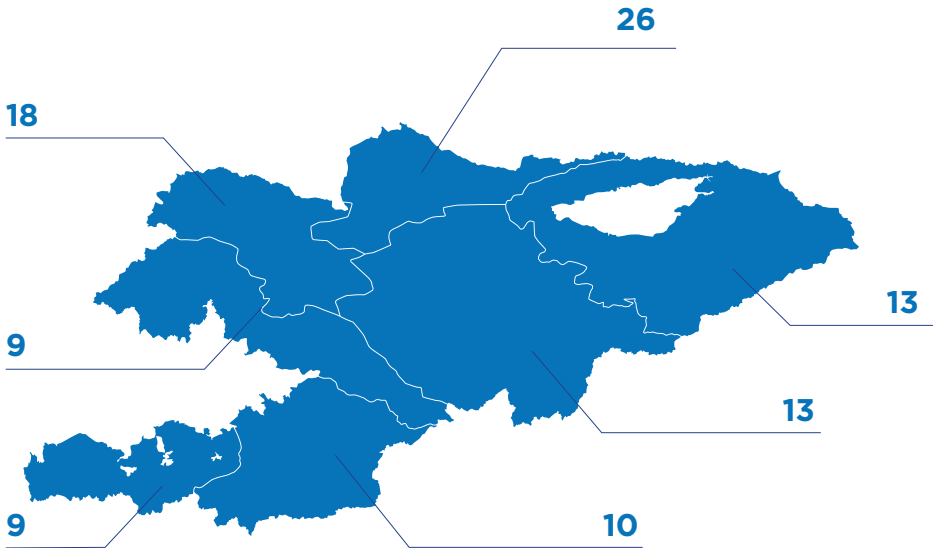
Beneficiaries



Interaction with 20 different denominations and beliefs

256 publications
911773 views
10929 likes

ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED WITHIN 1.5 YEARS



The Center worked closely with the State Commission for Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic to improve the research capacity of its staff and employees of the analytical department (see page 24 for more details)

3 interreligious educational youth camps were held under #unity_in_diversity (see page 15 for more details)

A review “Ensuring freedom of religion and belief in Kyrgyzstan” was prepared based on the findings of the needs assessment of religious and non-religious communities in the period from June to August 2022 (see page 26 for more details)

A study “Woman as a champion of freedom of religion and belief” was carried out, which was focused on obstacles to the implementation of freedom of religion among women in Kyrgyzstan (see page 27 for more details)

PROJECT ACTIVITY

Project: “Strengthening the rule of law and supporting religious freedom in Kyrgyzstan”¹

Goal: Improve the rule of law system with regard to religious freedom in Kyrgyzstan by strengthening local capacity to address violations of religious freedom and improving policies and legislation in the field of religious freedom.

Objectives: Raise awareness of the legal framework relating to religious freedom in local communities, including among women’s groups and religious minorities;

- 1.1. Citizens from target communities have raised awareness of the legal framework on religious freedom and the value of its application.
- 1.2. Community leaders have developed the knowledge and skills to resolve religious freedom disputes in a collaborative and constructive manner.

Implementation period: February 2022 - May 2023

In order to achieve its goal and objectives, the Center held a series of public events in each region of Kyrgyzstan.

SEARCH FOR
COMMON GROUND



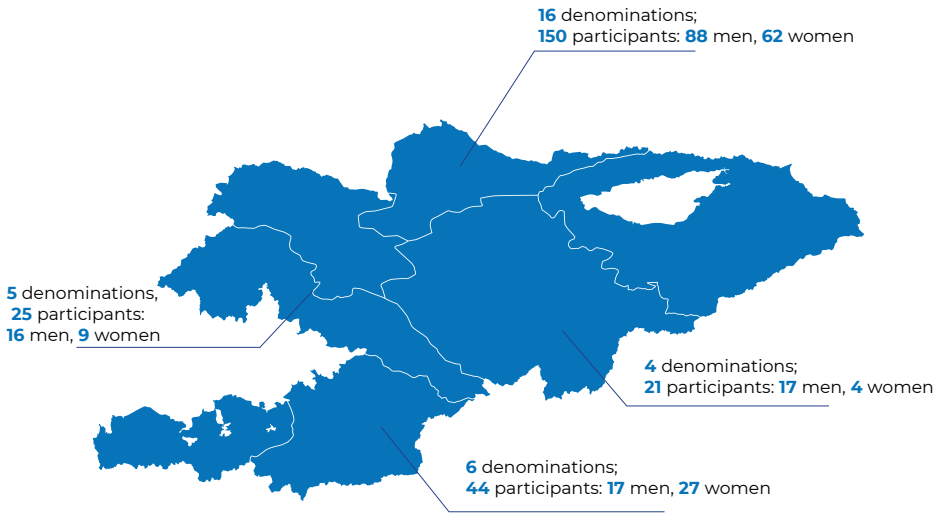
PROJECT:
“STRENGTHENING
THE RULE
OF LAW FRAMEWORK
TO SUPPORT
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
IN KYRGYZSTAN”



