

Community policing in Central Asia

Lessons and experiences from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

Acknowledgements

This report was authored by Ilya Jones, with substantial research, analytical and written contributions from Kanatbek Abdiev (Kyrgyzstan), Sanjar Saidov (Uzbekistan) and a consultant in Tajikistan. The research and final versions of the country chapters were based on interviews and valuable feedback conducted by Saferworld staff in the Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan country programme teams. From the Kyrgyzstan team, many thanks go to Ravshan Abdukarimov, Farrukh Artykov, Zamira Isakova, Chyngyz Israilov, Meerim Kurbanova and Stefan Stoyanov. Our partners also provided valuable input: special thanks to Timur Shaikhutdinov of Civic Union (Kyrgyzstan) and Nazifa Kamalova from the Centre for Legal, Economic and Social Support “Istiqlool Avlodi”, Jizzakh Region (Uzbekistan) for their detailed feedback on the drafts of the report. The research also benefited from extensive feedback from Saferworld staff around the world, including Tamara Duffey-Janser, Lucian Harriman, Robert Parker, Julia Poch and Sara Torrelles. Special thanks must also go to the interviewees who agreed to speak with us to help inform the content of this research. We would also like to thank our project partners who contributed to the report in various ways, and who implement much of the work on which this report is based. The report was edited by Jane Lanigan/ editors4change, designed by Jane Stevenson and translated into Russian by Bekten Dyikanbaev.



This report is a committed deliverable under our Tajikistan programme’s community policing project, funded by the United States Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, United States Embassy in Dushanbe.

Abbreviations

CPC	community policing centre
CPPT	community policing partnership team
C/PVE	countering/preventing violent extremism
CSO	civil society organisation
DMIA	Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs
FTI	Foundation for Tolerance International
GBAO	Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region
ICITAP	International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program
INL	Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
LCPC	local crime prevention centre
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PCPOP	public council on public order protection
SARA	scanning, analysis, response and assessment (problem-solving method)
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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Cover photo: Police work together with the members of a local crime prevention centre in Yrys, in the Jalal-Abad region of Kyrgyzstan.

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Contents

Executive summary	i
1 Introduction	1
What is community policing?	2
Police reform and community policing in Central Asia	5
Methodology and limitations	7
2 Kyrgyzstan	11
A short history of police reform efforts	11
Current public perceptions of the police	14
Motivations for reform	15
Legislative framework	16
Factors contributing to or hindering community–police engagement	17
Issues addressed through community policing initiatives	21
Gender and security	21
Role of civil society and international organisations	22
Transparency and accountability	24
Recommendations	25
3 Tajikistan	31
A short history of police reform efforts	32
Current public perceptions: motivations for reform, behaviour of the police	34
Legislative framework	36
Factors contributing to or hindering community–police engagement	37
Issues addressed through community policing	40
Gender and security	42
Role of civil society and international organisations in community policing	43
Accountability and transparency	44
Recommendations	45
4 Uzbekistan	51
History and legislative frameworks for reform	52
Factors contributing to or hindering community–police engagement	53
Gender and security	55
Measuring impact and ensuring local ownership	57
Recommendations	57
5 Conclusions and recommendations	61
Annex	65



A police officer talks with a community member in Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan.
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Executive summary

The five Central Asian countries have undergone rapid changes in the last few decades, including through varying degrees of national police reform and community policing efforts. They share many similar challenges in relation to their security sectors, particularly within the police. In Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (the focus countries for this report), the police still possess many characteristics from the Soviet system. They are often viewed with distrust, especially by women, young people and minority groups, who may face marginalisation and discrimination or lack responses to their concerns and priorities. Many still turn to the more accessible informal or local alternatives for addressing grievances. As a result, the police are seen as less legitimate and, consequently, their work is less effective. They are often disconnected from the needs of communities, or pursue efforts to address crime, insecurity, conflict and violence without the cooperation or buy-in of the people they are meant to serve.

Saferworld began programming with civil society partners in Central Asia in 2010, working closely with the informal and formal authorities and diverse communities to facilitate more responsive and accountable policing. This included the integration of community policing approaches (combined with elements of our community security approach), which seeks to bring together and build trust between the police and communities through collaborative platforms. Here, they jointly identify priorities and respond to communities' safety, security and quality of life concerns. Other organisations, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), also work closely with the government on police reform and community policing.

For this report, we reviewed analyses, experiences and lessons from our previous and current programmes in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and also spoke to those who were directly involved in these initiatives across the three countries. The goal was to provide an account of the issues that affect community policing efforts, including those that strengthen or frustrate them, and to provide recommendations for a range of actors who engage in these efforts. While the findings differed substantially across the different contexts – which all have very different histories, cultures and challenges – some general patterns emerged.

Trust and responsiveness

In nearly all Central Asian contexts, the police and law enforcement agencies more generally do not experience significant levels of trust or cooperation from the public. This is often a result of the excessive use of force, but also citizens' day-to-day experiences of police corruption, discrimination and poor responses to complaints. The lack of trust is especially true for women, as well as ethnic, religious or other minorities, who often do not feel represented by police (who are largely male and of the majority ethnicity and religion). These factors can lead to responses that are insensitive – especially when dealing with topics such as gender-based violence, which require greater awareness of the impact of gender norms on insecurity and violence and specialised training to effectively respond to these issues. In areas that had community policing initiatives, or in which collaborative platforms such as community police partnership teams (CPPTs) or local crime prevention centres (LCPCs) were in place and functioning properly, interviewees reported cooperation and trust to be higher.

Political will and legislation

The community policing approach stipulates that political will from the top is needed to make real progress in reforming the police. While there are genuine efforts to improve responsiveness and collaboration from all sides – government, police leadership, and international organisations and donors – efforts can be hindered by a range of factors. These include entrenched corruption and skewed incentives, or police departments having limited funds. Legislation in all three countries attests to efforts to reform the police, but many of these laws and regulations remain only on paper, without substantial change in practice. Interviewees identified further legislative reform as an additional necessary step; however, they emphasised that, without accompanying changes in institutional practice, there would be little progress.

Communication, collaboration and accountability

Cooperation between communities and local police varies substantially by location, with community policing efforts generally leading to improved communication, collaboration and perceptions of accountability where they have been implemented. A range of other actors are also involved in these partnerships and efforts, adding their own expertise and funding, as well as providing legitimacy in the eyes of communities. These actors include, for example, local self-government bodies such as *ayil okmotu* in Kyrgyzstan or *mahallas* in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Working together, the actors were said to be able to streamline ways of working and coordinate outreach, including by holding meetings in communities in which valuable feedback or concerns could be raised. Social media has also been increasingly useful in coordinating with the public – if not on specific cases (which could be sensitive), then at least when informing people of venues for meetings or of available social services. In areas where internet access is limited, other methods such as SMS, leaflets or hotlines can increase uptake of services or participation in collaborative platforms.

Diversity, equality and inclusion

For collaborative platforms to be effective, they must represent the various interests of different groups in the community. This can be a difficult or sensitive path to navigate, with traditional power dynamics often asserting themselves – to the benefit of older generations, men, or majority ethnic and religious groups. Fair and open selection, as well as requirements to include representatives of women's or youth committees or other marginalised and minority groups, can help mitigate this problem, as can engagement on tolerance and peacebuilding. Yet, crucially, a thorough understanding of local context could help navigate these issues sensitively. Another issue that can arise is the influence of central authorities, who in some cases, such as in Tajikistan, seek to get involved in the selection of CPPT or Public Council members. Diversity among the police is also a major factor in determining levels of trust, cooperation and more nuanced responses to complaints. For example, women police are often more trusted by other women, especially when it comes to issues relating to gender-based violence.

The role of civil society and international organisations

Civil society has a crucial role to play in pushing for more transparent, responsive, inclusive and accountable policing, as do the international partners who support civil society groups and organisations. National non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations often have strong connections at the national level, and can use these to push for community policing or other initiatives that improve constructive police–public partnerships. However, this should not be at the expense of community-level cooperation with local civil society actors or collaborative platforms, which are best placed to offer recommendations and advice for how to address issues specific to various locations. Civil society and international actors can continue to emphasise that national platforms – such as national-level Public Councils under the ministries of internal affairs – can be strengthened through diverse membership and genuine receptiveness to input from a wide array of actors.

International and national groups should seek to build strong connections with government departments, especially at the Ministries of Internal Affairs. It is important that they do not solely take a critical approach (only pointing out flaws), but act in ‘partnership’ as much as possible by presenting advice, offering exchanges of experience and funding identified gaps. There is likely to be a government preference for funding of infrastructure, equipment or material goods when officials are confronted with budget shortfalls, such as for radios, cars, building infrastructure, digital system upgrades, or weapons and tactical gear. However, a strong case should be made for accompanying any such efforts with those aimed at increasing effective service provision and changes in harmful behaviours that can increase insecurities among communities.



Participants of a conference from neighbouring Central Asian countries visit a community policing centre near Dushanbe, Tajikistan, as part of a learning visit.
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1

Introduction

Since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the five states of Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan¹ – have taken divergent paths, but have also shared many challenges and achievements. Chief among the challenges are questions relating to security sectors inherited from the Soviet system. For example, the Soviet police (or *militsiya*) was seen by many as being focused on state protection functions, rather than on providing services, protecting human rights or preventing crime. While Central Asian societies have undergone rapid change, the security (specifically policing) sectors have been slower to adapt to corresponding changes in political, social and economic systems, and have shown discrepancies between ministerial reforms and local practice. Despite multiple efforts by national governments, civil society and the international community to reform the police and the army over the years, these organisations are still seen to retain characteristics that make it harder to build trust or improve security provision for communities.²

The police in Central Asia have been associated with corruption, criminality and heavy-handed tactics that exacerbate, rather than resolve or prevent, conflict. This has led to a lack of trust between the police and the populations they serve. Many of those affected by conflict or crime prefer to resolve their problems informally, without filing police reports, for fear of making matters worse. Because of this widespread mistrust, even in cases where police actively seek to resolve or prevent crimes, they are unable to do their jobs effectively due to non-cooperation or disengagement from the public.

Many of the issues that strain the fabric of societies have been left unaddressed, or even worsened, in part because the police and security services do not always see defending citizens' rights as part of their job. Ethnic tensions, marginalisation of minority groups, gender inequality, corruption, the exclusion of young people from decision-making, support for proscribed violent groups³ and organised crime are problems in all Central Asian countries. These can be exacerbated or not properly addressed when police services are dominated by men or single ethnicities. The problems will worsen all the more without the cooperation and involvement of the police and the communities they serve, as well as civil society. Currently, they are often addressed superficially in ways that do not tackle the root causes of crime, insecurity, conflict or violence.

Central Asian governments, to varying degrees, have sought to address some of these issues by embarking on police reform. But none have fully reached their stated goals, with mixed results from district to district and country to country. The challenges to effective police reform are both internal and external – from limited funding and poor training to competing incentive structures and divergent visions of the meaning of reform and what it means in practice.

Map of Central Asia



According to the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, police reform should aim to ‘transform the values, culture, policies and practices of police organisations so that police can perform their duties with respect for democratic values, human rights and the rule of law’.⁴ It should seek to improve security and policing by shifting to a more people-centred approach to security (away from regime protection or purely punitive styles) that is responsive to the needs of all people, particularly marginalised groups. Reform should also seek to democratise policing, through improved capacity, response, accountability and transparency of the police, and inclusive access to security and justice and the protection of human rights.

Police reform efforts can take on many forms and involve different initiatives. One that has gained a lot of traction globally and in the region is ‘community policing’, a people-centred policing approach that reflects the values of democratic policing, which serves as the focus of this report.⁵

What is community policing?

There is no universally agreed definition of community policing and it has been interpreted variously by different groups. At its core, it is a philosophy (a way of thinking) and a strategy (a way of carrying out the philosophy) that seeks to bring together the police and the communities they serve at all levels – local, sub-national and national – in new and collaborative ways to proactively tackle issues relating to disorder, crime, safety and security. The aim is to improve the quality of life for everyone in that community, always with the consent of the public and with the police accountable to them. In a joint publication with the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, we said of community policing:

The philosophy is built on the belief that people deserve and have a right to have a say in policing in exchange for their participation and support. It also rests on the view that the solutions to community problems demand allowing the police and the public to examine innovative ways to address community concerns beyond a narrow focus on individual crimes or incidents. It also cuts across work undertaken on specialised issue areas such as drugs, arms and human trafficking, and organised crime and support for violent groups. The philosophy of community policing in a number of countries has developed towards a professional police service and a responsible community in an open and accountable partnership. The role of the community is therefore that of informed and proactive individuals and representatives who voice their opinions, offer their expertise and resources and take responsibility for their actions. This philosophy enables a constraint to be placed on the state, and in particular the police, taking on too prescriptive and managerial a role.⁶

Community policing is not new. Many have traced the core values of community policing to Sir Robert Peel's 1829 United Kingdom Metropolitan Police Act, which defined an ethical police service. Peel, who was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (1834–35 and 1841–46) and considered to be the founder of modern British policing, believed the police needed to seek the cooperation of the public, or 'police by consent'. This suggests that the legitimacy of policing is based on public support that derives from transparency about police powers, integrity in exercising those powers, and accountability for doing so.⁷ He famously said, "the police are the public [people] and the public [people] are the police" – a refrain that has been taken up in different contexts around the world in relation to the approach, including in Central Asia. By the 1960s, many countries – including the United States and United Kingdom – attempted to respond to poor community–police relations stemming from police abuse, corruption, militarised structures, racial and gender discrimination, and the perceived failure of the reactive 'crime-fighting' approach.⁸ Police organisations sought to move away from traditional reactive to more proactive, responsive policing, which focused on police–community relations and collaborative partnerships, team policing, crime prevention, problem-oriented policing and foot patrols.⁹

Community policing encompasses various areas of work that seek to democratise the police. This occurs across four dimensions, as outlined by Gordner:¹⁰ philosophical, strategic, tactical and organisational (see table 1). The **philosophical** dimension entails a shift in the values of policing – from the traditional, reactive 'police force' to a proactive, problem-solving and people-centred 'police service'.

The **strategic** dimension includes the components that put the philosophical elements into action, ensuring policies, priorities and resource allocation are all aligned with the shift in values. These two dimensions are then operationalised into concrete programmes, initiatives and changed behaviours through the **tactical** dimension. Finally, the **organisational** dimension – although not strictly community policing – ultimately determines its success; it focuses on the 'institutionalisation' of community policing, aiming to ensure that changes occur in the leadership and management of the police and that it is promoted from the top down throughout the levels of the hierarchy. Together, all of these dimensions ensure that 'community' concerns and needs lie at the heart of policing at all levels. This will not only increase trust in and promote a service-minded police service,¹¹ but will also enhance problem-solving partnerships and more effectively and collaboratively prevent crime, insecurity, conflict and violence.

Over the last 30 years, the community policing approach has been increasingly adopted around the world as a dominant strategy for policing – from Asia and Europe to Africa and the Americas. In addition to being taken up by governments themselves as a foundation of police reform processes, it has been a cornerstone of many foreign aid programmes focusing on security sector and police reform. This includes the United States (through the Department of Justice International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) and the Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL)), the UK and European Union,¹² as well as multilateral organisations like the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). These initiatives can be motivated by an interest in promoting more democratic societies and police services in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts. Or they may be driven by a desire for improved responsiveness and cooperation – regionally and globally – on shared security concerns that are seen as important for foreign policy. (For Western countries, like the US and UK, these might include drug trafficking, trafficking in persons, illegal migration or support for violent groups).¹³

The growing acceptance and institutionalisation of the community policing philosophy in the United States and elsewhere has led to some improvements. Yet it has not systematically addressed the long-standing problems and unaddressed grievances that pose substantial obstacles for improving collaboration and building safer communities. This was evident from the nationwide protests in the US in the summer of 2020

Table 1¹⁴: Differences between approaches related to community policing**Policing approaches**

Traditional policing	Community policing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Arrest as a primary tool ■ Numbers-oriented ■ Incident driven ■ ‘Us versus Them’ tendency ■ Work confined to shifts ■ Citizens call for help ■ Police provide security <i>for</i> the community ■ Passive role of community ■ Police, government authorities and citizens are reluctant to share information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Additional tools to solve problems ■ Results-oriented ■ Proactive problem-solving ■ Partnerships as focus ■ Citizens meet and work with police and government authorities to jointly solve problems related to crime, safety, and quality of life ■ Police provide security <i>with</i> the community ■ Active role of community ■ Police, government authorities and citizens recognise the value of sharing information ■ Policing by consent, not coercion

Problem-solving approaches used in community policing¹⁵

Community security	SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ People-centred approach focused on addressing the drivers of crime, insecurity, conflict, and violence ■ Community-led identification and prioritisation of security problems ■ Communities in charge of implementing collective responses with relevant actors, including authorities and security providers ■ Consists of five stages: analyse; jointly identify and prioritise community concerns; plan responses; implement action plans; and monitor, evaluate and plan improvements ■ Brings together state, non-state and civil society actors with communities ■ Context-specific and conflict- and gender-sensitive ■ Focus on inclusivity and equality, and people’s participation in activities that reflect their actual needs ■ Promotes accountability of authorities, including security providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A problem-solving approach often used in community policing for reducing the impact of crime and disorder problems in a community ■ Consists of four stages – scanning, analysis, response and assessment ■ Can be used as a collaborative problem identification/problem-solving methodology between police, communities and other relevant actors ■ Requires creativity and flexibility, thinking outside the box to find non-traditional solutions to law enforcement problems

following the death of George Floyd, an African American man killed while being arrested, and several other high-profile cases of fatal shootings by the police. There followed widespread public condemnation of police abuse, discrimination, systemic racism and violations of human rights. Similarly, there is continued widespread abuse of authority, as well as strong anti-police sentiment and protests, in many parts of Central Asia. Community policing should not be seen as a ‘panacea’, but rather as one possible avenue for addressing some of the challenges that police and communities face in specific contexts.¹⁶

Police reform and community policing in Central Asia

Central Asian countries inherited their security structures from the Soviet Union. As time went by, the gap between society and these security structures widened – with the security sector often lagging behind other sectors and exhibiting substantial resistance to change. The widening gap and the perception of the police as corrupt or ineffective have triggered demands for reform.¹⁷ These calls for dialogue and change to the status quo have led to varying degrees of reform. Reforms are often motivated by an earnest desire to change – but also at times by a desire to improve the technical capacity of the police, satisfy international donors and governments, extend the reach or control of the state, or to placate the public and help preserve the incumbent regime through improvements to the image of the authorities. Experience has shown that, regardless of the initial motivations, political will on the part of the government and at the executive level of the police is an essential ingredient for the success of reform efforts.¹⁸

The decision to pursue police reform – caused by violent events that lead to international and national calls for change, or through civil society’s advocacy efforts to democratise the security sector and demands for more transparent, inclusive, responsive and accountable security provision – can be an important opening for dialogue between the state, civil society and international actors. Such dialogue has occurred at different stages in Central Asian countries, often in tandem with changes in the political landscape and in reaction to events. We will explore these further in the country-specific chapters in this report. Community policing is an important part of an overall police reform strategy that includes

a number of components to build trust and support of the public (for example, needs assessments, changes to the law, structure and staffing, separating the police from the state, and performance monitoring).¹⁹

The overall objective of this report is to examine community policing initiatives in three of the five Central Asian countries – Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – to assess their effectiveness and draw out lessons, experiences and recommendations. These are meant to help inform future police reform and community policing efforts in the region and beyond, with recommendations directed toward national governments, international donors and organisations, civil society, and communities, on how community policing initiatives can be improved in the region.

Saferworld’s work on community policing around the world

Saferworld has significant experience conducting research and implementing programmes on community policing in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts. In 2003, in collaboration with the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Saferworld conducted research for a ‘Community-Based Policing Principles and Philosophy’ study in support of United Nations Development Programme Albania’s work with the Albanian Police.²⁰ That research was the basis for Saferworld developing and implementing community safety initiatives in Kosovo and the Balkans (2005–13), a comprehensive Democratic Policing Programme in Kenya (which started in 2015), a community-based policing training pack,²¹ and a comprehensive community security methodology handbook.²² The latter has been adapted and implemented in many of our programmes, including in Bangladesh, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Somalia and South Sudan.²³ We have also been working to help shape wider international security sector reform and governance policy, for example in Myanmar.²⁴

Box 1: Gary Gordner's principles and elements of community policing²⁵

Dimensions	Central ideas	Examples
Philosophical	Community input	Agency/unit/special advisory boards, community perception surveys, community meetings, email/website, public shows
	Broad function	Issues ranging from crime and disorder, to insecurity, conflict and violence (for example, traffic safety, drug abuse, gender-based and domestic violence, support for violent groups)
	Personal service	Officer business cards/phone numbers, re-contact procedures, slogans/symbols
Strategic	Re-oriented operations	Foot patrol, other modes of patrol (such as bike, horse)
	Prevention emphasis	Situational crime prevention, community crime prevention, youth-oriented prevention, business crime prevention, community safety/security, conflict prevention
	Geographic focus	Permanent beat assignment, lead officers, beat teams, neighbourhood police, area commanders, mini-stations, area specialists
Tactical	Positive interaction	Routine call handling, meetings, school-based policing, interactive patrol, community events (for example, sports, celebrations), open stations
	Partnerships	Citizen patrols, citizen police academies, volunteers, schools, partnerships (for example, community safety/security groups)
	Problem-solving	Scanning, analysis, response, assessment (SARA), stakeholder mapping, guardians, beat meetings, hot spots, multi-agency teams
Organisational	Structure	Decentralisation, de-specialisation, teams, civilianisation, gender diversity, equality and inclusion (across all departments and ranks)
	Leadership/management	Mission, strategic planning, coaching/mentoring, capacity strengthening and empowerment
	Information	Performance appraisal, programme evaluation, departmental assessment, information systems, crime analysis, geographic information systems

Saferworld's work on community policing in Central Asia

In both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, community policing is a central pillar of Saferworld's peacebuilding and conflict prevention work. We began working in the region in 2010, largely focusing on border conflicts in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the Fergana Valley region. We set up offices in Kyrgyzstan in 2012 (in Osh and Bishkek) and in Tajikistan in 2016 (in Dushanbe). From the beginning, together with civil society partners, we focused on improving cooperation and understanding between different groups, including communities, the police and authorities. This has involved applying Saferworld's community security principles to our community policing work. This participatory, people-centred and gender-sensitive approach aims to respond to perceptions of insecurity and conflict among communities by promoting greater cooperation and accountability between people – who define what security is, who it is for and how it is delivered in their communities – as well as with civil society, authorities and law enforcement agencies. It also aims to change relationships and behaviours that have the potential to lead to violence.

