

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 regards, the CSM is under renewal, and 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 offenses 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.

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



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

CURRENT GRANTS



 IMPLEMENTED BY		 PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES
Principal Recipient: SOS Children's Villages Kyrgyzstan		Addressing trauma and providing psychological support to women and children returning from conflict zones.
Sub-recipients: Childhood Institute, Center for Development and Protection of Vulnerable Population Groups		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)		Strengthen the capacity of state officials, frontline workers, and national experts to improve the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees.
Sub-recipients: Search For Common Ground, Mutakalim, DIA		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.
 AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION	 GRANT AMOUNT	 PERIOD OF THE GRANT
Bishkek, Osh, Chuy	USD 1,032,000	July 2024 – June 2026



I'TIREK community groups, which include returnee women, have been formally established to focus on rehabilitation and reintegration of women returnees from Northeast Syria © Foundation for Tolerance Kyrgyzstan

Distributing clothes and essential supplies to children returned from Northeast Syria © SOS Children's Villages Kyrgyzstan

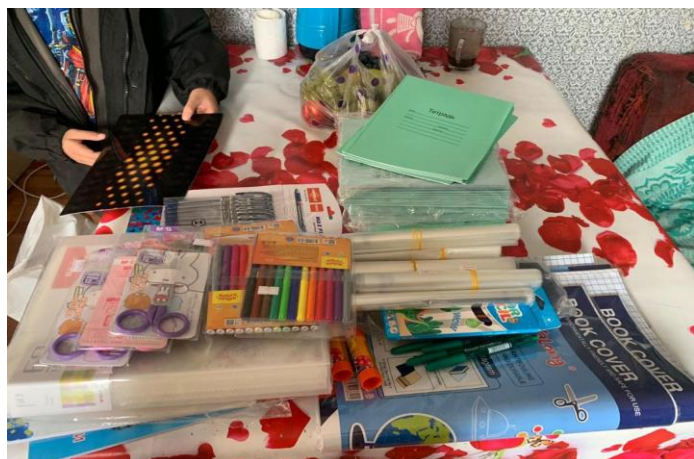
STORY OF CHANGE

Safe return and successful reintegration of a family repatriated from Northeast Syria (SOS Children's Villages)

After spending seven years in a conflict zone in a camp in Northeast Syria, a Kyrgyz woman and her six children returned home in late 2024. Stripped of documentation, support, and stability, their journey of reintegration has been marked by trauma, resilience, and the critical role of community aid, with support by SOS Children's Villages. Their ongoing reintegration demonstrates that repatriation can be carried out safely with proper support, underscoring the need to continue and expand efforts to bring back other nationals still stranded in the camps.

War-torn past, uncertain future

In November 2024, a 47-year-old woman was repatriated to Kyrgyzstan with her five sons — aged 20, 12, 10, 9, and 8 — and her 16-year-old niece. The family had spent seven years in detention in Syria after being taken to the conflict zone under pressure from the woman's father. During that time, they experienced profound loss: the deaths of her parents, sister, nephew, and eldest son. Her eldest daughter was taken to another country; contact with her has since been lost. Upon their return, the family faced rejection from relatives and had no permanent housing. Basic needs such as food, clothing, and bedding were unmet, and none of the children had identification documents or had ever attended school. The niece had witnessed the killing of her mother and younger brother and was forcibly separated from another sibling who remains unrepatriated. Her legal guardianship remains unresolved.



Returnees receive support for medical care, school supplies, and other essential needs. © SOS Children's Villages Kyrgyzstan

First steps toward normal life

In February 2025, significant progress began. Birth certificates were issued, allowing the children to enrol in school for the first time. Support from her late husband's relatives helped the eldest son find work, enabling the family to purchase basic groceries. Through the SOS Children's Villages' help, the children received essential clothing, footwear, school and sports uniforms, and medical care. Two boys were given medical check-ups and necessary medications. Psychological and psychiatric consultations were arranged for all children. The niece, who had suffered severe trauma, began working with a therapist, psychiatrist, social pedagogue, and tutor. The mother also received guidance from the SOS Children's Villages' project's theologians, helping her process spiritual and emotional challenges stemming from her experiences.

Gradual trauma recovery shows positive signs

The 16-year-old niece, now a 9th-grade student, has shown remarkable recovery. Once withdrawn and deeply affected by her past, she now actively participates in school life. According to her teachers and the school's social pedagogue, she is attentive, sociable, and motivated. She arrives early to school events, completes tasks eagerly, and often greets others with a smile. Her transformation illustrates the impact of coordinated psychosocial support, education, and material aid. The collaborative efforts of the project team, school staff, and social services have not only supported her reintegration but also offered the family a renewed sense of dignity and hope.

With support, a safe return is possible

While progress has been made, the family continues to face long-term needs. The legal formalisation of the niece's guardianship remains unresolved, and financial insecurity persists. Yet, the story of this family offers a glimpse into what is possible when trauma is met with structure and sustained support. SOS Children's Villages will continue to support the family on their path toward stability and successful reintegration into their home community, demonstrating that continued, coordinated efforts are essential to help others still awaiting return.

KEY RESULTS

Cumulative from July 2024 to June 2025

242

women and children returned from Syria participated in psychosocial counselling

133

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



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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