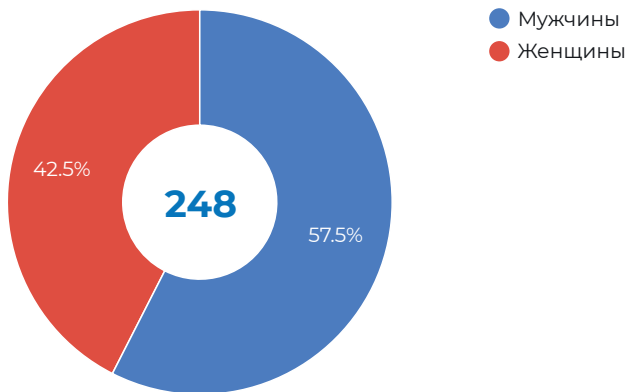
¹ The project was implemented by the Center for Religious Studies in cooperation with the Representative Office of the non-profit corporation “Search for Common Grounds”.

4 INTER-RELIGIOUS CONFIDENCE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Participants in confidence-building activities



248 PARTICIPANTS



Being aware of the need to create spaces where representatives of different religions can meet and informally discuss pressing issues, the Center organised events to build inter-religious confidence between representatives of various religions in Jalal-Abad, Osh, Naryn and Bishkek.

On March, 29, 2022, the Center organised the planting of 98 pine trees in the "Yntymak-1" park in Bishkek, together with the participants of the Interfaith Council of Kyrgyzstan. The event was attended by more than 150 representatives of different religions and denominations from Chui region.



On July 5, the event in Osh was attended by representatives of the Interfaith and Interethnic Council for the city of Osh and Osh region, as well as women and youth from different communities. The agenda included intellectual games, a collective installation of a yurt, a joint cooking competition.



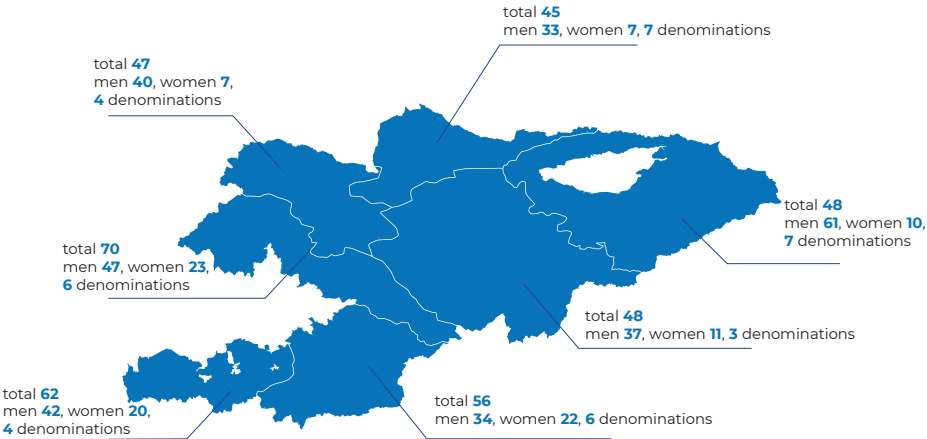
On July 6, in the city of Jalal-Abad, a regional inter-religious council of the Jalal-Abad region was established as part of an organized roundtable in cooperation with the SCRA.



On July 14, 2022, a meeting of religious leaders and government agencies was held in Naryn region with the aim of strengthening inter-religious dialogue and promoting positive interaction between representatives of different religious faiths.