In Kyrgyzstan, we implement a community policing/ community security programme mostly in the south and west (Batken, Jalal-Abad and Osh provinces), with some work in the northern Chui province as well. In Tajikistan, we implement a community policing/community security programme in all four regions (Districts of Republican Subordination, Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), Khatlon and Sughd). In Uzbekistan, we previously piloted a community policing project in Jizzakh region. We are continuing community security work here, with the addition of two other regions, Namangan and Tashkent. Our work on community policing has also recently been complemented by projects related to the empowerment of young people (in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), as well as preventing gender-based violence and working to address factors that lead to support for violent groups (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan).

Methodology and limitations

This report is based primarily on qualitative research. This consisted largely of semi-structured informant interviews (one on one), supplemented by desk research and our long experience of programme implementation in the region. The research was conducted from spring 2020 into early 2021. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, almost all interviews were conducted online by Saferworld staff and consultants using Zoom or Skype. However, some in-person interviews did take place when it was considered safe to do so. In Uzbekistan, due to the lack of a Saferworld office or programme team in-country, all interviews were conducted by a local consultant who used mixed methods of surveys and interviews (reaching up to 52 people altogether). In Kyrgyzstan (15 interviews) and Tajikistan (29 interviews), the majority of interviews were conducted by Saferworld staff members (in English, Russian, Kyrgyz and Tajik), and then analysed by consultants and the report author. A further seven interviews were conducted in relation to community policing or Central Asia more broadly, with these not tied to a specific country.

Research participants from the three countries were from a range of backgrounds – from members of civil society, committees and collaborative platforms, to ministry and government representatives, and media and international experts on security sector and police reform and community policing. We also tried to have a geographic spread, with interviews taking place with representatives in capital cities (Bishkek, Dushanbe and Tashkent) but also in different regions of the three countries. Some interviews were conducted with regional or thematic experts based in Europe, the US, Asia and elsewhere. In all, 103 people were interviewed or surveyed, around a third of whom were women. The report benefited from multiple rounds of feedback, including from Saferworld's civil society partners and staff.

Many of the limitations associated with the research were related to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. For example, we initially planned to gather data from several in-person events in each of the countries, as well as focus group discussions, and to supplement it with key informant interviews. However, because of the risk of the spread of the virus in conducting these in-person events, the vast majority of data gathering was via remote individual interviews. While this provided some benefits (including openness for participants to discuss sensitive topics with better anonymity), it also meant

there was less dialogue between respondents. We expect that there was a degree of self-censorship in some interviews, where respondents could have been worried about data security as a result of the online format. For the Uzbekistan chapter, we also had less programme experience within Saferworld. As a result, feedback from staff was more limited than in the other chapters, more reflective solely of the consultant's analysis and feedback from one of our civil society partners.

Another limitation was the lower number of women interviewed for the research. This was partly a result of the police and associated actors and institutions, such as the Ministries of Internal Affairs and local government bodies, being male-dominated – due largely to prevailing gender norms in such institutions. This could mean that some of the findings miss key dynamics or factors that disproportionately affect women or girls. To address this shortcoming, national research team members and Saferworld's gender adviser have taken considerable care to review the methodology and data to address any sensitivities and gaps.

There were also some adaptations that had to be made throughout the course of the research, especially during the data-gathering stage. For example, elections and political changes in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan meant that government officials were less available or changed positions. Some of the interviews were also conducted prior to or following events (such as the October 2020 political unrest in Kyrgyzstan in response to parliamentary elections), leading to different answers for some questions based on the changing context.

Notes

- 1 'The Central Asia region' most commonly refers to these five former Soviet republics, but other countries (or regions within other countries) are often included on the basis of geography, as well as ethnic, historical, linguistic and cultural links. Afghanistan is the most frequent addition, while Mongolia and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China (which is largely populated by Turkic-speaking populations historically linked to the region) are often seen as part of wider Central Asia. In some definitions, some parts of Iran, Siberia, Pakistan and India may also be included.
- 2 International Crisis Group (2002), 'Central Asia: The Politics of Police Reform', 10 December (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/central-asia-politics-police-reform>)
- 3 The term 'proscribed violent groups' can include groups that promote violent ideologies and methods of achieving their aims, such as in the case of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. But such terms can be hotly debated in their use in the region, including in relation to groups that may be seen by some as 'extremist' but that do not necessarily advocate violence. In other cases, the 'extremist' label can be used for political aims, i.e., to suppress political groups, opposition movements, civil society or religious groups and their practices that are seen to fall outside the accepted lines. For more on the threat of 'terrorism' and 'extremism' and how this has been used in the region, see: Lemon E (2018), 'Assessing the Terrorist Threat In and From Central Asia', Voices on Central Asia, 18 October (<https://voicesoncentralasia.org/assessing-the-terrorist-threat-in-and-from-central-asia/>)
- 4 Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (2019), 'Police Reform', *SSR Backgrounder Series*, p 2 (https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/DCAF_BG_16_Police%20Reform_o.pdf)
- 5 'Community policing' seems to be the most widely used term in the English-speaking world, but alternatives can often be used. These include 'police–public partnerships', 'community-oriented policing (COP)', 'problem-oriented policing (POP)', 'community-based policing' or a number of other locally specific names that capture approximately the same ideas and principles. The term does not always translate well into other languages. For example, in Russian – the most common shared language across the Central Asia region – it is translated differently depending on country and organisational preferences. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, it is often known as 'социальное партнерство между милицией и населением', which can be translated as 'social partnership between police and the population'. In Tajikistan, it is known as 'взаимодействие милиции с общественностью', which can be translated as 'cooperation of police with society'. For the purposes of this report, the term 'community policing' will be used, unless another term is used in quoted text.
- 6 South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Saferworld (2006), 'Philosophy and principles of community-based policing', p 3 (<https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Community-Policing/Philosophy-and-principles-of-community-based-policing-2003-EN.pdf>)
- 7 Jackson J, Bradford B, Hough M, Murray KH (2012), 'Compliance with the law and policing by consent: notes on police and legal legitimacy', in Crawford A, Hucklesby A (eds.) *Legitimacy and Compliance in Criminal Justice* (London: Routledge) pp 29–49 (http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/30157/1/Jackson_etal_Compliance_with_the_law_and_policing_by_consent_2012.pdf)
- 8 Fisher-Stewart G (2007), 'Community Policing Explained: A Guide for Local Governments', July, p 3
- 9 Gordner G (1996), 'Community Policing: Principles and Elements'.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Goldsmith A (2005), 'Police reform and the problem of trust', *Theoretical Criminology* 9 (4)
- 12 Bayley DH (2001), 'Democratizing the Police Abroad: What to Do and How to Do It', *Issues in International Crime*, June, p 4.
- 13 Brogden M, Nijhar P (2005), 'Globalizing community-oriented policing (COP)', in *Community Policing: National and International Models and Approaches* (Routledge), pp 4–9.
- 14 Adapted from a presentation given by Tamara Duffey-Janser.
- 15 For diagrams that outline the steps of these problem-solving approaches, see the annex at the end of this report.
- 16 Gordner G (1996), 'Community Policing: Principles and Elements'.
- 17 As Erica Marat notes, there is a range of other events or cases of abuse that can cause public outcry and trigger demands for reform. These include violence being deployed at protests or as a result of particularly shocking cases involving human rights abuses during arrests or detentions. See: Marat E (2018), 'The Politics of Police Reform: Society against the State in Post-Soviet Countries' (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p 195.
- 18 Saferworld interview, international police reform expert, 2020.
- 19 Harris, Frank (2005), 'The role of capacity-building in police reform', OSCE Mission in Kosovo (<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/f/19789.pdf>)
- 20 South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Saferworld (2006), 'Philosophy and principles of community-based policing' (<https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Community-Policing/Philosophy-and-principles-of-community-based-policing-2003-EN.pdf>)
- 21 Saferworld (2006), 'Community-based policing', August (<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/218-community-based-policing>)
- 22 Saferworld (2014), 'Community security handbook', April (<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/806-community-security-handbook>)
- 23 For a range of resources on community policing in various contexts by Saferworld and other organisations, see: <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1130-policing-resources>
- 24 See: Joliffe K (2019), 'Democratising Myanmar's security sector: Enduring legacies and a long road ahead', Saferworld, November (<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1234-democratising-myanmars-security-sector-enduring-legacies-and-a-long-road-ahead>); Hendrickson D, Joliffe K (2018), 'Security integration in conflict-affected societies: considerations for Myanmar', Saferworld, September (<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1185-security-integration-in-conflict-affected-societies-considerations-for-myanmar>)
- 25 Adapted from Gordner's table, with additions and adaptations from Saferworld. For the original, see: Gordner G (1996), 'Community Policing: Principles and Elements'.



Police in the Jalal-Abad region meet with school students as a part of Saferworld's community policing project.
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2

Kyrgyzstan

Since independence, Kyrgyzstan has embarked on a difficult path toward a democratic and free-market system. As with its Central Asian neighbours, the police were largely seen as a punitive institution rather than one which serves the needs of the public. Starting in the 1990s, the Kyrgyzstani leadership articulated its goal of building an open society with respect for human rights. Beginning in the latter part of the decade, the government made several overtures to the public on police reform. These efforts gained momentum at several watershed moments, largely following political upheavals in 2005 and 2010, in which regime change led to an initial desire to do things differently. At these crucial junctures, Kyrgyzstan's active civil society was a driving force, pushing for a more inclusive, accountable and service-oriented police.²⁶

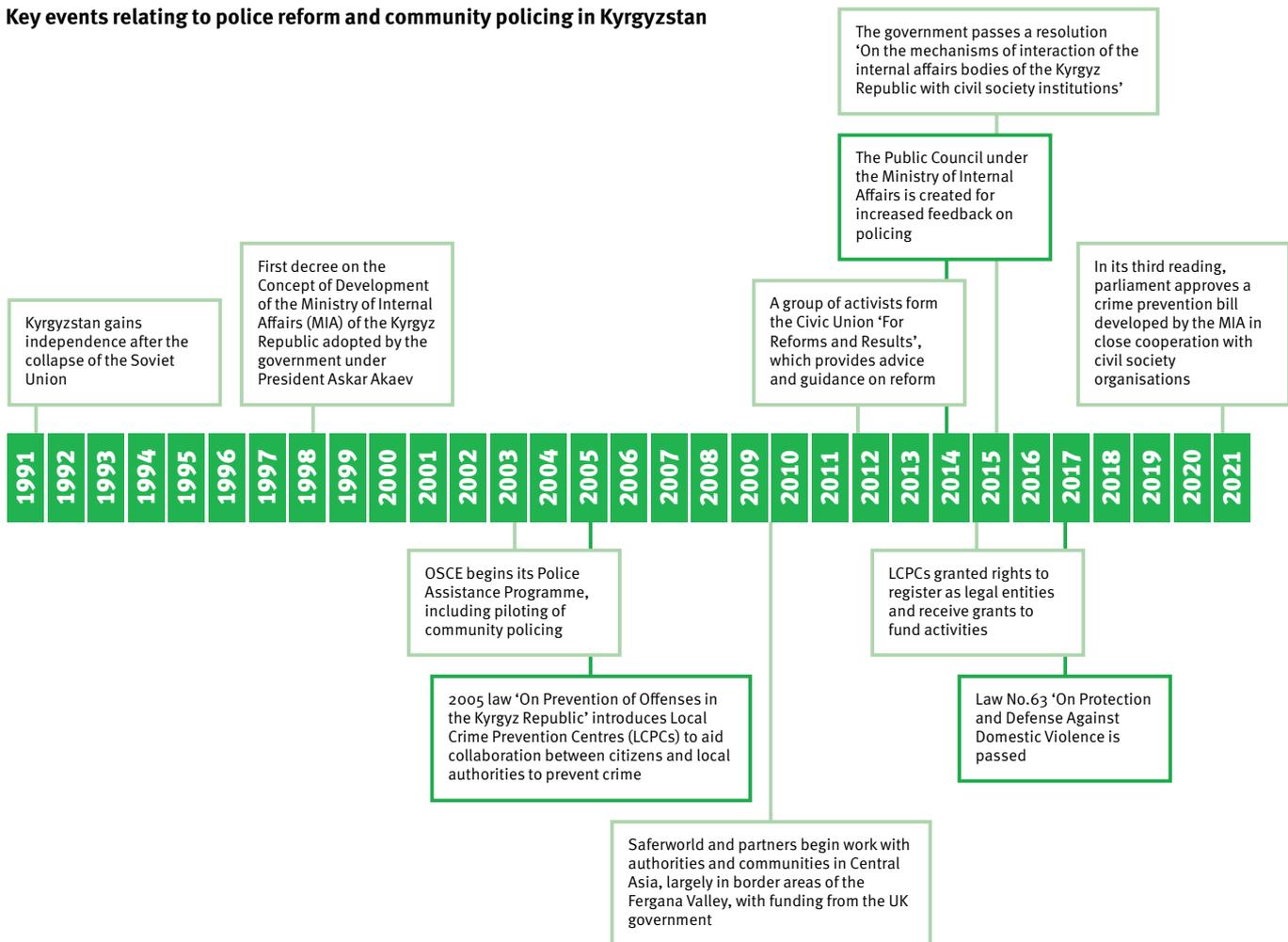
Although this factor varies by region, ordinary citizens often view the police with less trust than other public services in the country,²⁷ with frequent allegations of corruption and abuse of power. At other times, the police have been accused of playing a coercive function in serving political elites and regimes, or by pressuring political opposition rather than responding to the needs of citizens.

A short history of police reform efforts

Early attempts at police reform were undertaken in 1998, when a decree on the Concept of Development of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) of the Kyrgyz Republic was adopted by the government under President Askar Akaev, addressing the main principles and priorities for improving the operational activities of the authorities in the short, medium and long term (listed as until 2003).²⁸ The government took more serious steps toward reform in the 2000s, with a 2005 decree from President Akaev, before he was forced from office, titled the 'Concept of Reforming Bodies of Internal Affairs'. This was in place until 2010 and focused on reforms that would protect citizen rights and property. The decree aimed to address criminality and form a more positive image of the police.²⁹

In 2008, the MIA issued an order on 'The Program on the Internal Affairs Reform for 2008–2010', followed by the 'Program of Reforms of the Bodies of Internal Affairs for 2010–2012' in 2009. Following the 2010 revolution and a period of interim government, another police reform programme was adopted in 2013 covering the years from then until 2017.

Key events relating to police reform and community policing in Kyrgyzstan



It focused on compliance with the National Strategy on Sustainable Development. More recently, the then President Almazbek Atambaev issued a decree entitled 'On Measures on Law Enforcement System Reform'.³⁰ In total, six police reform programmes were initiated between 1998 and 2017, but they largely failed to meet the expectations of international donors and domestic civil society.

Due to its limited resources, Kyrgyzstan's government sought assistance from the international community to implement its reforms. This resulted in long-term cooperation with international organisations like the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations, and later various international and national non-governmental organisations like Saferworld and the Foundation for Tolerance International. Following the killing of six protesters by police in March 2002,³¹ the then President Akaev invited the OSCE to implement its Police Assistance Programme from 2003 to 2005. This focused mainly on providing technical assistance, training and equipment for the police, as well as introducing principles of police–public cooperation.³² Despite the OSCE's efforts, the initiative did not fully meet citizen and civil society expectations: corruption in the police force

continued, human rights abuses were reported, and the idea of service-oriented police departments failed to properly take off.³³ People's perceptions of corruption and increasingly authoritarian rule, among other factors, led to the Tulip Revolution of 2005, which came to a head when protesters demanded the resignation of President Akaev. Kurmanbek Bakiev came to power later that year.

During the Bakiev administration, from 2005 to 2010, the OSCE extended its Police Assistance Programme. It focused on preventing conflict, more training (including community policing) and operational improvements. However, the Bakiev regime was considered even more corrupt than its predecessor by many inside the country as well as abroad.³⁴ It was characterised by the formation of an inner circle of loyal elites, growing corruption and bribery, flourishing patronage networks, widespread human rights violations, and repression.³⁵ Law enforcement, having played a role in sustaining this system, faced popular scepticism and mistrust. Any proclaimed efforts at reform by the authorities were not taken seriously by the public.

Bakiev and his circle were overthrown in the April 2010 revolution, in the wake of an upsurge in police violence against protesters in Bishkek. In the end,

more than 80 people were reported killed and many more injured in efforts to suppress the growing resistance to the regime. This was followed by inter-ethnic clashes in and around Osh in June 2010, where hundreds more were killed and injured. During the clashes, some Kyrgyz police were accused of violating the law and stoking tensions.³⁶ This in turn deepened the popular perception of the police as a source of insecurity, especially for minority groups like Uzbeks, who cited feelings of injustice during and following the events of 2010. Calls for police reform from civil society activists and the public became louder.

Following the interim government's tenure with Roza Otunbaeva as president from 2010 to 2011 and a period of strong civil society activism, Almazbek Atambaev was voted in as Kyrgyzstan's new president in late-2011. His government initiated another round of police reform, passing responsibility for its implementation to the MIA, NGOs and representatives of the new parliament. This was accompanied by a time of unprecedented civil society mobilisation and optimism, leading to a series of demands and recommendations that included calls for accountability mechanisms and structural changes aimed at diminishing patronage politics. Around this time, civil society proposed an alternative concept on police reform that focused on transparency, depoliticisation, community policing and improved processes, such as around competitive and transparent staff recruitment. Holding more than 30 public hearings around the country, these civil society efforts led to the creation of the Civic Union for Reforms and Results. This group then published its proposed police reform concept,³⁷ which collected over 10,000 signatures before being sent to the government for consideration.³⁸ As a result, two working groups were set up comprising parliamentarians, government officials and NGO representatives. Both submitted proposals, some of which were incorporated into 2013's 'On measures on Law Enforcement System Reform'.³⁹

While civil society achieved some key successes at this time, Civic Union and partner organisations continued to advocate for measures, some of which were taken up. These included a revised system of police performance evaluation, police patrol services, studies on women's participation in the police, measures aimed at increasing recruitment of women, and mechanisms of collaboration between the police and the population (including greater support for community policing initiatives).

In October 2020, Kyrgyzstan faced another political crisis, as tainted parliamentary elections led to large-scale protests in the capital, Bishkek, the annulment of election results, the resignation of

President Sooronbay Jeenbekov and the rise of Sadyr Japarov to power. Following Japarov's election as president on 10 January 2021, and the approval of a referendum to move towards a presidential system, the country was, at the time of this report, entering uncharted territory. The fate of these reform efforts was unclear. While Japarov had indicated a desire to reform Kyrgyzstan's institutions and combat corruption, many observers worried that the reversion to a presidential system and a nationalist tone in politics would leave civil society locked out of discussions. Meanwhile, efforts to encourage democratisation could be seen as an imposition from outside forces, going against 'traditional' norms.⁴⁰

Throughout these various stages of reform, several institutions were set up that are still involved in community policing today. For example, the 2005 law 'On Prevention of Offenses in the Kyrgyz Republic' defined a **local crime prevention centre (LCPC)** as a 'non-commercial entity created by the local government to aid collaboration between citizens and local government to pre-empt crime and illegal activity'.⁴¹ These LCPCs, which were created under municipal governing bodies (*ayil okmotu*), were meant to bring neighbourhood and juvenile police inspectors together with representatives of local elder courts, women's councils and youth committees in order to work jointly on public order initiatives and crime prevention. Typically, LCPCs have membership of around 20 to 40 per cent women, made up of municipal representatives and volunteers, although this varies substantially by location. This mandate falls under Article 18 of the law on self-governing bodies, which designates local security concerns as an area of responsibility for *ayil okmotu*.⁴² Since their creation, the number of LCPCs across the country had officially reached around 530 by 2019, but with only a fraction of these operating in practice.⁴³ In 2015, they were granted rights to register as legal entities and receive grants to fund their activities (although in reality they seldom do so).⁴⁴ Saferworld and partners played a large role in this process, using these bodies as a platform for promoting police–public cooperation.⁴⁵ In addition, the **Public Council** under the Ministry of Internal Affairs was created in 2014 by the government (initially as two separate councils that later merged). This is an advisory group that broadly provides recommendations for the MIA leadership on implementing reforms and improving the efficiency of its functions. Members are selected by a special commission, after which they are meant to meet on a monthly basis.

Current public perceptions of the police

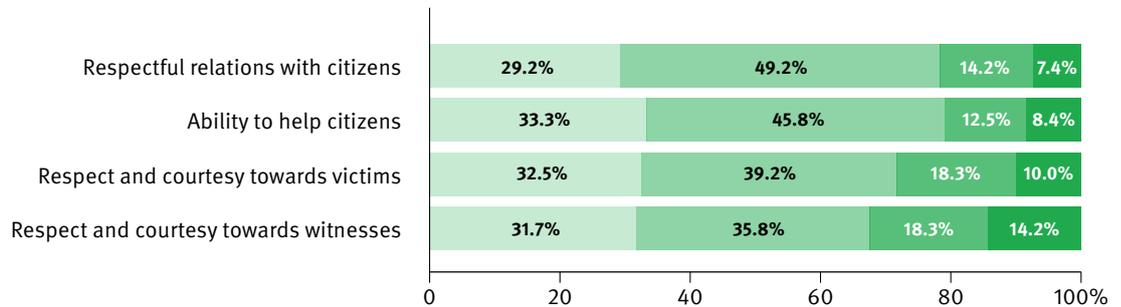
The police in Kyrgyzstan have faced challenges in improving their image, having often been associated with negative characteristics such as corruption, discrimination and abuse, detachment from the citizenry, and having ties to criminal groups or activities. Violent episodes or clashes, as outlined above, entrench these views, making genuine efforts for reform within the police even more difficult because of a growing chasm between the police and the public.

Research conducted in 2019 by Civic Union, supported by Saferworld and the Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI), asked respondents from across the country to share their perceptions of the police in their regions.⁴⁶ Some of the largest problems cited by respondents were around corruption and abuse of power (cited by 25% of respondents), low competency (cited by 15%) and rudeness (13%).⁴⁷ While many (75%) respondents

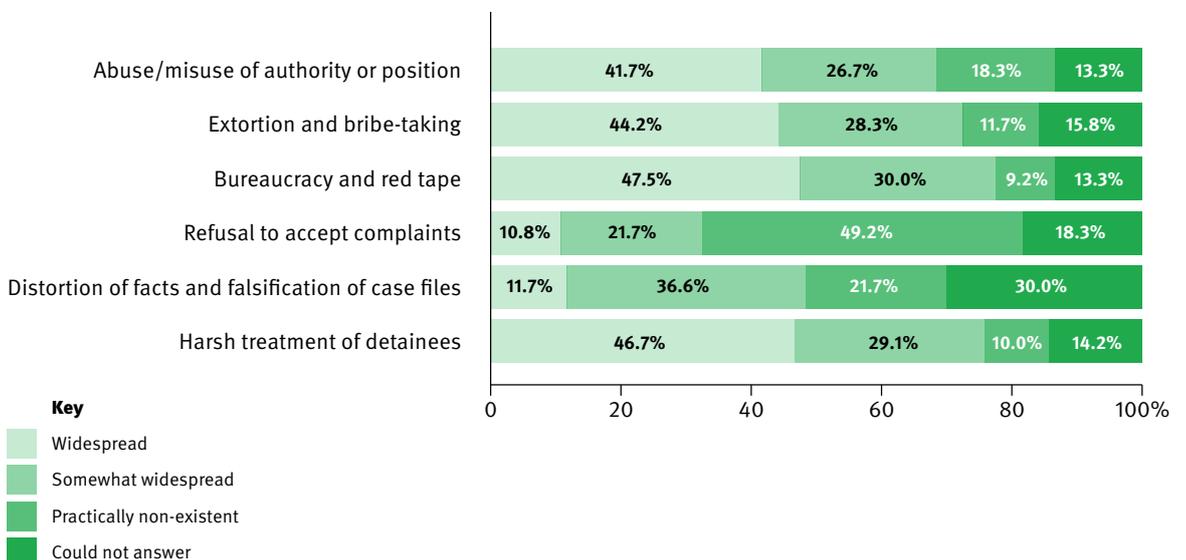
did not see differential access to the police based on gender, women participants were much more likely to cite discrimination in relation to police responsiveness (24.6% as compared to 10.2% of men). Other groups were also identified as facing discrimination, such as people from lower socio-economic households (cited by 42.7% of respondents), young people (9.4%) and ethnic minorities (3.4%). In addition, respondents shared their opinions on which issues the police responded to most effectively ('maintenance of safety in public spaces' and 'road safety'), and least effectively ('prevention and response to domestic violence' and 'cooperation with residents').

As a result, over half of those who participated in the perception survey said that people in their communities often used alternative mechanisms for resolving problems in the first instance. These included *aksakal* (elder) courts (cited by 16.4% respondents), relatives (cited by 12.1%), acquaintances (8.6%), and house and neighbourhood committees (5.2%), among others. However, many of these more informal resolution methods – while more accessible or trusted in many cases – were largely dominated by men and can favour traditional practices that disadvantage women.⁴⁸

Perceptions of positive factors relating to police



Perceptions of negative factors relating to police



In addition to a general mistrust from a large part of the population, our interviews showed the degree to which women and members of minority groups were sceptical of law enforcement, indicating a particular need to improve services and conduct outreach with these groups. “The level of public trust is very low, around 20 to 25 per cent,” said one civil society activist. “My organisation works in Osh and three southern regions. The area is densely populated and there are many different ethnic groups . . . I work in the field of gender, and when we analyse complaints of victims of domestic and gender-based violence to the police, the indicators there are very low – people do not contact the police nor trust them.”⁴⁹

There is also a dichotomy in many places between traditional pressures and priorities (such as keeping silent about abuse or keeping the family unit together at all costs) and the law (in which domestic violence, kidnapping for forced marriage and other practices are illegal). While there could be more protection for women under the formal courts, the pressures, inaccessibility, corruption and costs associated with them can all serve as deterrents.

Motivations for reform

On top of public perceptions, there are violent incidents which intermittently set the police against protesters and create outrage among people. This leads to calls for reform in Kyrgyzstan. Following periods of police violence, the calls for change are at their loudest; yet they are sustained by ongoing cases of abuse or ineffective responses that are continuously featured in the media. This is fuelled by cases in the media where the police respond to incidents of gender-based violence in ways that are ineffective or insensitive to the safety needs of survivors.⁵⁰

Most of the people we interviewed agreed that reform goals were largely shared across society – that is, improving police capacity, improving cooperation with communities, upholding human rights and preventing crime. Yet the incentives, approaches and ideas for how reform should be achieved differed substantially. Respondents cited different views regarding the role of the government, civil society and international actors in promoting reform of the police. “We started police reforms in the 90s,” said one civil society representative. “There have been some positive changes, but they do not reflect the results that we really need . . . due to lack of financing, lack of political will, unwillingness to change, or a lack of common vision between civil society and law enforcement.”⁵¹

For many in the security apparatus or government, reform meant improvements on a technocratic, operational basis – not in terms of a fundamental realignment of police behaviour.⁵² One civil society respondent said, “For [some in upper management levels], the current system suits them and allows them to realise their interests . . . it seems to me they would not want to change anything.”⁵³

For local-level police, one major benefit of building better relations with communities was that it helped them more effectively respond to crime and insecurity, ensure civil order, and serve the people. A greater degree of cooperation with local communities meant police were able to enlist civilian support when carrying out investigations; they could get information that would help them respond to, and even prevent, crime and insecurity. The police also saw the importance of this cooperative relationship – it encouraged people to turn to the police when in need, and also improved their image. This was an important aspect for many police, who felt the pressure of being in a profession that was generally disliked by their own communities.⁵⁴

Civil society respondents argued that police reforms were urgent given that low public trust led to underreporting and lack of action against violence, crime and human rights abuse. “People are afraid of the police and do not believe in the justice of police work,” said one activist.⁵⁵ This has led to pronouncements of cosmetic changes – such as from the Soviet-style *militsiya* to the more internationally used *politsiya* – although these efforts never got off the ground, with few people supporting such changes.⁵⁶ “Russia and Kazakhstan have renamed their police, but the changes must take place more deeply and qualitatively for Kyrgyzstan,” said one civil society representative. “Reform must include the training of future personnel, starting at the Academy of the MIA. Currently, people’s general opinion towards any changes is ambivalence – they think nothing will change.”⁵⁷ This was borne out by a survey in 2014, in which nearly 54 per cent of respondents did not feel the impacts of reform.⁵⁸

Civil society actors pointed to the need for behavioural change from the police as a crucial step in reform. This meant a change across the four ‘dimensions’ outlined earlier – philosophical, strategic, operational and organisational – whereby changes in policing culture, training and incentives could shift the focus onto community priorities. Respondents saw a crucial role for civil society and international actors in assisting and promoting police reform, by providing critical feedback and recommendations for areas needing improvement. This was especially true in relation to human rights and the security needs of communities. Some



Members of a local crime prevention centre in the Jalal-Abad region talk about local security issues.

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respondents noted gaps in civil society and NGO work which may stem from donor agendas that determine where resources are allocated in a country depending on priorities set by foreign governments. This could lead to inconsistent funding, the prioritisation of technical or infrastructural needs, or sporadic support for reform, which should be a long-term and sustained process.⁵⁹

Political will was highlighted as one of the main pre-conditions for reform: without the backing of government officials, there will be little change.⁶⁰ One former high-level police official noted that steps toward increasing low salaries and modernising equipment could also lead to a growing expectation for democratising the police, and “to move from the concept of ‘police forces’ to ‘police services’”. Many civil society activists saw these moves as important, but insufficient in changing core police behaviour and modifying their instinct to protect existing powers (including through depoliticisation and demilitarisation). “Police reforms were seen as positive in the beginning, but it took so long to realise those reforms that security forces began to see them as abstract,” said one civil society respondent. “Now they perceive it more as technical

assistance – ‘provide us with cars, computers and equipment’.”⁶¹ Some pointed to piecemeal reform as ineffective, citing the vast reforms undertaken by countries like Georgia during President Saakashvili’s tenure (2003–12). These were more far-reaching and involved changes to the wider political apparatus which was intrinsically bound up with the success of law enforcement.

Legislative framework

Most respondents told us that Kyrgyzstan already had in place good laws that could provide a solid basis for community policing, but that the issue lay in implementation and updating legislation according to changing developments.⁶² For example, there was legislation that was out of date and which referenced other out-of-date legislation. This could obstruct progress by making action too complicated or by obscuring the necessary steps. “One criticism ... is that not much has happened in response to these decrees, so it creates doubt that new laws can

solve problems,” said one expert. MIA officials said that laws touching on community policing should be amended and reviewed according to community needs and consultations from local bodies. “It’s necessary to analyse the situation constantly and make relevant amendments,” said one official.⁶³ Others suggested the laws themselves mattered little – it was more about political will and the norms the laws indicated. “Practice is lived first, and new culture established – and then law catches up,” said one policing expert. “I don’t think there should be an elaborate law – it has to be more the political and institutional intent of the MIA.”

Members of LCPCs highlighted that their work on crime prevention and addressing community security concerns did not have a sufficient legal basis, or that there was a lack of understanding of their role in relation to *ayil okmotu* and other formal bodies.⁶⁴ Civil society representatives agreed with this assessment, citing a particular law: “In 2005, a law on the prevention of crime⁶⁵ was introduced, which outlined the idea of cooperation between all parties, coordination meetings and the strengthening of LCPCs. But in reality, not everything is being implemented, the law itself is already old; there are various new government regulations.”

Some participants also expressed a desire for legislation and guidance from the government that would steer the activities of *druzhinniki* (volunteer community groups who support police to maintain public order and prevent crime). These would clarify the role the groups could play together with local police, while ensuring that they did not take over police duties, such as arrests, which should be left to professionally trained personnel.⁶⁶ The existence of other groups was cited, including self-organised units in Talas and Naryn, which included local police participation and had a mandate to prevent theft of cattle.

A respondent from the MIA suggested amending legislation on local government bodies. “The [2011] Law on Local Self-Government ties the hands of local self-government bodies, preventing them from financing measures to assist territorial divisions of the Internal Affairs Directorate to ensure law and order, as well as public safety . . . [I]t is necessary to revise the laws on local government bodies on the prevention of offences, in order to assign responsibility for the rule of law and public safety to these [local] authorities.”⁶⁷ More recently, in 2020, a new bill on crime prevention was being worked on by the MIA in close cooperation with civil society organisations (including Civic Union, Saferworld and others).⁶⁸ This provides one of the main examples of close cooperation between the government and civil society on legislation relating to crime prevention.

Main laws, decrees and orders relevant to community policing

Name	Year
On Prevention of Offenses in the Kyrgyz Republic	2005
Law of the Kyrgyz Republic of July 15, 2011 No. 101 ‘About local self-governance’	2011
On Measures on Law Enforcement System Reform	2017
Law on the Basics of Prevention of Crime	Third reading in parliament as of March 2021

Factors contributing to or hindering community–police engagement

Overall, respondents agreed that in areas of Kyrgyzstan where LCPCs and community policing efforts were supported, relations between police and the public improved. Collaboration also led to recognition of community-led LCPCs by municipal authorities. For example, a respondent in Yrys in Jalal-Abad noted that 100–150 cases were referred to the local LCPC in a typical year, and were often resolved through discussions, with involvement by the police as needed.⁶⁹ Community policing was seen to be especially effective when implemented at the local level, where cooperation was easier and engagement higher. It was more difficult at higher levels or with a wider remit (for example at the district level), while addressing problems and creating a collaborative environment locally was more effective.⁷⁰ Some limits to this role were mentioned, however – for example, not all LCPCs had training on human rights, gender or other specialised areas, and so did not always feel confident in addressing such issues without further support.

Membership of LCPCs and inclusion in community security

Respondents also mentioned that diversity of community membership in LCPCs helped address local problems more effectively. In places where women and young people took part in LCPCs, the groups were better able to address related issues due to more informed insights – for example, responses to gender-based violence or violence at schools. But this could be a challenge, especially when women or young people felt that they were not able to express themselves as openly as their older or more influential peers in the LCPCs, or when they faced discrimination or exclusion.⁷¹

In theory, LCPCs should have a wide representation of different groups, including women, young people, *aksakals*, religious leaders, and ethnic, gender, and disability minorities and groups. However, we heard that this was not always the case. In some LCPCs, difficult power dynamics would sometimes arise which had to be navigated to ensure an open, equitable and meaningful space for all.⁷² In some communities, getting ethnic minorities to engage was a challenge due to tensions or their experiences of isolation from the rest of the community. Some of our respondents suggested setting up separate small groups where ethnic minorities could speak openly; however, there were also seen to be some situations where this could increase divisions or tensions – meaning an analysis of individual circumstances would be crucial.⁷³

Cooperation with LCPCs to address community security concerns

Respondents stressed the importance of making the police a more attractive option for resolving problems, including through cooperation with LCPCs and other joint community initiatives. A number of police respondents suggested that citizens could get involved in other ways that helped build confidence in police work – for example, by organising volunteer groups (*druzhinniki*) during public events or other special occasions (such as the recent political crisis in October 2020, when citizen patrols protected property from vandalism and looting).⁷⁴ “When citizens see that an ordinary person like them is cooperating with police and wants to help maintain law and order, it has a good impact on others,” said one police official from Osh. “In this case, there are fewer conflicts between police and people.” He went on to say that “there are some situations when residents of a certain village or district ask to do checks to stop violations or prevent crime. We welcome these kinds of requests, because they help police and community members come together and

cooperate.”⁷⁵ Outreach to schools was said to be particularly effective at building connections and identifying concerns or risk factors for young people. Religious figures, such as imams, clergy and heads of *mahallas* (neighbourhoods) were also said to play an important role in shifting public opinion on some issues and encouraging more collaborative interactions with police.

There were positive outcomes during collaborative meetings. One civil society activist cited an example: “We worked with district and criminal investigation officers on public awareness of *ala-kachuu* (kidnapping for forced marriage), along with changes in legislation – and the situation has shifted.”⁷⁶ While both police and communities acknowledged the use of these open discussions in terms of raising awareness and helping police identify the sources of crimes for better prevention, they did not expect that communities themselves would directly address or handle crimes; instead leaving the response to the professionals.

The composition of the police organisation is an important factor in ensuring greater collaboration, both directly and through collaborative platforms such as LCPCs. Respondents mentioned that getting more women to join the police should be a priority. Apart from the benefits of gaining more equal access to employment and opportunities, they said women responded to some issues related to gender-based violence more effectively. This would help encourage women and girls to come forward.⁷⁷ They also stressed the importance of attracting young, motivated and critically minded recruits to sign up for the MIA Academy.⁷⁸

In some cases, interviewees said that religious practice was not always understood or considered by the police and this could result in responses that further aggravated tensions with religious groups. This highlights the need for sensitivity or inclusion of more devout members (who may otherwise be put off from joining the profession).⁷⁹ Different departments that work on the frontline which have the most contact with the public were also mentioned as central to community policing efforts. This includes neighbourhood and juvenile police inspectors, patrol police and duty officers who are among the most visible to people on a daily basis. Respondents cited positive reforms of the patrol police in Bishkek and praised Osh’s intention to follow this lead in the near future.⁸⁰

Local government participation

Respondents from Kyrgyzstan highlighted a range of different experiences of police–community interaction. One issue raised by MIA respondents was the weak participation by local self-government

bodies in some municipalities (*ayil okmotu*), which could cause problems for community policing efforts. Numerous interviewees hoped for greater involvement by local governments, adding that these local governments tended to rely on the central government because of a lack of clarity over their jurisdiction on security or on the laws regulating their role. Local governments also cited a lack of financing for issues related to security or conflict prevention, and mentioned cases where they were even accused of misappropriation of funds when budgeting for this work. “Many of the local self-government bodies believe that security is not their responsibility”, said one civil society representative. “This is overlaid with funding problems. They do not understand their role [in security].”

However, some respondents cited positive examples where local government was brought in to help provide solutions. “In Osh, we hold ‘prevention day’”, said one police officer we spoke with: “It is a day when we call officials from all services, starting with electricians, utility services, financial police, emergency services, healthcare [and so on]. And we do household visits. When people tell us about a certain problem, we already have an official or specialist that can address it and help the people. This is a good example of police interaction – not only with people, but also with all other government services.”

These types of practices were encouraged, especially in relation to local budgeting for the security concerns of communities.⁸¹ Some respondents said that making this an issue in local electoral campaigns could help raise awareness of security issues among community members and make it a central platform for local governments.⁸² Another LCPC member in Osh region said that they would often take *ayil okmotu* representatives with them for home visits in the community, and enlist their help when reporting to the local *kenesh* (council; municipal parliament). This sometimes helped in allocating funding for LCPC activities.⁸³

Other respondents spoke about how the police were often stationed in regions that they were not familiar with, so there was some time needed to understand the local context and build connections with communities. For those who succeeded in getting to know communities well, they were often moved soon after due to high turnover and staff rotation within the police. Some support was provided on community engagement from NGOs, but respondents mentioned that local government authorities could get more involved in this aspect of police–public interaction as a good practice. For example, in many communities they were already helping organise joint reporting days for the police, in which the police presented the results of their

work and outlined future priorities. This was one way to bring people together and flag community members’ concerns in an open format, while helping the police understand the local context and specificities.

Resource limitations and motivation of police and LCPCs

Limited funding for crime prevention and collaborative community security work was cited as a major obstacle at all levels. Representatives from Kyrgyzstan’s MIA said that this resulted in low salaries and the inability to implement community policing initiatives. Several respondents noted that it was difficult for the police: they struggled on a low salary and faced distrust from their communities, which diminished any motivation to ‘go above and beyond’ in their jobs or to engage meaningfully with the public. Some suggested that cooperation with the citizenry should be a key part of police job descriptions, rather than something seen as an ‘extra’, and should be evaluated as part of performance management. “They are not motivated to cooperate,” said one civil society respondent. “The management should be interested [in improving cooperation with the public]. I’ve looked at the employee appraisal questions they go through periodically, and I think there should be something on cooperation with communities in these certification questions. Then the police officer will know these questions are coming and will think about ways to [work with the public].”⁸⁴ However, the motivation of police to participate in community policing varied greatly from location to location, depending on local conditions and also the personalities of different officers or managers.⁸⁵ “A new chief comes and he wants to change something,” said a civil society activist. “He can maintain a dialogue, and the police officers [under him] begin to interact a little better with the communities.”⁸⁶

Members of LCPCs also highlighted the issue of pay and motivation, remarking that their own work with LCPCs was unpaid and voluntary, often competing with other full-time jobs, and so did not always get prioritised by everyone involved.⁸⁷ Some members reported feeling a lack of motivation as a result of the unpaid nature of the work. NGOs were cited as being able to provide some motivation by providing services, training, guidance and expertise. One member of an LCPC from Osh region said that “as the work is on a voluntary basis, some members are not interested. We call on them to join in, but of 11 people, only five or six work actively.”⁸⁸ Some sort of compensation or reward was suggested by several LCPC members due to the demands being made of

them, including regular reporting. LCPCs also faced challenges related to the number of communities they served, often at long distances from one another. Travel might have to be made at members' own cost or time (competing with other domestic – particularly for women – or employment priorities). “We need to visit houses, but some villages are far from the LCPC, so there is a need for transport,” said one LCPC member from Osh.

Perceptions of community policing

Respondents who were familiar with community policing and had worked on these initiatives previously had a positive view of community policing, noting that it almost always led to improved responses to certain issues and increased trust between police and communities. However, they highlighted that this did not always happen overnight for everyone. Respondents mentioned a general feeling of scepticism from some communities in relation to community policing, at least initially. In some places, the term ‘community policing’ (or similar) had been used for decades but without any real change in the attitudes, behaviours, or practices and relationships behind it. This led to scepticism over its future potential.⁸⁹ “One of the things that was tricky was that community policing could be understood to mean using ‘collaborators’ – having your spies [or informers] in the community, rather than what we really mean by the term – greater accountability, cooperation, responsiveness,” said a former community policing programme manager. “Getting the concept across to those who haven’t experienced that sort of society is a major challenge – it’s like a generational change, it’s not a quick thing we can get across.”⁹⁰ But on the other hand, respondents mentioned that there had always been a Soviet and post-Soviet tradition of women’s, youth or elder committees, such as through *druzhinniki*. Past engagement of these groups had given some legitimacy to LCPCs as platforms representing community concerns.