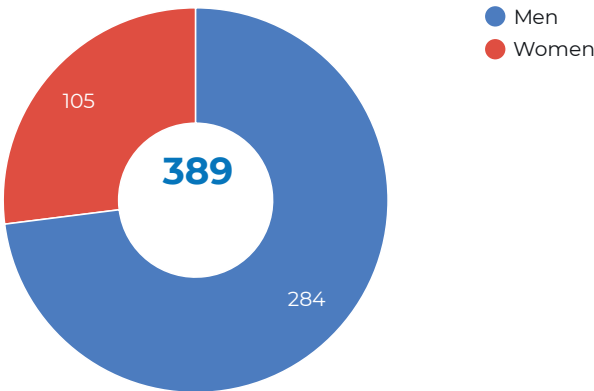
13 ROUND TABLES WITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN ALL REGIONS



Goal: to increase the knowledge of religious leaders about religious freedom and gender equality in Kyrgyzstan. For this purpose, the participants were explained:

- regulatory legal acts;
- State strategic documents on activities in the sphere of religion;
- the state concept of the Kyrgyz Republic in the sphere of religion;
- the number of religious organisations in the regions;
- officially banned materials and extremist organisations;
- gender aspects of family values in the context of religious freedom.

389 PARTICIPANTS



Round tables with religious leaders were organised in cooperation with the State Commission for Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic (SCRA) and took place in 2 stages. The first stage was held in July 2022 and was attended by future participants of information and discussion meetings and women's creative circles.



The discussion brought together local administration staff and social workers to improve the communication with religious leaders on social issues (education, medicine, environment, infrastructure).

The agenda was prepared in a way that allowed participants to develop joint solutions to overcome social barriers. Group work was carried out with representatives of all parties involved.



The second stage of the round tables with religious leaders took place in 2023 also in regional centres with the aim to **strengthen positive interfaith relations**, and as a logical conclusion to all previous events. As a result of roundtable discussions with religious leaders, regional interfaith councils were created in Naryn, Chui, Issyk-Kul, and Talas oblasts.

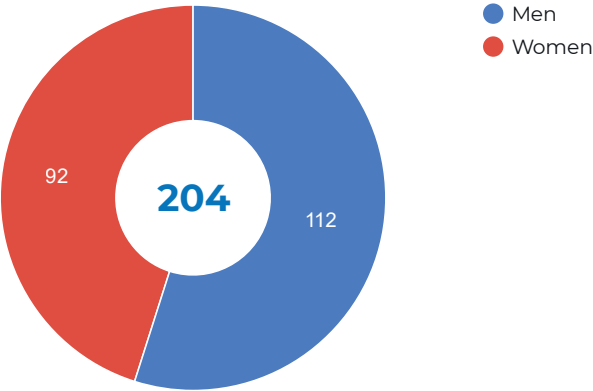


13 INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION MEETINGS

PARTICIPANTS OF THE DISCUSSIONS



204 PARTICIPANTS



From September to November, public meetings were held in the regions aimed **at increasing legal literacy and awareness of laws related to religious freedom and gender equality.**

Through a barrier analysis, 13 target locations were selected where the agenda of discussions would be relevant: Ak-Terek vill., Yrdyk vill., Cholpon-Ata town, Naryn town, Chon-Dobo vill., Semiz-Bel vill., Akman vill., Ak-Korgon vill., Uzgen town, Uch-Korgon vill., Kadamjai town, Kara-Balta town, Talas town.



The participants were men and women religious leaders, youth, civil activists, social workers, women's community and representatives of the local administration.



The practical side of the meetings included workshops on overcoming local social problems and analysis of case studies on gender equality in the context of religious freedom.

13 WOMEN'S CREATIVE CIRCLES

CIRCLE PARTICIPANTS



Religious women and girls face certain problems in everyday life. The Center organised women's creative circles to discuss with them the legal basis for religious freedom and the existing specific problems on the ground.



The participants used painting to express their dreams, prides and problems. Through creativity, they had the opportunity to tell others about what was important to them. A parallel effort was made to increase the involvement of religious women in local community life.



The participants also included representatives of local self-government bodies and leaders of local communities. They all received leaflets with contacts of crisis centres.