Urban versus rural

Community policing in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan was said by respondents to be more effective compared with in urban areas. This is because, in rural areas, communities are small and everyone knows each other, which helps promote better collaboration, inclusion, responsiveness, transparency and accountability. It is easier to mobilise community members who are already quite active, to have them participate in awareness-raising and outreach activities, and to identify focus areas for prevention of crime, insecurity, conflict and violence. Those we

interviewed also spoke of different priorities in rural and urban police departments: those based in areas with higher populations tended to focus on responding to crime rather than prevention or proactive collaboration with the public given time and resource constraints. “Differences have to be considered when developing the policing programmes for students of the Police Academy and when training police officers,” said one policing expert. “We should be able to educate police officers to adapt and work effectively either in urban or rural areas.” Some experts we spoke with were sceptical that community policing could work in urban areas at all, as in cities police were perceived to tend toward reactive rather than proactive approaches to crime control.⁹¹

Communities cited the fact that a single neighbourhood police officer was expected to cover 15,000 people, when “according to the rule, he should oversee 3,000 people”. In some communities in Jalal-Abad, we heard that it was about seven police for around 45,000 residents.⁹² Communities also raised the issue of frequent turnover of neighbourhood police inspectors. This could make it harder to address locally identified issues, when constantly working with new authorities who did not know them or adequately understand the local context. “A new precinct officer came, who has been working for two years. He got to know the population, their problems, and came to understand the nuances. People began to recognise and trust him . . . he increased his potential, his sensitivity, but then he gets transferred – another takes his place. This person may not be sensitive to conflict, gender or ethnicity,” said one respondent.

In urban and rural areas, the demands on the police differ, as do the solutions to those problems. In urban areas, there was a stronger demand for public order, protection of businesses and so on. Meanwhile in rural areas, policing could be more focused on preventing problems from arising in the first place. Nonetheless, border regions in rural areas were different in terms of the types of crime, insecurity, conflict and violence, as well as the solutions, they experienced.⁹³ Things moved more slowly in rural areas, because of the smaller police units and larger distances covered. “Take Kara-Suu district, for example”, said one civil society respondent. “The [area around the] village of Elekbir is around 30–40 square kilometres and it is difficult to cover the whole territory, contact people, resolve problems and, most importantly, to provide feedback on results. Because of the remoteness, things don’t happen quickly.”⁹⁴ In cities, crimes were reported more quickly and could be monitored more easily. Yet the priorities of urban police were informed by their proximity to various ministries and national-level institutions, so there they had less

autonomy in setting their own priorities or taking the lead from local communities.⁹⁵

There were differences, too, in access to information. Urban residents might get their information from a wider range of sources and could have a wider range of views, including those typically associated with liberal values, foreign media or social networks. In rural parts of the country, residents received information from local-language sources more frequently, which could help shape perceptions on different issues or thoughts on how to address them. Respondents recommended more exchanges between rural and urban youth (especially from different regions). Here they would be able to jointly discuss issues of tolerance, ethnic, religious and regional identity, gender, nationality and other issues that could lead to tensions if left unaddressed.⁹⁶

Issues addressed through community policing initiatives

Respondents said that closer cooperation between police and communities in Kyrgyzstan led to improved responses on a number of issues. For example, simply by being together in the same room, many issues which would not normally be discussed could be raised by LCPC members. Such issues included lack of access to education⁹⁷ and employment opportunities, gender-based violence (including early and forced marriage, and domestic violence), drug abuse, cross-border conflict, COVID-19, bullying or racketeering in schools,⁹⁸ fights between young people from different parts of town, corruption, and poor police performance.

Respondents noted that LCPCs often handled issues related to young people well. LCPCs tried to prevent juvenile offences (such as bullying, drug abuse or fighting in schools) by hosting events or other activities that actively promoted tolerance and engagement in extra-curricular activities and hobbies, and included representatives of different ethnic groups.⁹⁹ Some interviewees believed this helped provide alternative paths to young people, who might otherwise be attracted to violent groups due to feelings of neglect or a lack of productive engagement. A respondent from Kadamjay, in the Batken region, mentioned that cooperation between police and schools through the LCPCs had led to a significant reduction in offences among young people.¹⁰⁰ LCPCs were also seen by most

respondents to be effective at addressing issues within the household, minor misdemeanours, and problems around early marriage (including work with religious leaders on the legal implications and meetings with communities to prevent cases).

LCPCs worked on the issue of recruitment into proscribed violent groups and this, according to a number of our respondents, was more effective than the more heavy-handed, securitised approach that the police might adopt. “For example, when people were joining ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], we established a working group and held meetings with the population,” said one member of an *aksakal* (elder court). “This work was effective because we all worked jointly [on preventing their departure], including with the imams.”¹⁰¹ In general, religion was a delicate area, which some LCPCs had been able to deal with in a more sensitive way than the police. For example, this could be by speaking openly and advising rather than resorting to arrest or interrogation, which could increase feelings of persecution and alienation.¹⁰²

During the COVID-19 pandemic, some LCPCs had adopted the role of an information source for communities. We heard how in Tepe-Korgon, the local LCPC conducted outreach with market vendors to ensure sanitary norms were followed, after which they saw a decline in cases in their village.¹⁰³ They also worked closely with returning labour migrants (mostly from Russia) to ensure that they took precautions (such as quarantining) after travelling.

Gender and security

When it came to addressing issues related to gender norms or practices, such as gender-based violence (including forced and early marriage, domestic violence) or lack of education, employment and decision-making opportunities for women and girls,¹⁰⁴ there were several obstacles raised by respondents. These included resistance to working on gender-related issues (sometimes citing religion or ‘tradition’ or seeing it as a Western imposition), as well as a lack of women in the police (around 5–6%)¹⁰⁵ and as members of LCPCs. As is the case around the world, this was seen to be a result of structural discrimination and gender norms that prevent the full participation of women in political spheres and other public aspects of life. While respondents from the MIA reported that the government had systems in place to handle such cases, the persistence of traditional values, stereotypes and stigma led to lower rates of reporting by survivors of gender-based violence.

It also led to a reluctance from some to participate in activities to address this issue or to challenge harmful gender norms.

Despite positive steps towards criminalising domestic violence through national legislation (such as the 2017 domestic violence law and revisions to the code of misdemeanours),¹⁰⁶ police and other decision-makers at the local level (including elder courts) did not always take cases of domestic violence seriously, claiming it was a family matter.

“**I used to do assessments of women’s correctional institutions. Some were imprisoned for drug offences, but mostly they were jailed for grievous bodily harm or murder of their husbands or partners. When I interviewed them, they were all victims of domestic violence, and had experienced physical abuse for a prolonged period with their partners. This is a very serious problem.**

Former police official

As mentioned earlier, domestic violence is underreported in Kyrgyzstan: survivors are often reluctant to report abuses due to social pressures from families and authorities; for those who do come forward, poor police and judicial response and limited shelters and services result in little, if any, support to survivors.¹⁰⁷ “The majority of decision-making processes, including elder courts, involve adult men and few women,” said one respondent. “To improve social partnership, there is a need to increase the number of reputable, well-known women at the local level so they can address issues together.”¹⁰⁸

A number of LCPCs were found to have worked productively with shelters and domestic violence centres. “Together with women activists, we opened this crisis centre [in the town centre],” said a respondent from Kadamjay. “It was here for two years, but the authorities

stopped providing assistance and it was moved to a nearby village, and since then we have lost contact with them [the crisis centre] . . . within the framework of the crisis centre, issues were resolved not only in our city, but also in the district and Batken region.”

Respondents mentioned that it was important to raise awareness of gender issues in society, as such matters were poorly understood (and, as a result, ignored). There was often a divergence of priorities on issues of gender-based violence, with some placing an emphasis on preserving the family unit (by preventing divorce), which could put women in violent or dangerous situations. Issues of polygamy and early marriage were raised frequently. These could sometimes be addressed well at the LCPC level; however, in more complicated or serious cases, they would be referred to the police. Issues related to family life were also raised – including children of migrants, who some believed could be overlooked:¹⁰⁹ “We need to register them, and social services should examine in what conditions they live, and what risks they face.”¹¹⁰

Role of civil society and international organisations

From our conversations with interviewees, there was a strong consensus among civil society, many community members and authorities on the crucial role of both civil society and international organisations in promoting community policing and reform more broadly. Both could play a strong role in providing information to authorities, sensitising police, advising on legislative changes, supporting LCPCs through training and resources, connecting local actors with one another, and ensuring that reform led to behavioural – not just technical or infrastructural – changes that were to the benefit of communities.¹¹¹ “In terms of the openness of this process, Kyrgyzstan is better in comparison to other Central Asian countries, where civil society is less listened to and where much is decided centrally by the political leadership,” said one civil society activist.¹¹²

Divergent approaches and viewpoints of civil society and the authorities was another factor. Some respondents stressed that many civil society organisations (CSOs) had strong connections to communities and the people, but did not have as much understanding of the way things worked in the MIA or within the police force generally. One respondent declared: “Many representatives of civil society are not experts in the field of police reforms. They know very well what kind of police and law enforcement we need, because they understand the concerns and grievances of people. However, they misunderstand the role of police [in other circumstances].” We also heard how different approaches and demands for change could shut the door on collaboration, due to unrealistic or excessive criticism made without any proposed changes to address problems. This created a disparity between the two sides: civil society was seen to undermine the government and authorities, while the authorities were seen as unreceptive or indifferent to peoples’ concerns.

Most respondents – both national and international – stressed the need to be constructive in criticism and to be willing to take things one step at a time, rather than demanding too much from the beginning. Any presentation of evidence about weaknesses should come with recommendations. “When I wrote [my PhD thesis], I said I would only contribute to improvements, I wouldn’t go solely with the aim of negative monitoring. My consultations are not done with the aim of finding



A police officer assists a woman in the Jalal-Abad region of Kyrgyzstan.

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something bad and writing about it on social media,” said one civil society activist about her cooperation with local authorities. “So I go with a positive attitude, of constructiveness, to improve something.” Another international expert noted that finding champions and supporters within the government or MIA and working closely with them was crucial to success. “The constructive rhetoric is really crucial in convincing the ranks within the ministries and government,” he said. “But at the same time, this can also be a [negative factor], as criticism can be necessary for substantial reform. So reform can be a dynamic, up-and-down process.”¹¹³

Civil society representatives noted that they often would act as a bridge between local authorities, communities, parliament and international actors. When there were good relations with CSOs, the police could approach them for requests – such as for NGOs or donors to support specific activities. They also played an important role in supporting all actors involved with resources – for example, LCPC manuals to provide operational guidance or trainings on specific issues, such as gender-based violence or challenges around engagement on religion.¹¹⁴

International organisations were seen as playing a huge role in keeping up the momentum for community policing and reform initiatives, especially when the government faced budget crises and uncertainties in sustaining activities. Officials and the police sometimes expressed reluctance to cooperate with international donors on certain sensitive issues, and might harbour suspicions of foreign agendas or interference in domestic affairs. Civil society respondents worried that nationalism and scepticism of international organisations could result in the passing of a ‘foreign agent’ law, similar to that passed in Russia. This would make the work of NGOs (both international and national) much more difficult.¹¹⁵ To increase confidence in the work of international actors and the visibility of their results, some respondents suggested greater coordination between international organisations to ensure that they were not working at cross-purposes or on divergent priorities.¹¹⁶

International organisations could also continue to work on demonstrating the benefits of community policing and reform, showing how it can make the work of the police easier and more effective. Respondents had different ideas on the extent to which international donors should provide material support: for example, for construction, police equipment or communications infrastructure. Yet they agreed that such support could help motivate local police and provide important incentives to continue collaboration on wider reform efforts.¹¹⁷

However, they cautioned against this sort of support becoming more important than community policing or other initiatives more focused on behaviour, practice and relationship changes. In some cases, intergovernmental organisations were said to interact more directly with government counterparts, and had become more closed off to civil society voices or to coordination with other international organisations.¹¹⁸ Respondents suggested that inclusiveness, conflict sensitivity and gender sensitivity should become core pillars of international engagement, ensuring that a wide spectrum of civil society representatives were involved in consultations.¹¹⁹ One respondent highlighted the important role of civil society reaching out to and including elected officials in their efforts – parliament, for example – which could represent the interests of their constituents.

Some international respondents mentioned the role of higher-level diplomatic channels. Working directly with senior officials in the MIA would allow substantial progress, but at some point – without higher-level buy-in from the government – there would be limits to progress.¹²⁰ With encouragement and incentives from foreign governments to their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan, this could incentivise a

‘whole-of-government’ effort to reform the police and support initiatives such as community policing. This had been seen elsewhere, such as in Georgia and Northern Ireland.¹²¹ Such an approach would ensure a more sustainable effort once donor projects wound down or the organisations working on community policing lost institutional knowledge through staff turnover or other contextual changes.

Transparency and accountability

According to many of our respondents, community policing initiatives were becoming more widely known and transparent because of access to the internet, particularly to social media. Examples included Facebook pages or WhatsApp chats set up by Saferworld and other organisations to facilitate community policing work (something that had increased during the COVID-19 pandemic). In addition to official news shared by the MIA on its website, the public had become increasingly active in documenting police actions. “Social networks are now very tightly monitoring every action taken by MIA employees,” said one police official from Bishkek. LCPC members and civil society also promoted the idea of using social media as an accountability mechanism. As one civil society representative said, “According to my observations, almost all local authorities have their own pages on social networks – they should pay more attention to this and provide reports through these platforms.”¹²² Some LCPC members felt that booklets and leaflets were not that effective and that the focus should be on outreach via traditional and social media.¹²³ The LCPC in Tepe-Korgon, for example, had participated in talk shows in addition to its presentations to the local *kenesh* (parliament) and to village assemblies.¹²⁴

Respondents from Kyrgyzstan’s MIA argued that the Public Council under the MIA¹²⁵ should increase its level of activity in terms of advising the ministry. To back up its recommendations, there should be more public surveys and outreach to the public on issues they felt were addressed effectively or not. A member of the Public Council under the MIA said they had recommended introducing public perception as a metric for the MIA’s work, following similar calls from civil society organisations.¹²⁶ LCPC members cited a need to raise awareness of their own work, as communities were said to be unaware of many of their functions or meetings. They suggested this would help gain buy-in from local authorities and government as well. Civil society respondents

wanted to see more transparency and consistency in communications around community policing activities, with more public meetings being held and widely communicated with communities in advance. At the time of writing, this varied from community to community. For example, in one community in Jalal-Abad (as well as in many others), the LCPC met with the community at the beginning of the year to learn about their problems, and then at the end of the year hosted another meeting to report back on progress on identified issues.¹²⁷ In the Osh region, one respondent said: “I once asked our City Police Department when the district officer would come and report to us. He looked into it, and mentioned that he had already conducted the meeting where around 40–60 people participated. Maybe they did, but I was not informed – I think raising awareness of these meetings is precisely what is needed to improve confidence.”

Respondents from the MIA recommended that local government should get more involved in community policing initiatives to promote local ownership and accountability to local constituents. This included budget allocations for security issues from local budgets, and funding of LCPC activities where relevant. Civil society respondents stressed the importance of the MIA having rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems to see where efforts needed to be focused and resources allocated. Respondents noted that there was limited interaction or transparency between local government and the police, which had its own hierarchy and ways of working.

MIA respondents also stressed the importance of greater coordination between central and local law enforcement bodies. “It is the territorial bodies of internal affairs that should cooperate with local authorities, governments, communities, and non-governmental and public organisations in their districts. At present, everything depends on the initiative of the heads of local law enforcement agencies. We need laws, regulations and interdepartmental instructions and orders that clearly regulate this area. We need clear criteria for assessing activities of territorial divisions of Internal Affairs. Today, the heads of territorial divisions report statistically – for example, five meetings were held, ten meetings and so on – but it is necessary to focus on what the results were.”¹²⁸

Most respondents highlighted the fact that the indicators of success of community policing were largely qualitative and based on perceptions of safety – and were as a result quite subjective. But they recommended that interaction with LCPCs and community policing in general should be an important aspect of staff evaluation for the police.¹²⁹

A respondent from the Osh region mentioned that overly quantitative statistics could even play a part in creating perverse incentives, whereby performance statistics drove the police to close cases prematurely or without proper resolution.¹³⁰ Another suggested that metrics could include the resolution of disputes, rather than arrests of young people or other ‘risk’ groups. They could also focus more on measuring cooperation with other services that were more specialised on addressing specific issues, such as healthcare, psychological counselling or domestic violence shelters.¹³¹ Such evaluations did not always have to be carried out by the MIA or direct superiors, but could also potentially involve local *keneshes*, *ayil okmotu* and other bodies. This would help increase buy-in and cooperation between a range of actors, as well as promote external accountability outside the MIA or police structures.

Recommendations

Based on our internal and external analysis of the context and Saferworld’s programming in Kyrgyzstan, as well as the interviews conducted for this research, we have developed recommendations for various national and international actors.

Government/authorities

- Wherever possible, the police should work closely with LCPCs, in cooperation with civil society and local self-governments, to jointly identify and prioritise locally relevant security concerns and to develop action plans to address them. Approaches such as the ‘community security’ cycle or SARA (scanning, analysis, response and assessment) should be used, with financial and other support from local sources.¹³²
- Buy-in from the leadership of the regional departments of internal affairs, as well as at the national level, is crucial for the success of community policing efforts locally. Buy-in from the top must be accompanied by outreach to regional divisions to ensure it is accepted at all levels. Consultations should include civil society, including women’s rights and youth organisations, and local governments and committees, to help guide the process and increase support for community policing initiatives.

- Kyrgyzstan’s MIA Academy curriculum should be updated and improved to include a range of community policing-related topics, making them mandatory for all police recruits and in-service police officers. These could include modules on gender and conflict (including gender-based violence, early marriage and the root causes of violence); partnerships; the community security cycle or similar problem-solving methods (for example, SARA); working with LCPCs and other collaborative mechanisms (with different modules for urban and rural areas); crime and conflict prevention; human rights; communications and negotiation; and diversity, equality and inclusion. International actors, local civil society – including women’s rights and youth organisations – and relevant educational institutions should be meaningfully consulted, and can supply relevant materials.
- Local self-government structures should budget for community policing initiatives, including the funding of locally-developed ‘action plans’.
- Governments/authorities should further strengthen transparency and communication on the various services available under the MIA and police departments, including information on LCPCs. They can provide support to LCPC publicity efforts.
- Governments and authorities must make dedicated efforts so that the police service is a more attractive career option for women (by addressing obstacles identified by women and ensuring accountability mechanisms for potential abuse, such as work and sexual harassment). Women’s meaningful participation in law enforcement or LCPCs should be actively supported. Women’s roles should include those at the leadership level and could also include a wider range of functions, which would help make the police more sensitive to women’s concerns.
- Governments/authorities in Kyrgyzstan should promote the leadership of women in the police and in decision-making in the MIA, while putting mechanisms in place to garner buy-in from colleagues.
- The police should also conduct analyses that look into obstacles to recruiting people from different social groups (including religious, ethnic and gender groups). They should ensure equal opportunity, diversity in recruitment and workplace safety for all, regardless of social identity. This would lead to greater sensitivity of police responses, as well as improved trust from ethnic, religious and other minority groups.
- Efforts should be made to incentivise staff to apply for and stay in rural police postings, given the many problems associated with staff rotation for community policing. Thorough inductions should be planned for new staff and could include materials (such as video) that introduce the concept and key principles of community policing. These would build on the trainings on community policing that they will have received at the MIA Academy, once it has been fully incorporated into the curriculum.
- The MIA and local authorities should develop and implement evaluation systems that include community policing and community engagement. Such evaluations should move away from quantitative indicators – such as number of arrests – and towards qualitative indicators supported by public surveys or other information-gathering mechanisms (which should be anonymous). Surveys must be conflict- and gender-sensitive and be developed in meaningful consultation with gender experts.
- The practice of LCPC cooperation should be embedded with local governments. They can be encouraged to set aside some funds from local budgets for community-led action plans addressing crime and security concerns. More emphasis should be placed on local government responsibility for issues, rather than these just sitting with the police.

Civil society/communities

- Civil society activists and opinion leaders in Kyrgyzstan should provide LCPCs with ad-hoc support as needed, including gender-sensitive analyses of the local conflict context and trainings. They should also act as bridges with national or international actors.
- Civil society and the media should work together to carry out more information campaigns on sensitive issues that can enflame tensions, such as gender-based violence, the role of religion in society, border clashes, labour migration and bullying in schools. Diverse participation should be encouraged, telling all sides of the story, including minority or marginalised groups, ensuring women are represented and can have a say in the work of LCPCs. Campaigns can also be carried out to raise awareness of the function of LCPCs and other local platforms, committees and so on – so that people know to whom they can turn to report or raise issues. Police reporting and open station days can also be widely reported where possible.

- In addition to traditional media, civil society should also devote more time to working on social media platforms, especially those that are popular in specific regions or towns. Once identified, civil society should link up with local and national government to encourage greater transparency via social media. This social media engagement could also be supported by international organisations, as well as local activists who specialise in outreach/communications.
- Civil society/communities should work to ensure conflict-sensitive formation of LCPCs, including consideration for local dynamics and women's and minority participation when building membership of the teams.
- They should work with and support the Public Council under the MIA to provide comprehensive analysis on police reform and community policing approaches. Analysis – including gender analysis of crime, insecurity and conflict – and of local contexts across Kyrgyzstan, could be provided for the Public Council to use when advising the government and MIA on their policies. The Public Council should be supported to identify gaps in its own work in order to ensure effective functioning.
- LCPCs and civil society, including women's rights and youth activists, can support the police to map out neighbourhoods in their towns, highlighting problem hotspots or sources of insecurity. While responding to these issues is important, other ideas could also be generated for working proactively with marginalised or excluded groups to build positive relationships and engagement. This could be through cultural events, membership of community platforms or committees, or other dialogue-building activities.
- Civil society/communities should support outreach, including with local police, to schools (including school counsellors and psychologists) to identify and address safety issues concerning young people, and particularly young women.
- International actors should listen to and support local civil society organisations, including women's rights and youth organisations, in areas they have identified, including around capacity strengthening, advocacy or training.
- They should provide financial and training support for LCPCs, including on understanding the gender dynamics of crime, insecurity and conflict. Such support can also be provided for dealing with gender-relevant issues internally – such as work and sexual harassment, lack of women's participation – and externally, such as domestic violence and early marriage or religion. These can also cover more practical skills-focused areas, such as how to approach fundraising for local initiatives or networking and holding consultations.
- In conflict- and gender-sensitive ways, international actors can jointly identify gaps and needs with civil society organisations in specific communities, and provide resources (manuals, toolkits, trainings) to help guide community policing efforts. These materials should be translated into local languages, based on location.
- Greater coordination is needed on community policing, especially between donors, international organisations and local civil society, to provide a more united front and support for the approach. International organisations such as the OSCE, UNODC, Saferworld and other international NGOs should coordinate activities to a greater degree and see where advocacy can overlap when working with the government. These efforts should be linked up with those of donor agencies and diplomatic channels (such as embassies), to push for continued support for people-focused and rights-based approaches.
- Local CSOs, academia and governments in Kyrgyzstan can be supported to conduct public gender-balanced and sensitive surveys that will help inform government policy and practices and the relevance of community policing initiatives. Using the results of these surveys, programmes for all actors should be adapted to respond to local needs.

International actors

- International actors should work in conflict- and gender-sensitive ways with Kyrgyzstan's national authorities to design, develop, implement and evaluate security sector/police reform strategies and processes. These should be based on objective assessments and active community participation and a commitment to accountability and transparency, including areas that ensure the implementation of laws that support police reform, criteria/processes for selection and training of employees (making the police more accountable and accessible), and allocation of resources.
- International actors should provide balanced and comprehensive support for community policing programmes, including a mix of material (infrastructure, equipment) and non-material (training, facilitation) support.
- International organisations should be transparent and accountable to communities in relation to their activities. They should work together with CSO partners, including women's rights and youth organisations, to identify areas of support for implementation.

Notes

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A police officer speaks with community members in the Khatlon region of Tajikistan.
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3

Tajikistan

After a civil war that ended in 1997, Tajikistan has gone through a slow reform process, especially around its governance and the security sector. Through joint efforts by the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan and the international community, safety and security in the country have improved substantially. However, there are still major challenges to ensuring a stable environment for sustainable peace and development.

The structure, norms and culture of the police today have their roots in the Soviet period; many legacies from that time define their behaviour and practices. In some ways, these have been worsened by events such as the civil war and the flourishing of patronage networks. The police function is primarily geared to protection of the regime and its interests, rather than upholding the civil rights of the population.¹³³ Unlike those of its neighbours, Tajikistan's police were militarised during the civil war period, when they were pitted against opposition forces and tasked with maintaining public order in a volatile environment.¹³⁴ The country's position bordering Afghanistan and along drug trade routes also has implications for the police, who can be involved in facilitating criminal activities across its borders and thus be seen as corrupt or even criminal.¹³⁵

Many believe that this function as a repressive force during the civil war led to a more 'hostile' relationship between the police and communities.¹³⁶ Due to their involvement in criminal activity, police actions could be violent or heavy-handed with little to no oversight, further decreasing trust.¹³⁷ The levels of distrust were particularly high in centres of 'opposition', such as the Rasht valley and Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (or GBAO as it is known by its Russian abbreviation). During the civil war and in the years after, there were reports of the police taking sides, and of extracting confessions through coercion or corruption in order to meet arbitrary quotas on fighting crime or threats to state stability.

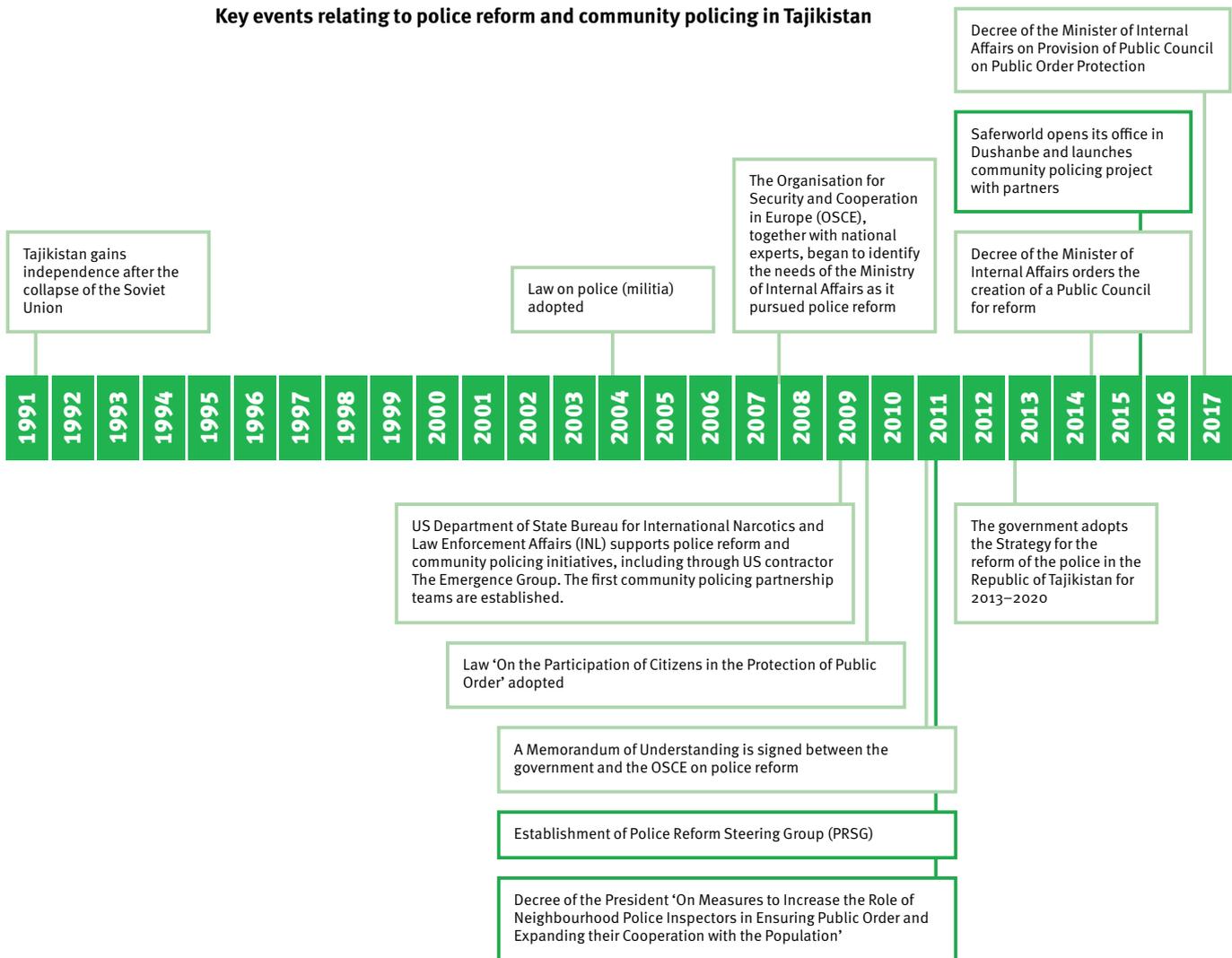
“

Due to objective and subjective reasons, including the civil war, the people separated from the police, and trust dropped. Without trust we will not achieve anything. This trust must be real.

Employee of the MIA

”

Key events relating to police reform and community policing in Tajikistan



A short history of police reform efforts

Reform of police institutions in Tajikistan began in the early 2000s following the civil war. Reforms continued in earnest from 2008, when the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), together with national experts, conducted the first needs assessment to identify the general security sector needs and, more specifically, those of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in relation to police reform.^{138, 139} A second needs assessment was conducted in 2009.¹⁴⁰ The assessments largely focused on legal reform, human resource and management systems, police education on trafficking in persons, and technical development – including in areas such as leadership, community policing, canine service, forensics and logistics support. At the time, the OSCE identified a range of gaps, including: a lack of professional police training; low public trust in the police; duplication of tasks and functions; an outdated organisational

structure; police misconduct; corruption; a lack of funding; and the absence of a legal framework. A memorandum of understanding was signed in April 2011, formalising cooperation between the government and the OSCE. It was ratified by parliament in February 2012.¹⁴¹ The Ministry of Internal Affairs established the Office of the National Police Reform Coordinator, who holds a key role in coordination, implementation, communication and analysis of the reform process. Around the time of the signing, President Rahmon stated it was “necessary to prepare and submit a police reform programme and a law of the Republic of Tajikistan ‘On Police’ in order to improve the activities of internal affairs bodies, improve their structure, bring the activities of these bodies in accordance with modern requirements and norms of acts of international law, as well as bring the activities of these bodies closer to society”.¹⁴² While this law is still in draft form, the government plans to revisit and finalise it in the next reform stage from 2021–25, in which it would replace the existing law ‘On the Militia’.¹⁴³

The alleged objectives of such reform were to build a democratic and legal state security institution responsive to the needs of citizens, and also to address a range of issues hindering the police. These included corruption, criminal activity and ill-equipped staff, unable to fulfil the requirements of their jobs. According to the president himself, these were problems that prevented law enforcement agencies from carrying out their stated objectives.¹⁴⁴ They also contributed to the continued chasm between communities and the police. Improving the image of law enforcement, in addition to changing police attitudes and behaviours, were cornerstones of the reform efforts.

Toward this end, the government adopted the ‘Strategy for the reform of the police in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2013–2020’, the ‘Programme for the reform (development) of the police for 2014–2020’ and the ‘Action plan for the implementation of the programme of reform (development) of the police for 2014–2020’.¹⁴⁵ As part of the strategy, programme and action plan – with the support of international partners, particularly the OSCE and the US Department of State – the MIA supported the establishment of platforms for citizen engagement and participation in processes of public order, including Public Councils and community policing partnership teams. These are supported in partnership with the OSCE, the US State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Saferworld and various other governments and international organisations that have provided expertise and much-needed funding for local bodies.

Some of the more visible elements of police reform, which are often the most widely cited by members of the public, involve the attempted (although never completed) change of terms from *militsiya* (милиция) to *politsiya* (полиция) in Russian and local languages.¹⁴⁶ This is similar to efforts carried out in Russia to distance the authorities from their Soviet past.¹⁴⁷ An overall change in image has been attempted through the slogan ‘the police are the people, and the people are the police’. In addition, several collaborative and oversight bodies were established, including the OSCE-established Civil Society Advisory Board at the start of the police reform, which was the precursor to the present-day Public Councils.¹⁴⁸

To encourage popular participation in any reform, we should consider the Public Councils. Public Councils are sub-national consultative and monitoring bodies, which are mandated through an MIA order, to encourage citizens to participate in discussions on the progress of police reform.¹⁴⁹ There are currently seven Public Councils across Tajikistan, two in Dushanbe and one in each of the regions,

which try to maintain at least 15 members each. Anyone can join the groups, with terms limited to three years. Proposals for nominations are made by the National Coordinator for Police Reform, based on proposals from public organisations and legal entities, and are submitted to the Police Reform Steering Working Group¹⁵⁰ (which is led by the MIA and meets on an ad-hoc basis to discuss key issues with civil society and international representatives). This takes place no less than 30 days before the terms of outgoing members expire; the nominations are then approved by order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.¹⁵¹ The Public Councils are meant to act as bridges between the public and the police.¹⁵² However, during our research, we heard that they could also sometimes be perceived by authorities as working against their interests, or by civil society as reflecting government interests too strongly.¹⁵³

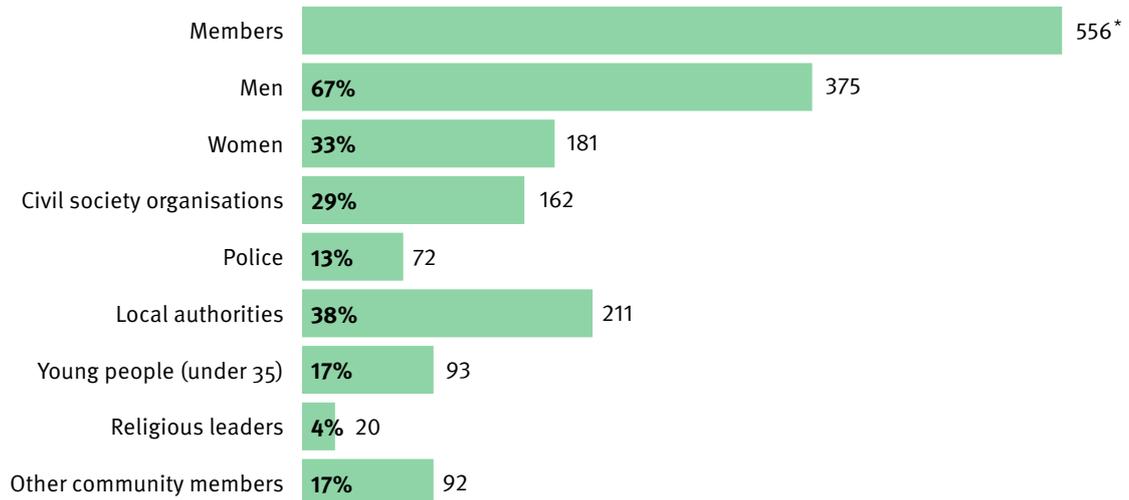
Another initiative for improving police–public collaboration and understanding and responding to the concerns and priorities of communities are community policing partnership teams (CPPTs). These were created in 2008 out of community policing efforts by the United States Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (including through US contractor The Emergence Group), in support of national police reform. CPPTs are semi-formal collaborative and problem-solving partnerships, composed of police, local government representatives, religious and civil society leaders, and community members (including women and youth). They work together to identify, prioritise and address local concerns and priorities related to crime, insecurity, conflict and quality of life issues. According to recent orders from the MIA, the CPPTs are now known officially by the term ‘public councils on public order protection’ (PCPOPs) and should be established in all district and town police departments in the country.¹⁵⁴ These platforms must have at least seven members, with terms lasting three years (see the graphic on page 34 for a breakdown of membership of current CPPTs). The Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (DMIA) at the district and *jamoat* (village) levels conducts open calls for membership in the media. Citizens send applications to the DMIA. There are more than 30 CPPTs supported by Saferworld across Tajikistan (with many more beyond this that were created by the MIA). According to our interviews, their levels of activity varies depending on locality, ownership and other factors.

Community policing centres (CPCs) are publicly accessible buildings where the police can carry out their community policing functions, including together with CPPTs. Because of their accessibility, these buildings can also be used for community events – for example, town hall meetings, trainings or information sessions.



PC and CPPT members, in numbers

**Because some respondents identified with multiple categories, the numbers do not add up to the total of 556.*



Current perceptions: motivations for reform, behaviour of the police

Efforts to reform the police and move toward greater public–police interaction through approaches like community policing are officially seen as positive steps in Tajikistan. However, despite these initiatives, public perceptions of police behaviour remain unfavourable, having shifted only minimally. Some people cited continuing offenses by police themselves, as well as unqualified staff in the MIA at upper levels, and also harmful gender norms that could prevent successful cooperation or resolution of problems.¹⁵⁵

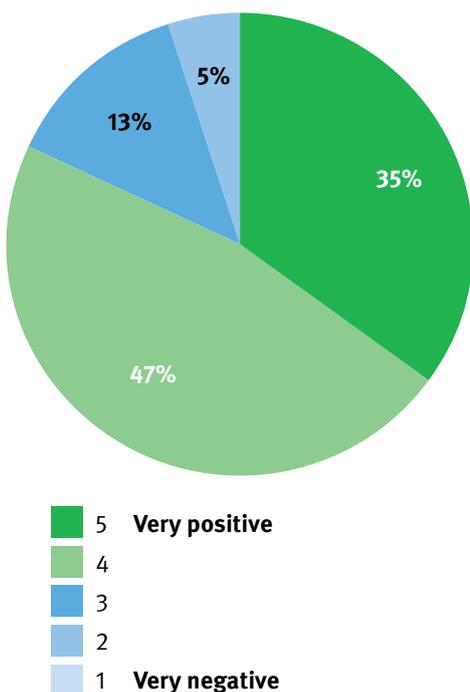
Perceptions of the police are better in areas where community policing initiatives have been implemented, and where there is therefore a greater chance of closer cooperation with the local populace (for example, see the diagram on page 35 on perceptions of police in areas with functioning community policing initiatives). However, according to Saferworld’s own public perception surveys,¹⁵⁶ this varies substantially by location. In some parts of Khatlon region and also in the north, survey

respondents noted local authorities were not interested in community concerns (or could only be motivated when issues were passed up the chain to the national level).

There were also cases where authorities would appear at public events but, when it came to substantive action, were reluctant to get involved with communities. Other police departments did not share important information with communities. In Rasht, coordination was said to be changeable, depending on the leadership and approach from the authorities at any given point. This led to periods where there was a lack of joint initiatives between CPPTs and the police. However, the situation changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the two worked together productively to address the effects of the pandemic. In our surveys, the most critical responses came from Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), where historically relations between locals and largely ethnic Tajik police have been strained and where participants noted a lingering lack of trust.¹⁵⁷

Despite identified areas for improvement, most respondents acknowledged resource constraints and difficulties for the police, particularly in community policing areas. Nonetheless, 79 per cent of respondents said that there had been incremental improvements in the past year. Some stressed the long-term nature of the community policing approach, which did not lend itself to rapid change

Perceptions of police in areas with functioning community policing initiatives



or quick fixes. They observed that continued engagement, both with communities and authorities, was needed for sustainable and any longer-term change.

Regarding police reform, there were different understandings of what it meant and the motivations behind it, depending on a person's background and circumstances. Many saw such reform as a first step, laying out the framework and intentions, but without expecting any major changes. Those we interviewed for this research generally saw the goals of reform as falling into the following categories:

- to increase the level of confidence in the MIA
- to change the perception of the police from being 'punitive' to a 'service-oriented' body
- to create a modern law enforcement system with improvements to its legislative base
- to contribute to institutional improvements in internal affairs bodies
- to improve administrative mechanisms and conduct

Many respondents saw reform in Tajikistan to be a genuine effort to bring the police closer to the public and serve the needs of society.¹⁵⁸ Others were more cautious in their assessments, arguing that reforms had not yet moved beyond the initial stages of words and rhetoric. They said that officials would use the language donors liked to hear, but resisted real change. One respondent cited specific incidents –

such as attacks on the authorities or protests – as an impetus for reform on the part of the government, to minimise the causes of discontent or protest and minimise security risks.¹⁵⁹

International organisations and Western governments, as well as local civil society bodies, focused on human rights and democratisation. Yet local and national authorities focused more on the capacity of law enforcement, modernisation, infrastructure and funding for equipment.¹⁶⁰ Joint initiatives on community policing and reform must strike a balance between these divergent interests. They must find a way to balance support for infrastructure, technological advancement and modernisation with support for behavioural change and structural reform within law enforcement. Behavioural change was often de-emphasised in favour of funds for infrastructure, equipment and skills. This was especially the case in the face of security issues that authorities tended to consider more important, such as drug trafficking, recruitment into proscribed violent groups, or instability on the Afghan border. The latter issues were pushed as priorities domestically. For the MIA, 'reform' could mean bringing policing up to modern standards (including equipment) and ensuring that all regions – some of which were seen as 'restive' or less under central control – were within reach of police capabilities to maintain order and influence.

Interviews with international organisations, in contrast, stressed the centrality of democratisation of the police, with differing opinions on the importance of infrastructure support. Some of our respondents argued that infrastructure development was not a component necessary for reform, apart from incentivising government and police for reform.¹⁶¹ Meanwhile, other respondents highlighted that the police were not going to be able to think about improving services when they were operating at extreme under-capacity or without proper equipment or salaries. As one respondent who used to work at an international NGO noted, "The changes that we intend with such projects can be disappointing, and sometimes rewarding. You have some champions from government or police that understand the whole philosophy behind [community policing] . . . accountability, communication, establishing relationships with civil society, [gender equality]. But these were the tough areas. It was always easy to agree on a tender of US\$300–400k."¹⁶²

“During initiatives for the prevention of COVID-19, where we made a home visits to families, a three or four-year-old boy came out to open the gates for us, and when he saw the police he burst into tears and ran away. If a four-year-old boy has fear, then what can we say about adults? I believe that we need to start working with schools and the police themselves in order to achieve the goals set for the reform.”