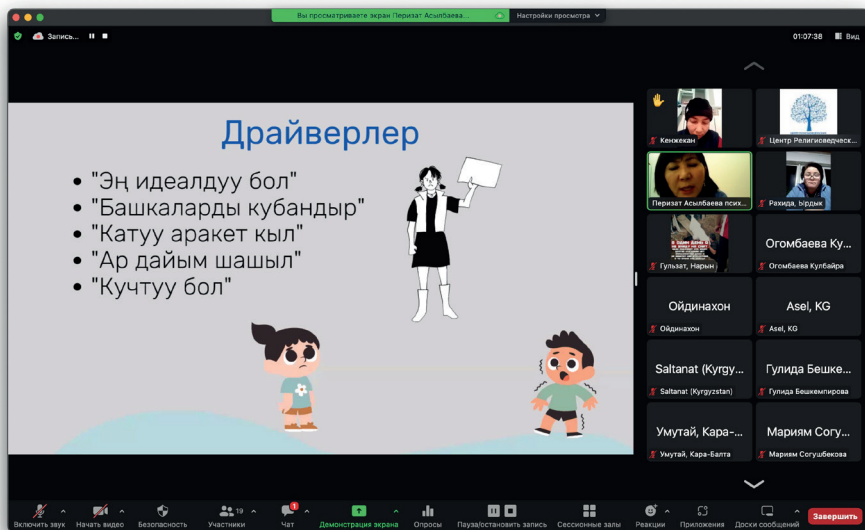


At the end of the meetings, women from each local community painted a panel, which embodied their love and patriotism for their small homeland. All 13 panels from each location were donated to the Art Museum of the city of Osh.



ONLINE TRAINING FOR WOMEN

25 PARTICIPANTS



In April 2023, the Center held 6 online sessions for the most active participants of the women's creative circles from 13 locations as well as for interested newcomers.

The purpose of trainings: capacity building in women's leadership and personal growth.

Discussions took place in small groups. In turn, participants talked about what they saw as significant barriers to women's leadership development in their places, communities, and realities:

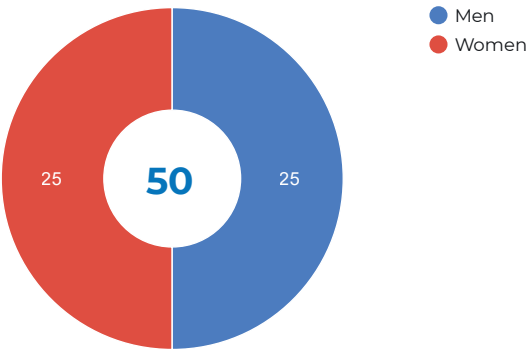
- high household burden;
- customs, traditions and stereotypes;
- low level of awareness and education among women;
- established religious norms.

2 YOUTH IDEAS GENERATING LABORATORIES UNDER #UNITY_IN_DIVERSITY

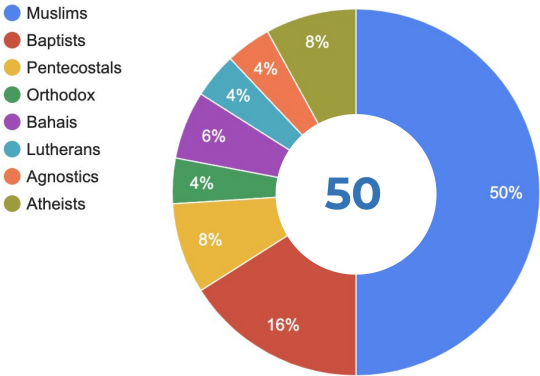
#unity_in_diversity is a youth movement that unites representatives of different religions and beliefs to address social problems in Kyrgyzstan. The movement was established in 2020 and is a platform for positive intercultural and inter-religious interaction.