Public Council member in the Khatlon region



Respondents acknowledged that reform efforts had opened up some space for outside engagement, including from international organisations and civil society – although the process was largely under the control of the MIA. There were ongoing discussions between civil society, international organisations and the government on issues such as improving police performance, increasing women’s representation in the police, integrating mechanisms for community collaboration, and other related issues. However, there were issues that remained sensitive, such as police abuse of power, corrupt practices, excessive use of force or human rights abuses. International organisations and civil society must be able to navigate these sensitive areas, or risk facing pushback within the country – resulting in no positive outcomes. This also means the government giving space to civil society to work on areas that are prioritised as the most important by communities.

Legislative framework

The legal basis for interaction between the police and the public is found in national legislation, as well as international legal acts ratified by Tajikistan. This includes the law ‘On the Militia’ (revised several times, and planned to be replaced by the draft law ‘On Police’),¹⁶³ the law ‘On the Participation of

Citizens in the Protection of Public Order’,¹⁶⁴ and the decree of the president ‘On Measures to Increase the Role of Neighbourhood Police Inspectors in Ensuring Public Order and Expanding their Cooperation with the Population’.¹⁶⁵ In addition, there is the memorandum of understanding between the government and the OSCE,¹⁶⁶ the ‘Community Policing Concept’, the police reform strategy, police reform program and its accompanying action plan.¹⁶⁷

Many of our respondents asserted that there was sufficient legal basis to carry out police reform and community policing initiatives – and that the emphasis should be on awareness, implementation and practice.¹⁶⁸ Many respondents agreed that there was little understanding – not just among

communities, but also by the MIA, local authorities and law enforcement officials – about the status of the consultative bodies such as Public Councils or community policing partnership teams. As a result, their activities were often met with

indifference from the public and the police.

A member of a Public Council told us that the policy on Public Councils itself, adopted in 2014, was outdated and only applied to those already working within the MIA structure. The status of the Public Councils needed to be clarified; they should have equal legal footing with the MIA itself. The Public Councils, if they functioned properly, could act as a bridge for ideas and complaints from the public (which was not the case at the time of the research).

Respondents noted that one of the most important laws related to police interaction with the public was the law ‘On the Participation of Citizens in Ensuring Public Order’, adopted in 2009.¹⁶⁹ This was prior to the drafting of many of the key documents developed as part of the police reform programme. The law sounds as if it should relate to mechanisms and best practice for cooperation between the police and the public. Yet it mostly focuses on regulation of voluntary ‘public squads’ (*druzhinniki*), which are groups of around ten people ‘founded on place of employment, study and residence’ (Article 5), and tasked with the maintenance of public order in coordination with the police. (This is a role quite different from that of community policing, which is more collaborative, inclusive and proactive.) A few respondents from Public Councils and CPPTs saw this law as an opportunity to revisit the functioning and norms of Tajikistan’s law enforcement system, to incorporate recent changes in the country, and to expand its mandate to cover Public Councils and CPPTs.

A draft version of a Law of the Republic of Tajikistan ‘On Police’ does exist (drafted by the MIA, with feedback from civil society and international organisations, including Saferworld), as does a draft Program on Police Reform for 2021–2025. However, given the largely Soviet operating style of the MIA and other law enforcement agencies, many respondents believed widespread police cooperation with communities was still far off. Updating, amending and ratifying the law ‘On Police’ could lead to clarification on the status of Public Councils, CPPTs, and more generally offer a long-term vision of reform. It could include provisions on accountability and timely reporting to citizens on the status of crimes and the activities of police. Other respondents noted the stated commitments in the police reform strategy to update the legislative basis for improved policing. But much of this had yet to occur. The plan for 2015–16 listed objectives including the development of legislation on state internal organs, on the police, on the use of physical force and small arms by authorities, and rules for registering crimes. However, these had not been completed at the time of writing. They should be a priority for the next period of reform.¹⁷⁰



The Law of the Republic of Tajikistan ‘On Police’ has not been adopted, despite the fact that a draft was published in the media, including on the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Recommendations of ministries, departments and civil society were taken into account. The law is not passed due to the lack of proper material and technical support.

Representative of the MIA



Overall, in the context of Central Asia, respondents agreed that a legal basis and funding were necessary prerequisites to work on issues like community policing. Without proper legal status, such initiatives would carry less weight, have less buy-in, and could be subject to bureaucratic hurdles or stoppages. However, even though it is necessary to have a legal basis for reform, this does not guarantee progress toward more effective policing if such reform is not accompanied by solid plans for implementation, transparency and communication. Furthermore, partnerships themselves (such as through CPPTs) should not be over-legalised or made official, given the usefulness of their informal and voluntary status in setting their own agendas. Some respondents cited examples of the legalisation process going too far. “Sometimes they over-legalise it and it loses the spirit of civil society,” said one former NGO worker. “The government steps in with a more rigid approach – it creates an entity which can’t exactly be called either civil society or police because it’s neither.”¹⁷¹

Main laws, decrees and orders relevant to community policing

Name	Year
Law of the Republic of Tajikistan ‘On the Police (Militia)’	2004
‘On the Participation of Citizens in the Protection of Public Order’	2009
‘On Measures to Increase the Role of Neighbourhood Police Inspectors in Ensuring Public Order and Expanding their Cooperation with the Population’	2011
‘Decree of the Minister of Internal Affairs on Provision of Public Council on Civil Society Assistance to Police Reform under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan’	2014
‘Decree of the Minister of Internal Affairs on Provision of the Public Council on Public Order Protection under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan’	2017

Factors contributing to or hindering community–police engagement

Nearly all our respondents agreed that increased police–public interaction and collaboration, including through community policing, was one of the cornerstones of any police reform and indicated progress toward a more people-centred approach to security. Participants we interviewed generally saw a growing commitment from all sides on improving police work, although priorities and methods did not necessarily coincide. In some areas, there was resistance to change from the authorities. Major changes to the system and standard practices would take time; interviewees did not expect rapid change could take place without pushback from existing structures. Within Tajikistan’s MIA, as with any institution, there was an established, self-perpetuating way of doing things.¹⁷² Officers in senior positions, who were largely part of a male-dominated structure, had to play by certain rules to get where they were; these practices were then passed down the chain to lower-ranking officers.¹⁷³

Incentives and motivation

Chronic underfunding, inadequate equipment or low capacity in teams contribute to keeping these practices in place, because of the impact on time and motivation. There is a reluctance among rank-and-file police to change their behaviour, especially if they do not perceive benefits from doing so, or if the existing system provides benefits that otherwise may be taken away. This is especially the case when police leadership uses different criteria for measuring success, which may not show any need for reform within the framework of their crime-fighting goals.

In a recent unpublished survey of MIA Academy recruits by Saferworld, 67 per cent said they were not prepared to increase their interaction with society. From the other side, Public Council members told us that their members already had full schedules in their day-to-day jobs and, given that their Public Council roles were unpaid, treated such roles as an extra burden. This was especially the case if they did not have the trust of communities or the authorities, meaning they were less likely to have the motivation to instil improvements in their communities. One respondent declared: “Even members of the police service, especially the lower ranks, know little of the

reform strategy. When their colleagues talk about reform, they are surprised, but when you talk about a salary increase, they smile and say ‘yes, this is necessary!’”¹⁷⁴ Public Council members express disillusionment over their limited powers. They could not meaningfully assess or suggest changes in how the MIA operated.¹⁷⁵

Poor guidance and instruction on *how* to interact with communities can also make this approach an extra burden with no clear results. Interviewees stressed that in hierarchical institutions like the police, nothing happened without instruction from above. Poor communication within law enforcement agencies added to the deleterious impact on the success of reform efforts at the local level.¹⁷⁶ Thus, buy-in from leadership and the ‘pitching’ of the benefits of any changes in practice to local-level police departments from the top were crucial for success. Otherwise, reform efforts would be perceived as an imposition from the outside, especially when introduced by donors, multilateral or regional organisations, international NGOs or civilian bodies. Respondents noted that, especially in countries with more centralised governance like Tajikistan, buy-in from the authorities was the most important factor, leading in turn to respect and buy-in from the public.¹⁷⁷

Trust and confidence

We heard from respondents that lack of public confidence was a major factor in determining the success of community policing. In Saferworld’s own conflict analyses, we have repeatedly found that this is even more the case for women, who do not trust the largely male police officers to address their problems. Information-sharing is a central part of building and maintaining trust, most notably in areas where there is limited communication with the public (such as remote locations, where communication instruments like the internet are limited). Where communication is poor, confidence in police services and community policing initiatives is lower.

Some members of the Public Councils and CPPTs declared that they were viewed with suspicion and mistrust, as much as the police were, in communities where the community policing approach was not developed. One respondent explained, “When we introduce ourselves [to communities] as members of the Public Council on Police Reform in Tajikistan, this already frightens them, thinking ‘oh, this person is also a police officer’. But then when we give a presentation before the people and explain our goals, they begin to understand that we are not police officers and begin to trust us.”¹⁷⁸ In some cases where community policing is not sufficiently

understood and where trust in the police remains low, participants in the community policing initiatives might be seen as ‘informers’, contributing to stigma or accusations of collaboration with the police.¹⁷⁹ In these areas, perceptions of the police must substantially improve before cooperation is feasible.

Communication

Many of our respondents cited the importance of better two-way communication for community policing in Tajikistan, including distribution of telephone numbers and discussion of available police and CPPT services.¹⁸⁰ One Public Council member we interviewed said that improved communication between the police and the public had been one of the main benefits of community policing in his community: “District police take their telephone numbers door to door, and also the numbers of the MIA [and their subdivisions].”¹⁸¹ This was said to create a feeling of mutual trust and, if accompanied by action from police, a perception that they were indeed a service-oriented institution. This point was stressed by many we interviewed: that is, greater communication and ‘public relations’ must be accompanied by action and changes that people were able to feel in their daily lives. This did not just mean responding to crimes (although this was a crucial component). Also critical were: taking a proactive approach to identifying problems (through collaborative exercises in which police and community members worked together to map out problem areas in different neighbourhoods); prioritising issues (through open and honest discussions of what people saw as contributing to insecurity); and coming up with joint plans to address problems.

Respondents noted the successful use of modern technologies, where available, to inform communities of public meetings of CPPTs or Public Councils, or to announce public ‘reporting sessions’ by the police on their activities for a specific period. This could be done through SMS, phone calls, local media or social media in places where the internet was available.¹⁸² However, the use of technologies or social media was still said to be controlled by the authorities, whereby such engagement would need a ‘green light’ from higher up. Respondents argued that greater effort needed to be made to reach more isolated community members (who generally had less access to services), such as ethnic and religious minorities, people with disabilities, youth and women. “Vulnerable groups may not be informed at all about the reform, because they do not have access to information or do not consider it relevant to their lives,” said one interviewee. It was also possible that the information was not shared with



Police meet with community members in a town in Khatlon region, Tajikistan.

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these groups by those who did have access. “The wealthy strata do not attach importance to the reform of the police, since many issues are resolved through corruption and [so they] consider it irrelevant.”¹⁸³

Several members of public councils cited positive examples in Dushanbe and elsewhere, where the police or MIA reached out via social media to address cases of violence in public spaces to help solve cases.¹⁸⁴ “Now there is a lot of information on Facebook from people talking about their problems,” said one respondent. “Police [in these cases] react very quickly . . . they are starting to listen to the opinions of the people . . . Also on Facebook posts, people are writing ‘well done, police! They react very quickly!’”¹⁸⁵ Respondents suggested that communication channels must be used in relation to participation in public bodies, such as the Public Councils and CPPTs. Membership in these bodies should be determined by an independent commission rather than by the MIA itself, which brought in its own biases.¹⁸⁶ One respondent said that “In [my region], the Public Council is pro-government and does not protect the interest of the

civil society. This is mainly due to the composition of the public councils and CPPTs. They are composed of [political] representatives, teachers who are affiliated with the government. It is crucial to advocate for the participation of independent experts.”

Legal awareness

Legal awareness – on both the part of police and communities – was seen to be an important factor in the success of community policing. Without this awareness, violations of the law and a general sense of arbitrariness would set back relations on both sides.¹⁸⁷ Disregard or ignorance of the law has led, for example, to violations of detention procedures, violations of the rights of drivers, who are harassed or fined, and other abusive and corrupt practices. Ignorance of the law increases the likelihood of violations of the rights of marginalised groups, including women, young people, and ethnic, religious and other minority groups. For example, in some sensitive cases, the police may follow practices that end up worsening the situation or

endangering women, such as by notifying husbands of women's complaints and attempting to reconcile a husband and wife.¹⁸⁸

Lack of legal awareness also leads to people's acceptance of bribery or other corrupt practices, which they see as a normal part of life. Our interviewees noted that the traffic police were a 'first point of contact' for many people in Tajikistan. They suggested that there should be greater focus on working with these police as well as the public on legal rights. The public needed to be better educated on how to deal with such situations in a way that was within the law, so that they were able to do so safely without repercussions. "We listened to the deputy head of the traffic police on efforts to reduce the level of corruption, and he reported honestly," said one interviewee. "I read the report. They have corruption, but they also have a desire to fix it. The middle and lower level [of the police] need to know about the reforms proposed for the police. They have little understanding of the [police reform] strategy or what it means."¹⁸⁹

Respondents also cited problems arising from specific services associated with the authorities, including passport officers in charge of renewing or issuing passports. They were said to encourage unofficial payments and contributed to negative perceptions of the authorities.¹⁹⁰

Physical spaces for meetings

Several interviewees pointed to the importance of having a physical space separate from police stations, where people could interact with the police and members of the CPPTs. Community policing centres (CPCs) are useful for interaction and communication between police and citizens, often doubling as community centres where events and information sessions can be held. Findings from our project evaluations found that CPCs were used for consultations with other representatives as well, such as elders or young people. This involved local police in certain instances, when they were needed.¹⁹¹ In some cases, these buildings had been taken over by the police for their own use. This needs to be prevented when these sites are renovated, and an agreement reached where the use of the buildings by all stakeholders is clearly emphasised. Some of the buildings (especially those not covered or supported by funding from community policing projects) had already fallen into a state of inactivity (or were never active to start with). The reasons included a lack of communication between key actors, low political will from the authorities or a lack of financial incentives to maintain or use the buildings.¹⁹²

Urban versus rural

Universally, our respondents declared that rural community-police partnerships in Tajikistan were more productive than urban ones.¹⁹³ In small towns and villages, cooperative relationships could be built more easily.¹⁹⁴ Respondents commented that police in cities were more connected to the interests of the MIA, and slower to change. Police units distant from the capital and in less populated areas, such as those in Khorog or Rasht, could be more autonomous and cooperative with local populations. They were also better able to address specific community security issues that had been identified collaboratively.¹⁹⁵ Some respondents referred to the 'personality' factor (which was more important in rural areas), where one or two people from the authorities (or possibly communities) could take over the whole collaborative process and dominate conversations that were meant to reflect consensus among a range of stakeholders.¹⁹⁶

At the same time, the police's capacity to respond to community concerns in rural or distant parts of the country was more limited. One respondent cited the example of Bokhtar, in the Khatlon region: "On issues of domestic violence, [police inspector offices on prevention of domestic violence] work well in the city of Bokhtar and are located outside the building of the [DMIA], where people are free to ask for help. There are no such centres in the villages."¹⁹⁷ Others mentioned slow response times by the police if they were unfamiliar with localities and needed to travel long distances with limited equipment or resources. "The city responds to calls faster, because they are technically equipped. It's hard in the districts. For example, when responding to a case of vandalism of graves in Kushoniyon, the police did not know the area. I myself called the DMIA and informed them about the crime. The Ministry of Internal Affairs reacted quickly. [They] went to the scene of the crime and only later did the Kushoniyon police arrive."¹⁹⁸

Issues addressed through community policing

We asked respondents from Tajikistan what security concerns or issues they felt were addressed well through community policing initiatives and which were not. Some clear patterns emerged. Our interviewees claimed community policing best addressed the interaction and trust between police and communities. Such interactions were a form of

feedback. They provided the police with information on what was working well and what could be done better. It also helped identify issues in their localities, acting as a gateway to more effective resolution of a range of concerns. With time (and trust) this could lead to a more cooperative approach to crime response, in which local residents provided crucial information on crimes or investigations. However, without sincere discussions or collaborative problem-solving approaches, people would not be as willing to cooperate.

Cooperation also helps with ‘non-criminal’ issues. Police may not see these as falling within their purview, but they can nevertheless help build trust and confidence in the police as members of the community. These issues can be simple things, but impact significantly on community safety, security and quality of life. Examples include keeping the community clean through improved waste collection, improving traffic and pedestrian safety, improving accessibility of vital services, setting up opportunities for dialogue between communities and authorities, helping young people with job opportunities, raising awareness of gender inequalities, addressing drug or alcohol abuse, and focusing on youth violence (such as in schools). However, solutions to these problems should not be the responsibility solely of the police, given the range of actors and services they involve; this is fundamentally what community policing partnerships are about. Expecting the police to fulfil all of these functions could ultimately dilute their responsibilities to address crime and ensure public safety. It could even lead to inadequate responses on issues they are not trained to resolve. But by working collaboratively to identify issues, the police could help communities reach out to the right bodies or services to address their concerns. One issue that was seen to impede this cooperation and trust-building, however, was the frequent rotation of police officers, which produced a feeling of ‘starting from scratch’ every few years (or even more frequently in some cases).

Corruption and internal police dynamics

Issues concerning the internal workings and practices of the police, or that were related to corruption, were not addressed as effectively. Such issues are sensitive in nature, and the police and communities were less willing to raise them in public platforms.¹⁹⁹ For example, issues such as mistreatment of citizens and abuse of detainees were rarely raised.²⁰⁰ Our project evaluations found little evidence of CPPTs tackling these issues head-on or of having any substantial impact on

corruption.²⁰¹ CPPTs were not seen to have the remit or resources to address such issues directly, but participants did feel that increased interaction with the police contributed to positive relationships in a more general way, and improved trust, legitimate action and accountability. Some local action plans, such as those supported by Saferworld in Panj district in Khatlon, contained some anti-corruption components, but our evaluations were unable to determine the extent to which these contributed to changed behaviour.

Other measures not directly related to community policing could contribute to wider police reform. These include support for e-crime databases, which enable people to file complaints more easily and cut down on opportunities for corruption, because of the digital footprint involved, while increasing visibility and trust in police services.

Addressing root causes of violence and support for violent groups

There were mixed results when attempting to ‘counter or prevent violent extremism’ (C/PVE).²⁰² While this issue is a major priority for many donors and for the Tajikistan government, it was not raised as much by communities themselves as being of immediate concern or affecting their quality of life. C/PVE is also not easily defined or addressed, so evaluating success of responses was a challenge.

Interviewees considered discrimination against people with strong religious beliefs by the authorities to be a contributing factor for support for proscribed violent groups and distrust of the police.²⁰³ Some respondents mentioned that the police generally had limited awareness of religious practice and would interpret outward signs of devoutness as ‘extremism’ – prompting harsh measures. In addition, there were few devoutly religious people who wished to join the police, especially given the prevalence of discrimination and corruption – which would go against beliefs enshrined in Islam. This created a secular force, with limited understanding of a large segment of the population.²⁰⁴ “There’s still this strong suspicion of religion in general as something to be watched and maintained, with little understanding of what goes into it,” said one expert. “They look at [the resurgence] of religion with a lot of suspicion, and see it as being within their purview as law enforcement agencies – [including monitoring] what people believe, what they listen to, how they dress – it creates all kinds of other tensions.”

Most communities who chose to work on this issue did so through work with young people, who were seen as more vulnerable to recruitment into violent

groups. Youth engagement, education, and opportunities or other capacity strengthening were important. Yet, given the paucity of data on people leaving to join violent groups in Iraq and Syria, it was difficult to say what sort of impact community activities were having on C/PVE. Engagement with young people is important in its own right and should not necessarily be attached to ‘C/PVE’. Unfortunately, authorities sometimes responded to these issues with further repression, which could have the opposite effect to that intended and mean that more work needed to be done to build trust with the public.²⁰⁵ In areas where ‘violent extremism’ was prioritised, there was a history of arbitrary detention or mistreatment, which made addressing the entire issue even more sensitive.²⁰⁶

Gender and security

When implementing community policing, interviewees saw issues related to gender norms and security (such as gender-based violence) as among the most important in all communities. Our interview with a former MIA representative suggested that this was something that women and men felt increasingly willing to confront, although it was also still taboo and often seen as a family matter. In 2017, UN Women reported that nearly one in five women in Tajikistan between 15 and 49 years of age had

reported experiencing violence from a partner in the previous year.²⁰⁷ The number of cases reported to the police, as well as discussions in CPPTs and other venues, had shown an increase. A former employee of an international organisation also told us of a case in Sughd region in the north. Here a woman said she had been contemplating suicide, before taking part in conversations that were part of the local-level action plans and initiatives discussed above.²⁰⁸

Community policing is a useful approach for raising issues of domestic violence, which particularly affects women and girls. This is because it can provide a platform where women are meaningfully included in coming up with solutions for their identified and

prioritised security problems – something that is often lacking in police teams, which tend to be dominated by men. According to one interviewee from Khatlon, “the problem of domestic violence is addressed with the help of community policing. Civil society and the police closely cooperate on this

issue. Members of civil society organisations have programmes to prevent such problems in their own professional communities. If problems arise, they turn to the Public Councils for help – and have close cooperation with media at regional and district levels.”