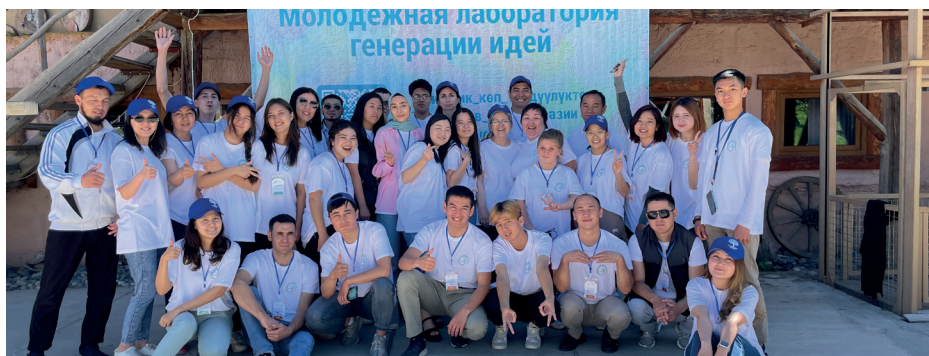
50 PARTICIPANTS



50 PARTICIPANTS



On June 25-29, 2022, as part of the movement, the Center organised Youth Idea Generating Laboratories in the north of the country and on July 4-8 in the south of the country. The event brought together young people aged 18-35 from different religions (Muslims, Orthodox, Pentecostals, Baptists, Lutherans, Bahais) who represented different beliefs (atheism, agnosticism).

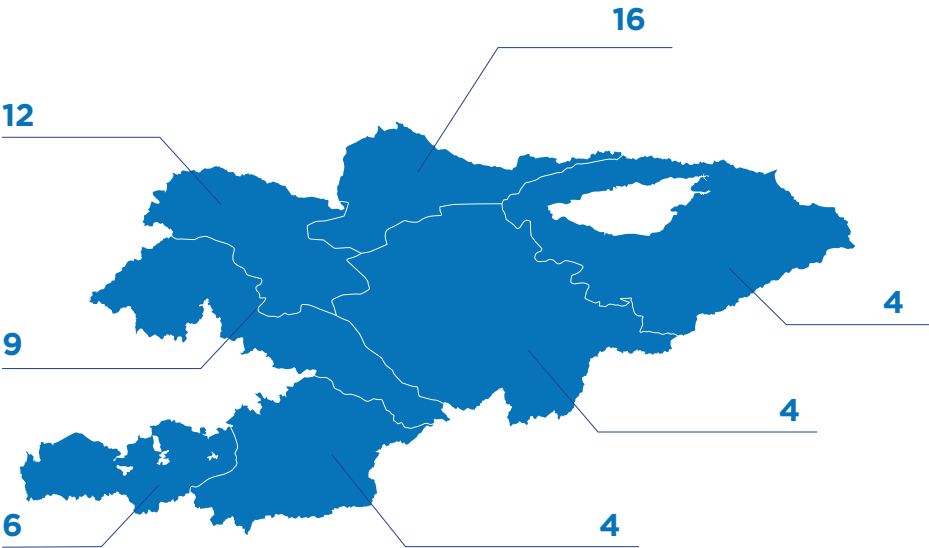


After a 5-day training programme, the participants prepared applications for social project support, 10 of which were accepted.

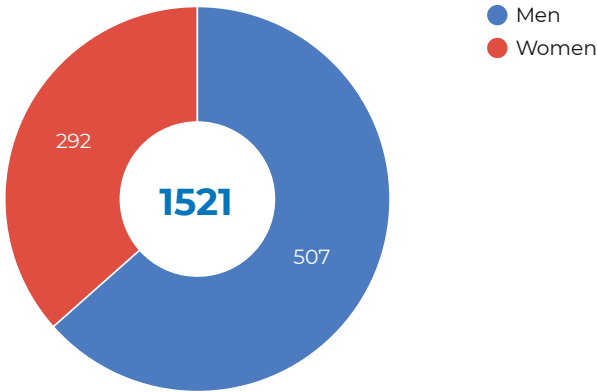


10 SOCIAL YOUTH INITIATIVES HAVE BEEN SUPPORTED

YOUTH EVENTS IN THE REGIONS



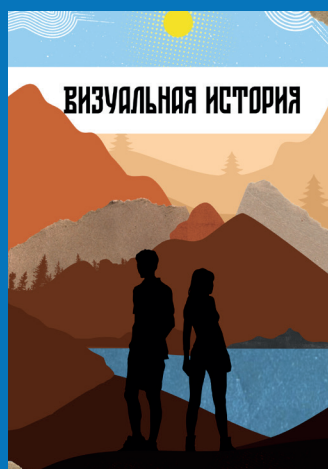
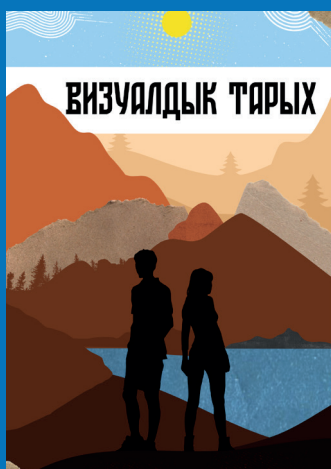
1521 PARTICIPANTS



Based on the results of two laboratories, the Center supported 10 initiatives aimed at **promoting inter-religious dialogue, countering youth radicalisation and raising awareness of the religious diversity in Kyrgyzstan.**

COMIC BOOK “VISUAL HISTORY”

In an effort to increase the availability of information about the religious diversity in Kyrgyzstan, the team named “Exceptional” prepared and published a comic book that tells about the current and past religions in our country in a language understandable to young people.



For its promotion, the team held a 5-day exhibition of posters and archival photographs at the Museum of Fine Arts named after Gapar Aitiev.

BOARD GAME “DO NO HARM”

The “Onukkon jashtar” team was no less creative in raising awareness and religious cultures of Kyrgyzstan and developed a board game. During the game, players had to explain various religious terms to other participants. Points were awarded for correctly explained and guessed words, which gave the game a competitive spirit, and the gameplay itself directly increased knowledge about cultures.



FESTIVAL OF CULTURES IN TALAS

The team “Unity in Friendship” organised a large-scale festival of cultures in Talas, which involved representatives of different religions and ethnic groups. The event included many performances, master classes and competitions for young people.



PODCASTS AND VIDEOS IN OSH

The team used new formats to promote positive interaction and counter stereotypes through the recording of 2 podcasts with experts on the topics of the country's religious situation and law. The team was the first to produce a visually designed informational video about the right to freedom of religion in Kyrgyzstan:



In addition, trainings on freedom of religion and belief in Kyrgyzstan were held for religious leaders, women's associations and legal professionals.

“GENERATION OF EQUALITY” INITIATIVE IN TALAS

The team organised a drawing competition on the importance of religious diversity and gender equality in Kyrgyzstan in 4 schools in Talas. All drawings were exhibited for the visitors of the Festival of Cultures. Parallel to the drawing competition, youth forum theatres were held on the same topics in schools.



LIVE RADIO BROADCASTS AND A SOCIAL VIDEO FROM KADAMJAI

The team recorded 4 radio broadcasts in a local studio in Kadamjai town, where experts from various sectors - teachers, civil servants and specialists - shared their views.

A social video was devoted to the relationship between the right to freedom of religion and gender equality



“TREE OF FRIENDSHIP” INITIATIVE IN TALAS



The team, with the support of experts, conducted trainings on the right to freedom of religion for representatives of religious denominations, ethnic minorities, teachers of the history of religion, and representatives of local self-government bodies. An excursion to the religious sites of Talas town was prepared for the participants. The series of events culminated in a joint planting of trees.



3 “DIVERSITY IN ACTION” INITIATIVES IN KARAKOL, TALAS AND TOKMOK

The “Jash Time” team drew attention to the widespread problem of prejudice against representatives of other religions.



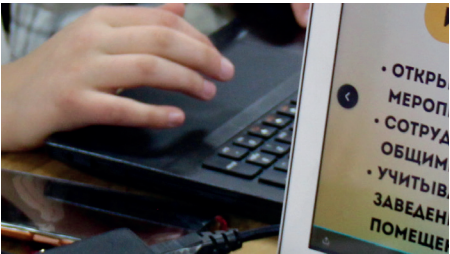
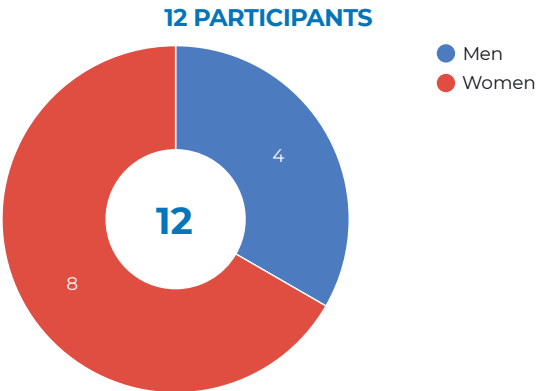
The team used unusual and creative tools in towns of Tokmok, Karakol and Naryn to draw the attention of young people to the problem: intellectual quizzes, debates on religion and society, an online essay marathon, art exhibitions, movie nights, creation and promotion of caption videos, stickers, website and QR codes about the attractions of their home town of Tokmok.