Some of our respondents cited the positive impact of men and women residents working with religious figures to discourage violence.²⁰⁹ However, this is a delicate balance: engagement with religious leaders can at times lead to psychological pressure on women. They may, for example, be told suicide is a ‘sin’, rather than focusing on the core issue of male violence toward family members. In other cases, religious leaders (or authorities) may see preventing divorce as their goal. This can mean women are encouraged to return to abusive conditions ‘for the sake of the family’, where they may face further psychological or physical violence. Engagement on domestic violence through community policing can open up new avenues for addressing the issue. However, the approach is by no means immune from the norms or pressures that keep domestic violence as a ‘private issue’ to be dealt with inside the home.

Respondents cited many challenges regarding gender norms in CPPTs and among police officers. Many in communities saw gender equality as anathema to certain aspects of Tajik culture, or as a foreign imposition or something that led to male subservience to women. Some men complained that gender programmes focused more on women than on men; they felt that this created an imbalance or enflamed tensions. Our interviewees cited continued stigma regarding public acknowledgement of domestic violence. The view of domestic abuse as a family matter did not help.²¹⁰ Even when cases were raised, they were handled in a way that did not take women’s concerns into account. This potentially endangered women in already-vulnerable situations, as well as re-traumatising and exposing them to further violence. The situation is reinforced by expectations of the types of positions women should occupy in society.²¹¹ “There are few women among the police, and the majority of cases they work as assistants or inspectors for victims of domestic violence,” said one researcher we spoke with.

The Centre for Strategic Studies in Tajikistan found that a full third of the population did not think policing was a suitable role for women.²¹² While many believed the best way to improve the responsiveness of the police to women’s issues would be to create a more diverse police force, this would be a long-term process which would entail acceptance of a change in women’s roles in Tajik society. However, in the meantime, more could be done to improve police culture and procedures relating to cases of gender-based violence or other

“
Not long ago, I was walking down the street and saw a guy beat a girl – and as I got closer, I saw one person approach and then another, and someone managed to call the police. Before, people would have walked by, thinking this was a conflict between husband and wife and not react. But now they react.

Former Public Council member

”

security issues that disproportionately affect women and girls, while also promoting the role of women in the workforce and in leadership positions.²¹³ Some of our respondents cited successful collaboration between the police, Public Councils, NGOs and shelters, which had coordinated responses and referral services for women facing abuse.²¹⁴ Although many districts had an inspector who focused on cases of domestic violence, many police departments were not aware of this.

Role of civil society and international organisations in community policing

Most respondents saw civil society's main function to be as a bridge between the government and the citizenry. An important element was the communication of community concerns to the authorities, and advocating for more responsive, inclusive and accountable security provision.²¹⁵ Civil society also performed an important monitoring role. NGOs should follow the reform process and provide recommendations on how to better reach civic goals and targets.

One interviewee asserted that civil society in Tajikistan had been actively reaching out to government counterparts for a long time, and in the last few years had seen significant progress.²¹⁶ But civil society views were rarely taken into account: "Probably, this is due to the fact that civil society sees changes in the police system more in terms of openness and transparency regarding human rights, while the police department pays more attention to internal changes in procedures, external attributes of the police, and the structure of its various bodies."²¹⁷ It was also due to a suspicion of foreign-funded groups pursuing external interests, and what was seen as shrinking space for civil society to speak up. This could cause CSOs to censor themselves, and to hold back on constructive criticism that could help improve policing – largely out of worry that they might offend government officials.²¹⁸

Civil society should also have a strong educational role. It can promote awareness of police reform and community policing, and act as an arbiter when the sensitive issues of human rights and abusive behaviours are raised. Civil society – including international NGOs – is well placed to provide analysis of police reform abroad, to share what has

worked well in other contexts, and to help inform domestic efforts. Facilitating exchanges, and highlighting experiences in other countries that have undergone police reform successfully, are important factors in promoting success. Many respondents cited Georgia as a country that Tajikistan might learn from.

An important role for civil society is ensuring that programmes take local needs into account and are sensitive to context-specific conflict dynamics. Respondents cited *mahalla* (neighbourhood) committees as important to potential coordination between the public and the authorities, especially when CPPTs or community policing were not widespread.²¹⁹ These *mahallas* were said to be trusted and often a useful body for raising community concerns, advocating police or pushing for resolution of local security concerns.²²⁰ However, barriers between civil society and the authorities remained. In one district cited by a respondent, local police inspectors continually questioned local NGOs, demanded documentation and maintained a confrontational relationship. Building a cooperative relationship – one in which civil society could feel free to offer constructive criticism or advice without fear – was still a challenge.²²¹

International actors

International organisations and donors were said to have an important role in continuing to fund community policing initiatives, building on what had worked well and taking a collaborative approach working with government. This was seen as an important component by most respondents: antagonising the government by only pointing out flaws was seen to be unhelpful, an approach that would only hinder progress. Instead, international organisations should provide constructive recommendations and use their platform to speak up for communities' priorities, based on experience from programmes as well as collaboration with local civil society groups who had a strong understanding of the context.²²² They could also bring in lessons from their programmes around the globe, providing ideas and tested approaches in similar contexts.²²³ One respondent suggested framing problems in mutual terms: "We see that you have these problems – we also have these problems and conflicts and discrimination in our communities. We've had to make our own reforms to our police forces – here are some things we did that worked and some of the things that didn't. We share a common problem. [This is better than] approaching it as 'We have best practice because we're Western,' as it can sometimes come off that way."²²⁴

At a roundtable discussion, police speak with activists and local government representatives about a range of issues, including the recruitment of young people into violent groups.

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Respondents noted that it could also be useful to frame concepts, issues and challenges by talking about cases abroad, such as in the US. This might open up conversations that people may otherwise feel hesitant to engage with because of local sensitivities.

Interviewees also stressed the importance of cooperation and coordination between international organisations working on community policing; for example, the OSCE, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Saferworld. This aspect could sometimes slip off the agenda and, as a result, awareness of or complementarity between programmes might be lacking.

Accountability and transparency

According to all our respondents, accountability was a crucial component of public trust in the police and in crime prevention. In Tajikistan, local inspectors were obliged to report periodically to the communities they served. Practice showed this was not done consistently; whereas in some towns, cities and regions it was common practice, in others it was unheard of. A positive example cited by respondents was in the Shokhmansur district of Dushanbe, where there were advertisements and publicly posted information about the district police inspector, including his phone number and those of various departments, hotlines and MIA officials. Every quarter, the head of the district police department reported to the public on their achievements.²²⁵ Meetings were also held with parents several times a year at school, to check on families and raise awareness of certain issues that could arise at home.

“A precinct must be accountable,” said one former member of a Public Council in Sughd. “At the meetings it became clear that it was not always the case. Some communities don’t even know where they are located. At a meeting in Panjikent [in the north], people saw their precinct officer for the first time . . . and there were lots of questions for him. And six months ago [in Istaravshan], the precinct police inspector spoke to the population and there were questions for him . . . Of all the police officers, the precinct police officer has many duties and you can call him a ‘little’ police chief – from morning to evening he does not have time to do his job. On the other hand, this is the first person to whom the population turns, and based on his actions, evaluate the work of the police. Therefore, there should be more reporting, although this is not always done.”²²⁶

These observations were confirmed by other respondents. Transparency and accountability remained low, despite the fact that these principles are enshrined in strategic and planning documents for police reform, which oblige district reporting sessions every six months.²²⁷ One respondent noted that reporting sessions tended to be more congratulatory and without any real analysis of the problems or deficiencies that could be addressed together with communities.²²⁸ Reporting by mid- and low-level police officers should be increased, particularly in relation to procedures and policies. Some respondents noted that the Public Council meetings in their regions were open discussions and that members would stay a few extra hours before or after the main meetings to have honest conversations on the issues people were facing.²²⁹ Press conferences by the MIA were also broadcast via media outlets, although respondents were unsure how useful these were for citizens.²³⁰

Recommendations

Based on evaluations of the context and joint programming with our civil society partners in Tajikistan, as well as the interviews conducted for this research, we have developed recommendations for various national and international actors.

Government/authorities

- Government/authorities should pursue the regular cooperation and involvement of civil society, including women- and youth-led organisations, in efforts to communicate with the public through the media, and in order to promote police reform and raise awareness among the public.
- They should set up pilot areas across the country to test different approaches to improving police–community interaction. This can be based on advice from experts (local and international and including gender experts) and experience from similar contexts abroad.
- Unbiased gender-sensitive needs assessments need to be conducted or supported, to better understand the security concerns of communities as part of the government’s commitments to police reform. This should be done with support from civil society, to ensure honest feedback from communities, including women and girls, or sexual and gender minorities.
- Cooperation between police and Public Councils should be enhanced, to ensure security concerns and responses are discussed openly.
- Government/authorities in Tajikistan should place a special focus on issues predominantly affecting women and girls, such as domestic violence, which is widely regarded as one of the top concerns around the country. This can be done by conducting outreach and encouraging cooperation between a range of actors, including the police, women’s rights organisations, gender-based violence services providers, legal and psychosocial services, and religious figures. Women and men should both be included, with a range of interventions to address harmful gender norms, tailoring interventions to local contexts. The MIA should also focus on hiring more women who are then trained and given responsibilities to address gender-based violence.
- Government/authorities should ensure gender-balanced participation of CPPT and Public Council members during reporting meetings of the police to the public, allowing for community feedback. They should consult them as needed on recruitment or in addressing complaints from communities on police conduct.
- Guidelines or a policy providing guidance on how the authorities can share information with the public – especially with marginalised communities, young people and religious, ethnic and other minority groups – need to be developed. These guidelines might include, for example, frequency and recommended methods, with these incorporated into standard practice at the MIA Academy. This should accompany a revision of the MIA press service, based on advice from CSOs and the media, and suggested improvements to the MIA’s social media presence (or creation of local chat groups, for example, through Viber) to create a ‘service delivery’ culture. These channels should be used to inform communities of police reporting days or relevant meetings. In areas without the internet, this could be done through SMS or other locally identified methods.

- Government/authorities should adjust performance indicators for precinct police inspectors and other departments that deal with the public on a regular basis, so that they are less focused on crime response indicators (e.g., number of arrests, tickets given) and more on qualitative factors and cooperation with communities. Indicators for success could measure the number of reporting meetings held with communities or frequency of participation in collaborative platforms like CPPTs.
 - They should allow for greater independence of Public Councils and CPPTs, especially in relation to selection of their members and public funding. The membership of the Police Reform Steering Group could be expanded to include more organisations and civil society groups working on police reform, as well as Public Councils and CPPTs, who can advise on membership of various CPPTs and Public Councils.
 - Local religious leaders should be involved in discussions on community security, ensuring sensitive responses by the authorities that take into account the needs and concerns of religious communities. At all times, there should be respect for religious freedoms, as outlined in international standards to which the Tajikistan government has committed.
 - When establishing CPCs, local authorities should work together with Public Councils, CPPTs, civil society or other relevant bodies to draw up agreements on how the centres can be used for improving community–police relations – while also ensuring the centres are not used solely for police functions.
 - To improve motivation of CPPT and Public Council members, incentives must be factored into ways of working – including through letters of appreciation, funding from local government bodies for activities and support from local authorities. The MIA Academy should develop guidelines for precinct police inspectors on managing complaints, disputes, referrals and so forth. It should also integrate resources like Saferworld’s *Community Policing Handbook*, or materials from other organisations working on community policing, into its curricula.
 - Regular refresher sessions on the community policing approach and gender-sensitivity need to be carried out in various police departments, including in different regions and for different functions, such as the traffic police.
 - Departments of Internal Affairs should work with civil society to organise ‘open station’ days to build better relations, answer questions from the public, and ensure people know where they can turn in emergencies.
 - The number of tasks for precinct police inspectors that do not necessarily fall within the police remit should be reduced, especially for those based in rural areas. This will help free up more time for proactive prevention efforts and will reduce ineffective responses by police who are not trained or equipped to carry out certain duties. These functions can include conscription, collection of taxes or bills, compliance with the 2007 Law of the Republic of Tajikistan ‘On regulation of traditions and ceremonies’,²³¹ and enforcement of court decisions.
 - Police work with schoolchildren should be more sensitive, to reduce fear of the authorities, including by issuing warnings rather than punishing or soliciting money for minor misdemeanours. Local governments should cooperate with various ministries (such as on religion, youth and the MIA) to allocate funding for efforts to prevent domestic violence according to the law, and to encourage greater reporting by communities.
 - The government and authorities should engage more actively with young people and ensure inclusion in outreach efforts and consultations. They should support CSO/NGO efforts to work with young women and young men.
- ### Civil society/communities
- Civil society/communities should conduct regular community assessments to gauge the perceptions of police and work through collaborative platforms, such as Public Councils and CPPTs, to communicate recommendations for improvements.
 - They should continue advocacy with the government/authorities on the benefits of a more people-focused approaches to policing, including in relation to the prevention of crimes and insecurity and more effective responses based on community–police cooperation and trust.
 - Where possible, they should act as a referral mechanism for appropriate services. For example, referring criminal cases to relevant police services or shelters for the immediate needs of survivors of domestic violence.
 - Civil society should raise legal awareness of Tajikistan’s citizens and law enforcement agencies through public outreach campaigns.
 - Civil society/communities should conduct assessments and advise the authorities and MIA on how to make policing a more attractive career path for women, to increase the number of women staff and better address gender-related issues.

- They can encourage participation in CPPTs and Public Councils from different groups, including women, *mahalla* representatives, young people, civil society and other platforms. When working on certain issues, they should involve specialists such as psychologists, childhood development experts and religious leaders.
- They should engage more with traditional and social media channels to promote the work of CPPTs/Public Councils. This could also sensitively raise awareness of issues that can lead to conflict, such as gender norms, border tensions, youth challenges in school and families of labour migrants.
- Civil society/communities should conduct independent, regular quantitative and qualitative surveys of the population to gauge perceptions of the police and progress of reform efforts. These can be used to make recommendations to the MIA and local authorities.
- They should continue trainings on community policing (using toolkits and materials, such as those produced by Saferworld or other organisations) for police personnel, and involve Public Council/CPPT members. They should support the incorporation of key training modules and materials into the MIA Academy curricula.
- The MIA and local authorities can be supported by providing examples of models for sustainable funding of collaborative structures like Public Councils/CPPTs, and incentivising their continued work – for example, through subsidised costs out of local budgets.
- International actors should engage with efforts to pass the law ‘On Police’, including by working with the government to identify gaps and obstacles and to provide support to overcome them.

International actors

- International actors should continue funding police reform and community policing initiatives, while also providing support to local civil society to lead change and influence the government/authorities on specific issues of reform and community security priorities. This is in recognition that community policing is a long-term endeavour that must be sustained over an extended period. They should look for opportunities to institutionalise the approach, for example, through work with the MIA Academy and with higher-level officials who are interested in community policing.
- They can facilitate exchanges of experience with other countries formerly in the Soviet Union, where efforts have been made to move towards more people-centred and human rights-compliant policing, and which share common security sector features. This could include between MIAs in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia.
- Jointly with local experts and civil society, international actors should develop guidance and instructions for local police to improve interactions and partnerships with communities, holding trainings to reinforce key concepts.
- They should balance funding for equipment or infrastructure with government commitments to behavioural and systemic change, including implementing people-centred, human rights-compliant policing approaches.

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Uzbek policemen stand guard at the Toqi Telpak Furushon Bazaar in the old city of Bukhara, Uzbekistan.
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4

Uzbekistan

Through much of its independent history, Uzbekistan was one of the most repressive countries in the region, with the police fulfilling the role as an arm of the state. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power in December 2016 and introduced a spate of reforms aimed at turning Uzbekistan into a more modern and open country, which would adhere to international norms and standards and act as a progressive leader in the Central Asia region. His well-publicised measures included the closure of torture sites, changes to forced-labour practices, and the opening of space for civil society.²³² The impact and sincerity of these reforms are hotly debated, with media stories referring to authoritarian practices that undermine the stated intentions of the leadership.²³³ Yet the fact that these issues can be discussed at all is testament to positive changes in society.

Given Uzbekistan's history of human rights violations and arbitrary arrests, the police have a long way to go in becoming a more service-oriented body. Reform of the police has been marked as a priority by Mirziyoyev's administration, and many law enforcement officials claim they are genuinely seeking to improve police–public relations.

There are currently no 'community policing' initiatives active in Uzbekistan and known to Saferworld. However, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) was piloting the approach at time of writing, while the OSCE had also engaged on the topic in country.²³⁴ Since 2018, Saferworld has been supporting community security initiatives in Uzbekistan in four communities located in Jizzakh, Namangan and Tashkent, through our local civil society partners. This approach is based on establishing partnership groups between local authorities and communities to work towards identifying and addressing concerns around community security.

This chapter outlines some of the broader police reform efforts in the country. It also explores some of the challenges and opportunities associated with greater police interaction with communities – with an eye to better assessing the potential of such initiatives.

History and legislative frameworks for reform

The history of independent Uzbekistan's police can be roughly divided into three periods.

The first period, from 1991 to 2009, was a transition from the Soviet policing system. The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. 270 was introduced in 1991,²³⁵ formally creating the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan. It laid down some technical changes to improve police effectiveness (such as provision of modern equipment and improved systems for handling cases), and a new system of training for national personnel. The country also began to undergo economic changes as it transitioned to a market economy. At the same time, it faced major security challenges in the Fergana Valley, where violent groups dedicated to the overthrow of President Islam Karimov's secular regime had established themselves. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which was founded in 1998, staged violent attacks in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and was probably behind a number of bombings in Tashkent, Uzbekistan's capital, in 1999 and possibly subsequent ones in 2004.²³⁶

These events led to calls for the government to focus on strengthening its security sector. The government sought to increase the ranks of its qualified police personnel (after having formed the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1994), and joined INTERPOL. This permitted Uzbek law enforcement agencies to cooperate with foreign agencies (including exchanges and training from Russian law enforcement), especially in relation to organised crime.²³⁷ At the same time, a number of violent events – in particular protests in Andijan in 2005, when hundreds of protesters were killed by security services – caused an international outcry over abusive police behaviour in Uzbekistan.²³⁸ In the United States, the Bush Administration's (2001–2009) cooperative relationship with Tashkent was seriously affected, and the ability to push for change in Uzbekistan was made harder by an increasingly repressive environment for civil society.²³⁹ The authorities then proceeded to move forward with a clampdown on NGOs, civil society activists and those seen to be in opposition.²⁴⁰

The second period, roughly from 2010 to 2016, saw a continuation of these shortcomings. This included a worsening of the opaque structure of the MIA and consolidation of power (although at the same time,

relations with some foreign governments thawed). There were increasing reports of violations of the rights, freedoms and interests of citizens, as well as problems with crime. There was no clear division between the national, regional and local structures of the police, and low levels of communication between police officials, including 'crime prevention inspectors'. Uzbekistan lacked accountability or mechanisms for public or parliamentary oversight of police activities, and there was insufficient cooperation with civil society institutions. Added to this were the authorities' superficial approach to citizen appeals, a lack of systematic measures for crime prevention, and no analysis of conflict drivers or early detection. The country's system of training and retraining for law enforcement officers did not meet modern requirements.

The third period, from 2016 to the present, commenced following the death of Karimov in 2016 after 27 years in power. It is directly related to Shavkat Mirziyoyev's election as president in December 2016, and his regime's numerous efforts at public administration reform. From the start, he took steps to demonstrate a break from his predecessor's repressive regime, promising to address the country's problems and improve relations with neighbouring states. Within the sphere of law enforcement, the changes were based on the 'Action Strategy for the Further Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan' for 2017–21,²⁴¹ and the 2016 Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Internal Affairs' Bodies.²⁴² The new law represented a change in approach for the MIA.²⁴³ The law – which replaced 1990's 'Charter on the Activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs' – clearly delineated the powers and responsibilities of internal affairs bodies. It was received with some optimism by local and international experts, as well as rights activists, who had long recounted cases of police abuse and underlined the police's lack of accountability.²⁴⁴ In addition to limits on the use of force, the law provided for better protection of the police's rights and conditions. This included a 40-hour working week, proper payment for overtime, and other benefits for mid- and lower-level employees. But many in the police have complained that these requirements have never been observed by the MIA after the law entered into force, and implementation remains a major obstacle. Several years after it was introduced, the law largely remains on paper – although there have been some positive changes in specific services and bureaucratic processes.²⁴⁵

One of the main obstacles to an improved police service in Uzbekistan is a lack of public trust, transparency and accountability. The MIA remains a closed institution, and there is little accountability when the police violate the law. When these cases are investigated, it is often as a result of a public

outcry or media attention. Investigations remain isolated, rather than being a systematic practice.

A positive development cited by respondents was a decree towards the end of 2016 ‘On measures to radically improve the system of dealing with appeals of individuals and legal entities’.²⁴⁶ This mandated ‘people’s receptions’ throughout the country, which were meant to be a mechanism for interaction and appeals from the population to government bodies on a range of issues.²⁴⁷ “The establishment of these public receptions has certainly been a positive development,” said one civil society respondent. “However, they mainly serve to address socio-economic issues. Fundamental political reforms, including in the internal affairs system, are still not able to address corruption.”

Motivations for reform

According to our interviews with a range of respondents in Uzbekistan, motivations for reform vary. The police and MIA officials stressed peace, public order and the rule of law. Civil society representatives, meanwhile, focused on the restoration of public confidence in police. This fits within the broader goals of the Mirziyoyev administration, in terms of improving the image of the government at home and abroad.²⁴⁸ Some of the people we spoke with felt that these efforts were genuine, while others were more sceptical. “Most of the reforms are largely populist,” said one retired police officer from the Tashkent region. “The police and government agencies are still working in the same system, in the same administrative-command style.”