The final video of all events can be found here:



FINAL WORKSHOP FOR LABORATORY GRADUATES

The Center held a practical workshop on error correction for participants of the movement who had successfully implemented their initiatives. Various aspects of communication and reporting were extensively explored.



Video testimonials from the workshop:

Project: “Strategic support: streamlining of the M&E system of the State Commission for Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic and capacity building through technical assistance”²



Implementation period: January-June 2022

Goal: Increase the knowledge and capacity of the Central Office employees and regional representatives of the State Commission for Religious Affairs in the field of monitoring and evaluation by providing targeted technical assistance.

From March 9-11, 2022, the Center held a **national workshop on monitoring and evaluation** for employees of the analytics department and representatives of the State Commission for Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic. During the workshop, the implementation process of state programmes and effective tools for tracking the results of their implementation were discussed.



Based on the results of the workshop, the most appropriate monitoring tools for the SCRA were identified. The use of these tools will contribute to the process of preparing information on the progress of the implementation of the country's programme documents.

² The project was implemented with the support of CASSS.

During the following month, practical exercises on research tools such as interviews and FGDs (focus group discussions) were conducted for SCRA employees in each region of the country in order to reinforce the material covered.

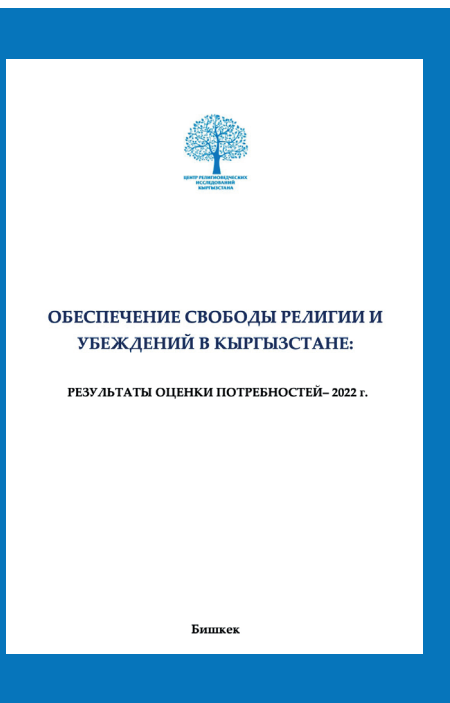
The practical exercises in the regions were followed by the final regional conference, which was held in the Issyk-Kul region in order to present the results of the project, share the lessons learnt and discuss planning. 10 laptops with pre-installed analytical software were handed over as technical support to the State Commission for Religious Affairs.



RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Review “Ensuring Freedom of Religion and Belief in Kyrgyzstan”

Project: “Strengthening the capacity of participants in the implementation of the right to freedom of religion and belief in the Kyrgyz Republic”



Study report:



Based on the results of the study, recommendations for addressing the situation were developed for various state bodies involved in the subject of the study.

Implementation period: April 2022 - September 2024

Goal: Assist the government and society in respecting, protecting and promoting freedom of religion or belief for all, in a gender-sensitive manner.

Following the needs assessment carried out in June-August 2022, the Center prepared a review “Ensuring Freedom of Religion or Belief in Kyrgyzstan”. The assessment covered representatives of religious and non-religious communities in all regions of Kyrgyzstan.

Summary results:

- the society of Kyrgyzstan is still overwhelmed with prejudice and lack of understanding of religious diversity;
- the problem of burial of non-Muslim Kyrgyz is still acute and is not being resolved;
- the abundance of aggression towards people of other faiths and the lack of a proper response from the authorities leads to diminished confidence in the Government and a desire to conceal one's religious identity;
- the accumulation of aggressive potential in the sphere of interreligious relations, coupled with general political instability, is unacceptable and poses significant social risks.

STUDY “WOMAN AS A CHAMPION OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF”

Project: “Woman as a champion of freedom of religion and belief”³

Implementation period: November 2022 - March 2023

The goal of the project is to create favourable conditions for women to exercise their right to freedom of conscience and religion in the Kyrgyz Republic.

For this purpose, the Center conducted 1) an analysis of the situation of religious women in the context of the rights to freedom of conscience and religion, 2) an advocacy campaign to prevent violence among religious women in Kyrgyzstan.

In 2022, the Center conducted a short-term study “Woman as a champion of freedom of religion and belief” among women and girls of various religious communities to **assist the promotion of women’s rights to freedom of religion and belief in Kyrgyzstan.**

It was found that:

- there is inequality between men and women in the exercise of freedom of religion and belief (for example, in terms of independent choice or access to education, medicine, freedom of movement, communication with the outside world, etc.);
- the majority of interviewed women believers have little awareness of their basic rights (especially in rural areas);
- there is no system of legal support and counselling available for religious women that would take into account their religious beliefs;



The full study is available at:



- there are instances of infringements of the right to protection from intolerance and violence on the grounds of religious beliefs. At the same time, these cases hardly ever reach the courts due to the low qualification of defence lawyers and the lack of proper legal practice, etc.;
- there are no public mechanisms to support the diversity of religious beliefs and practices, at the local level in Kyrgyzstan;
- Religious women often do not have access to legal assistance due to lack of information and their own funds;
- in some cases, religion acts as a way to overcome crises with subsequent deepening into religious practice.

Based on the results of the study, an analytical note was prepared and shared with the following government agencies:

- State Commission for Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- Office of the Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- The State Agency for Civil Service and Local Self-Government under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The Center has produced and published 3 awareness-raising videos on the most topical issues voiced by women: alimony, protection against family violence and inheritance. You can watch the videos using these QR codes:



Alimony



Family violence



Inheritance

MEDIA CAMP #UNITY_IN_DIVERSITY 2023⁴

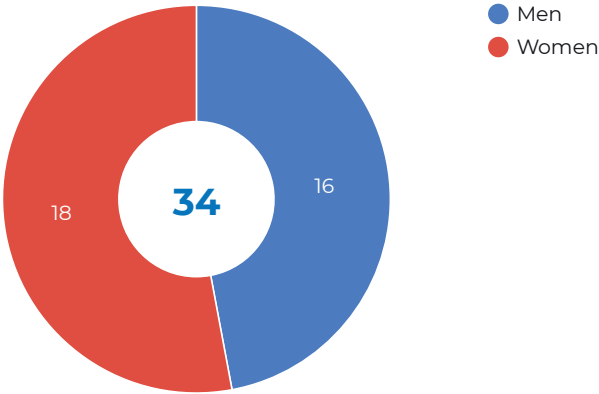
In March 2023, the 3rd group of participants from all over Kyrgyzstan took part in the **#unity_in_diversity** media camp, the final goal of the camp is to organise 5 media campaigns aimed at promoting dialogue between different religions and countering youth radicalisation.



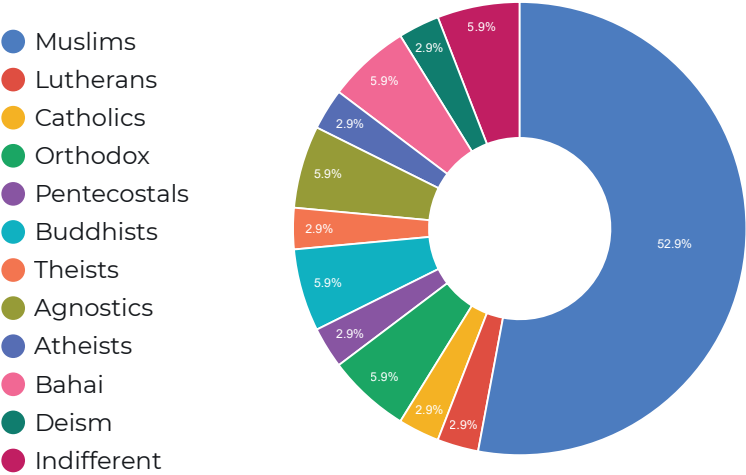
With a view to enhancing the capacity of the campaigns, the participants took part in online trainings and a 5-day program, where they studied media literacy in the field of religion, human rights to freedom of religion, tools to counter extremism and radicalism, stereotypes and prejudices against believers and non-believers.

⁴ This project was funded by the US Embassy in the Kyrgyz Republic. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein present the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the US Department of State.

34 PARTICIPANTS



BY CONFESSION TOTAL 34 PARTICIPANTS





The teams prepare different formats of media campaigns: from quizzes and online marathons to recording documentaries.

You can find out more about the activities of the Center on the official website rcrskg.org or on our social networks.