Factors contributing to or hindering community–police engagement

There are some benefits to working for the police in Uzbekistan, such as the relatively high pay (compared to other sectors), and other social benefits that come with a police service certificate. For young people especially, this makes it an attractive prospective occupation in a context of high unemployment. However, there are numerous challenges for the police in carrying out their duties, depending on their level. For example, at the regional and district levels, police carry out national

directives in addition to those of their own governing bodies. This can involve major campaigns enforced by the authorities, such as cotton picking, grain harvesting and other agricultural activities, which can create tensions with communities.²⁴⁹ Some respondents also mentioned that working hours were not regulated: “Sometimes we don’t come home for a few days,” said one police officer from Jizzakh. “We have to do things that aren’t part of our job.” For example, according to some police respondents, there had been protests against forcible involvement in activities that were unrelated to their usual responsibilities.

At the national level, police mentioned that their salaries were not high enough for urban areas and that there were a series of overlapping laws and regulations that led to a lack of clarity of conditions and processes. “In some cases, there is a mismatch between the law and the bylaws, which contradict each other,” said a former member of the *Oliy Majlis* (parliament) of the Republic of Uzbekistan. “This is due to the slow progress of the legal system.” Some cited underinvestment at the national level – for equipment, staff and other resources – as an issue that could impede police work and make community engagement more challenging.

Accountability and transparency

Several respondents, including youth activists and academics, noted the positive and growing role of the media and social networks in providing public scrutiny of the activities of the police. They cited examples of positive steps being taken due to pressure and public feedback through these channels, which had grown and become more open and active in recent years. At the same time, there were other examples where the MIA had reacted negatively to such criticism and had fallen back on repressive tactics. These included arrests or the use of bureaucratic tools such as arbitrarily enforced regulations to silence critics.²⁵⁰

Respondents stressed the increasing frequency with which photos, video and audio were shared on social networks, highlighting cases of corruption or abuse of authority. This was increasing the momentum of demands for change from the public. Such calls for transparency had resulted in some positive developments, similar to those that police have tried around the world. For example, in December 2019, traffic police began to wear video recorders, while recruitment policies to internal affairs bodies were said to be more open to competition.

There have also been new amendments to the law, obliging law enforcement at all levels to begin to report to parliamentary deputies on their activities.

“**The police system, in cooperation with the public, needs a new worldview, a new way of thinking. Unfortunately, the views and worldviews of the police officers remain the same, where there is no understanding of the new generations. Unfortunately, there is also corruption, which should be dealt with.**

A human rights activist in the Samarkand region

The Minister of Internal Affairs himself should report twice a year to the Senate of the *Oliy Majlis*, while the representatives of the regional departments of internal affairs should report quarterly to the regional Councils of People’s Deputies (*Kengash*) – where NGOs, civil society, media and communities are also permitted to attend.²⁵¹ The idea is for these

to become interactive forums, where community representatives will also have a voice and be able to make recommendations. But, as one analyst mentioned, the success and transparency of these measures were yet to be seen. “It is difficult to assess the speed and scale of such an effect, since much depends on measures [yet] to be implemented.”

While civil society representatives acknowledged some of this progress, they also said that the MIA and police remained the most closed-off institutions in society. Some respondents expressed a desire to know more about the financing systems of law enforcement agencies, and how taxpayer money was spent within them.

“In my opinion, the police are accountable only to higher leadership, rather than to the people”, said one journalist. “One gets the feeling that law enforcement agencies are working on statistics, which are not qualitative but quantitative.”

“I have been the chairman of the *mahalla* committee for four years, but no governing body has visited and reported to the population,” said one respondent. “On one hand, there are high-sounding statements on television, such as ‘communication with the people’, ‘everyone should go to the community in their area and report’, but in practice nothing is being done. Police chiefs also have not attended the neighbourhood.”

Cooperation with civil society and the media

According to the Law on Social Partnership, government agencies should work with ‘non-governmental, non-profit organisations and other civil society institutions in the development and implementation of normative legal acts and other decisions affecting the rights and legitimate interests of citizens in the field of socio-economic development of the country’.²⁵² But the majority of respondents mentioned that the rules were very different in practice. “The police system is very closed and opaque – working with them is a difficult task for true civil society members,” said one

respondent. “As an independent journalist, I do not receive any information from the police or other government agencies or carry out social projects. The police system still retains the ‘top-down’ practices of the former Soviet Union.”

According to one respondent from the police, “we should always get permission from ‘above’ to cooperate with any person or civil society institution,” creating a substantial obstacle to cooperation or local-level relationship building with the public. “If I give an interview to the media without the permission of my boss, or cooperate with an NGO, I will be fired.” Respondents also mentioned that honest police–public relations were often hampered by a desire to maintain a ‘safe’ image of the *mahalla*, city or region. The relevant officials often worried that reports of crime could entail disciplinary measures against employees of the local divisions of the MIA for poor performance and so, as a result, they did not investigate complaints or open criminal or administrative cases. While this may keep statistics low, the real drivers of insecurity continued to go unaddressed and the perceptions of the police only worsened. “I think that the main disadvantage are the noticeable gaps in the lower level of the law enforcement system”, said one analyst, “for instance, the activities of inspectors for the prevention of offenses. Despite the material support provided to them by the state, the precinct [prevention inspectors] haven’t become closer to the people. In *mahallas*, people almost do not know the district police officers, do not communicate with them until circumstances require it. In turn, crime prevention inspectors have a lot of duties that must be performed every day and there is practically no time left to communicate with the population.”

Other respondents noted ongoing difficulties, but also improvements in the last several years. “We are constantly working with various government agencies, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to protect the rights of children and youth,” said one NGO respondent. “The issue and format of cooperation has been very difficult, but in the last three to four years, we can say that our cooperation with them has changed for the better. This mainly includes the prevention of juvenile delinquency, social rehabilitation of young people, providing them with various psychological, legal and other assistance.” Others mentioned initiatives that encouraged greater interaction between the police and people, including ‘safe city’, ‘safe neighbourhood’, and ‘safe tourism’, which was introduced as one of the MIA’s main objectives.²⁵³

The government has also piloted the introduction of a rating system for police officers, the adoption of a Code of Conduct and Communication Culture for

government agencies, and the establishment of the Institute for Advanced Training of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Another initiative trains police officers on written and verbal speech when interacting with the public, with the aim of improving their image. “The culture of speech of law enforcement officers plays an important role in establishing contact with the people,” said an official from the MIA.²⁵⁴

Community participation

Despite the lack of systematic cooperation between police and the public, respondents emphasised the importance of addressing this gap. According to one police respondent in Jizzakh region, “We rely mainly on the *mahalla* institution in our local activities. Neighbourhood representatives know every family, every citizen in their area. We rely on the community to communicate with people of different nationalities and different religions, to prevent crime and maintain public order.”

Officers in Jizzakh, Tashkent and Fergana regions all noted the intensification of efforts to reach out to the public, including by police holding spiritual or educational events and roundtables. These they felt had had a positive effect. The holding of ‘open court’ sessions in different organisations and *mahallas*, and the liberalisation of criminal liability (through the lessening of penalties and harsh sentences for a range of offenses), had also helped strengthen relationships, social stability and tolerance in society.

A regional politician highlighted that citizens should be encouraged to participate at all levels, including at the village, city or the capital levels. Then, if the police did their job sincerely, their image would improve, leading to closer and more productive cooperation. This also touched on cooperation between different members of the community, as another respondent highlighted. “Tolerance between different nationalities plays an important role in strengthening law and order in society. Uzbekistan is a multi-ethnic country, where interethnic relations have always been relevant. Cooperation between law enforcement agencies and national-cultural centres is well-established today. It’s important to do joint advocacy work together, especially in the border areas.”

Urban versus rural

Police–community cooperation encountered different challenges in rural and urban settings. According to an MIA respondent, rural areas lacked many resources (transportation, housing and

financial incentives), which could get in the way of collaborative initiatives. He said that many of the young people who signed up to become police officers often did not want to work in rural or remote areas, and so could feel demotivated. “Individualism prevails in urban areas, while in rural areas [it is more] collectivism,” said one legal expert. “The principle of work [with police] is different.”

According to civil society representatives, police officers in cities were able to respond more quickly because there were more officers in a smaller area. In the countryside, there was more fragmentation; there was also a reluctance on the part of communities, who felt greater fear and insecurity when dealing with police.

Gender and security

Uzbekistan has signed up to a number of international agreements in relation to gender equality, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)²⁵⁵ and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In addition, in 2019, its parliament adopted two laws: one ‘On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women’,²⁵⁶ and the law ‘On the Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence’. The latter focuses specifically on preventing harassment and violence at home, in the workplace, in educational institutions, and also providing more accountability for such cases and addressing gender norms that lead to violence.²⁵⁷ A Gender Commission was also created, chaired by the Speaker of Parliament, which looks at a range of social, economic and political issues, including advancement of gender equality, issues of discrimination in the workplace, wage discrepancies, and progress toward the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination, as committed to in legislation.²⁵⁸ In addition, quotas for political representation in parliament and public office have been set up, with notable progress being made – for example, in recent parliamentary elections.²⁵⁹

Shelters have been established around the country, which can provide psychological and practical support for survivors of domestic violence. A national hotline (1146) connects women with emergency assistance. In 2020, the Ministry of Internal Affairs said it had created 360 positions for women to work with women who needed legal and social assistance.²⁶⁰ In addition, a Department for Women was created within the crime prevention

Members of a community security working group meet in Jizzakh region, Uzbekistan.

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system of the MIA (following the Resolution of the Cabinet Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. 495).

However, despite these steps and acknowledgment of the issue from the top, gender discrimination, inequality and violence against women and girls remain huge issues in the country. In 2020, the MIA registered 3,261 administrative offenses against women, with 164 of these considered to be grave. This was also thought to be a massive undercount, due to underreporting.²⁶¹ In 2020, there were also around 14,700 protection orders issued, largely in response to gender-based violence.²⁶² In addition, there are myriad cases revealed in the media highlighting harassment or violence against women, as well as the inadequate responses to them from the authorities. This has led to consistent calls for improvements. In some cases, the police are even the perpetrators themselves. For example, one prominent example raised by Radio Ozodlik, Radio Free Europe's local branch in Uzbekistan, highlighted the case of police in Kattakurgan district forcibly stripping a woman suspected of theft and filming the incident.²⁶³

According to police respondents, women in Uzbekistan – like in neighbouring Central Asian countries – tend to hide cases of abuse without reporting. This is due to various pressures and the social stigma associated with publicising issues seen as ‘domestic’ in nature. “Let’s start with the fact that the mentality in Uzbekistan is such that it [discourages] ‘washing dirty linen in public’, including gender-based violence,” said a chairman of a *mahalla* in the Samarkand region. “On this issue, it is difficult to interact with the population, even for *mahallas*, let alone law enforcement agencies. The latter intervene only when an illegal act has been committed or a complaint has been received by the police.” A prominent woman journalist in Uzbekistan expanded on the issue in the media: “The police are not very active in this regard,” she said. “In recent years, the issue of gender and domestic violence has been discussed in Uzbekistan. But it’s mostly at the media level and more of a declarative character.”

While, in multinational urban areas, respondents said that women had more rights and opportunities, problems in rural parts of the country were said to be

particularly acute. Responses from the police were also poor. According to a CSO representative, this situation was worsened by the lack of opportunities and of a competitive job market for women in rural areas. The focus tended not to be on prevention, but on obligatory response according to the offense committed. Inequality permeates all aspects of life, due to the lack of women's involvement: "Women are not sufficiently involved in the socio-political life of the country," said one respondent. "This can be seen in the regional and district branches of political parties, in the nomination of candidates in elections, in the judiciary and so on. For example, in the Jizzakh region, only a few women work in government and other governing bodies."

International organisations, such as the United Nations Populations Fund and the International Children's Emergency Fund, have established cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs on gender issues. They largely provide advisory support, as well as assistance for social programmes. But respondents stressed that the situation required fundamental reforms by the state as well to truly address the issue.

Measuring impact and ensuring local ownership

Most respondents, including some in Uzbekistan's government, acknowledged that there were not enough clear mechanisms for assessing the performance of the police. There is little legal basis for oversight from parliament or public institutions, and the police remain largely an extension of the executive branch.

When assessing the work of the police and the potential for support of police–public partnerships, police respondents suggested a number of factors should be considered. These included: the level and type of crime in the area (district, city or neighbourhood); the effectiveness of crime prevention in the area; and public opinion of the police and the level of existing cooperation. Communities should also be aware of the activities of local government bodies and the police.

"Effectiveness of law enforcement agencies can and should be measured by conducting broad-based research and sociological surveys," said one expert. An official in the Ministry of Justice mentioned that "the evaluation of the police and other law enforcement agencies can also be determined by

referring to the 'people's receptions' in the regions and the 'virtual reception' of the president."

Representatives of civil society and international organisations stressed that transparency, the rule of law and prevention of corruption should be cornerstones for evaluating police effectiveness. They recommended establishing councils of public representatives and conducting more public surveys to gauge the effectiveness of police in different parts of the country.

Recommendations

While Uzbekistan has often been recognised as a safe country in relation to reported crime statistics and security, there are also many drivers of crime, insecurity, and conflict that remain hidden and unaddressed. The police can play a strong role in these drivers. The state has made some progress in providing better conditions for the police, such as on salaries, housing and equipment. However, the service itself has not yet undergone sufficient reform to change people's perceptions of the police from being perpetrators of violence to protectors from it.

In contrast to the other chapters in this report, Saferworld does not have an in-country presence in Uzbekistan (although we have partnerships in-country), and we have fewer past projects to draw on in formulating recommendations. Still, based on initial conversations conducted for this research, we propose the recommendations below.

Government/authorities

- Government/authorities should take steps to decouple the police from political agendas, and work towards transforming it into a more people-oriented service that responds to citizens' needs. Bureaucratic processes (which currently require local divisions to obtain permission for local-level cooperation) should be eased.
- Police departments and inspectors, especially those in rural areas, should make greater efforts to cooperate with communities, including through community policing approaches and initiatives.
- Police outreach can be conducted in rural areas, including through systems of 'family–school–neighbourhood' cooperation. 'Open classes' in schools should be continued, particularly on topics such as gender and violence in schools.
- The authorities in Uzbekistan should take steps to ensure transparency in the recruitment of police personnel, to make it a more attractive profession for

young, educated and passionate staff, including women, and to help reduce nepotism or corrupt practices.

- They should review criteria for individual police performance evaluations, including by incorporating elements of cooperation with communities and local perceptions of police performance.
- The activities of the Public Council under the Ministry of Internal Affairs need to be strengthened, to become an active ‘bridge’ between society and address existing challenges. These include limited uptake of citizen suggestions for improvements, as well as a lack of public information on the activities of state bodies. These bodies can also help advise on community–police initiatives, such as the creation of community policing partnerships, and identify training needs for national NGOs and CSOs that work on these issues.
- Local authorities should conduct more public hearings in *mahallas*, local councils of people’s deputies, and in front of various public organisations, on locally relevant security issues, as well as trends, police responses and ideas for collaborative action.
- In the spirit of government initiatives to expand two-way dialogue, government/authorities should explore existing and new channels for communication with the public on issues relating to security and policing, including through social media, the MIA website and other formats where applicable. This can include sharing information on police activities, announcements of public meetings or lodging of complaints from the public.
- Where existing feedback mechanisms exist (including reporting to the *Oliy Majlis* or the Boards of People’s Deputies), the government/authorities need to open up participation to civil society and the media. They should find ways to include their ideas and concerns (including through civil society support or public perception surveys).
- Government/authorities should work at the national and regional levels to make law enforcement a more attractive career option for women. They should ensure that women are meaningfully engaged in decision-making – not only locally (including on issues related to gender-based violence), but also in high-level decisions on people-centred security provision.
- Police departments and inspectors, especially those in rural areas, should make greater efforts to cooperate with communities to tackle locally defined security concerns. This process could involve the creation or facilitation of spaces for community policing initiatives, e.g., CPCs, or the establishment of collaborative platforms and police-public

partnerships, such as CPPTs, using processes such as the community security cycle or SARA models to jointly map, prioritise and respond to security concerns, and build better relations. These efforts can accompany existing goals of modernising police stations to increase capacity and make them more accessible to the public.

International organisations/actors

- International organisations should support wide-scale police reform efforts based on international standards and practices, including human rights and conflict and gender sensitivity.
- They should support improved police–community cooperation, including through the implementation of community policing initiatives in Uzbekistan (similar to those in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan).
- They can facilitate exchanges of experience between relevant authorities in Uzbekistan and other countries, including with Central Asian neighbours.
- International organisations should coordinate with both government agencies and civil society to identify gaps and needs for targeted support and financing.

Civil society

- Civil society should advocate on behalf of communities for more responsive, inclusive and accountable security provision.
- Civil society, the Youth Union, the Women’s Committee and independent organisations should work with police and government representatives to strengthen advocacy work on gender equality in society, to increase representation of women in the police and in the government, and to reduce the stigma attached to reporting of domestic violence. This can include special classes and trainings in schools and at the police academy on gender equality and on the sensitive handling of gender-based violence cases, as well as training at the sub-national level for representatives of regional structures.
- Civil society should support the government and authorities to carry out public perception surveys in different regions and districts of the country, to understand people’s changing perceptions of security in Uzbekistan and the safety and security issues they face. These surveys can also help analyse the level of trust in police and how they can improve their performance and work more effectively with the public and civil society.

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Women participate in a mapping exercise in the Districts of Republican Subordination, Tajikistan.
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Conclusions and recommendations

As the research conducted for this report demonstrates, there is no single perception of, or vision for, police in Central Asian countries, with the context varying substantially from country to country. However, there are several patterns that have come up consistently in relation to the need for police and communities to work together more closely in an open and trusting relationship.

Trust in police services in the three countries remained low across the board, with both the authorities and communities recognising the need to improve police–public relations and cooperation. While the history of police violence was tied to different political events in each country, there was a general perception that the authorities fulfilled a role to protect the interests of the regime or the prevailing powers, rather than that of service-oriented or people-centred security provision. This is fuelled by repressive actions by the state, as well as by negative day-to-day interactions – such as those involving corruption, excessive use of force, or insensitive responses to issues of crime and insecurity. This has meant some people turning to alternative resolution mechanisms, further widening the gap between the police and communities. In places where specific efforts have been made (such as through community policing approaches and initiatives), respondents said that perceptions of and cooperation with the police had improved substantially and that communities were much more willing to approach and cooperate with the police. However, in some places where trust of police was especially low, there were still challenges around community policing being seen as ‘informing’ or ‘spying’ for the authorities, causing tensions between people within a community.



A police officer distributes masks to community members as part of a campaign to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

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Motivations for police reform generally and community policing specifically differed when speaking to government officials/authorities, civil society and the public. While all tended to agree that there was a need to improve responsiveness and trust in the police, civil society (and many international actors) tended to focus on behavioural, relational and structural reform and systemic change. Meanwhile, government officials and authorities tended to focus more on improving operational aspects and increasing funding for equipment and infrastructure. Most respondents noted that both elements were important to consider in any reform programme, and that international partners should not neglect one at the expense of the other. It is also possible that priorities for various actors change over time. For example, following events of violence in which there is a public outcry, the government may be more willing to engage on behaviour and relational change and to work more closely with civil society and the international community. Political will from the top was mentioned as being central to challenge some of the incentives that obstruct efforts to change the police and MIA structures or ways of working.

In relation to **legislation** to improve community policing, respondents generally agreed that the problem lay more in implementation rather than a major reform of existing laws. On paper, the laws in all three countries are thorough and speak to the observance of rights and cooperative and service-oriented policies and practices. Improvements in this area have been seen over the years, especially recently in Uzbekistan, which has just introduced laws, for example, on gender equality and gender-based violence. However, there are examples where further reform of laws could help spur action: for example, the crime prevention bill in Kyrgyzstan, the draft bill 'On Police' in Tajikistan, and further meaningful reforms of the legal code in Uzbekistan. Many of the changes cited as being needed were in strengthening the voices of public bodies, such as Public Councils and CPPTs, integrating them further into the daily practice of the MIA and regional structures.

In terms of other factors affecting community policing at the local level, **collaboration** was repeatedly cited across contexts. This was not only among communities and the police (which were

traditional targets of community policing efforts), but also of local self-governments (for example, *ayil okmotu* in Kyrgyzstan and *mahallas* in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) as well as local civil society and the media. Collaboration could include efforts such as greater outreach for police reporting days, meetings of collaborative platforms such as CPPTs, LCPCs or Public Councils, and greater local budgeting for community policing activities and action plans. In all three countries, locations that have seen increased collaboration and enhanced partnerships were also said to have experienced improved police effectiveness – due to increased public confidence and legitimacy of the police. At the national level, Public Councils should be strengthened, while at the same time ensuring diversity and inclusiveness and sufficient local and civil society input. The central MIAs could also do more to coordinate with local governments, authorities, and communities, and should pursue re-thinking of methods of evaluation (for example, focusing more on qualitative rather than just quantitative indicators of success).

Accountability could also be further strengthened through greater **communication**, including through social and traditional media use by the MIA and local police. Many civil society and community representatives pointed to the fact that the authorities could be opaque, so people were unaware of what was happening or what activities were being pursued to reduce crime or insecurity in their communities. Many cited positive experiences of using social media to increase interaction, such as through Facebook pages for local police, who could share what they were doing and respond to requests. Others cited positive trends where police distributed phone numbers or contact information for relevant staff. Other channels, such as SMS notifications for public meetings, were also said to be useful to encourage community participation in joint events, such as joint mapping or action planning exercises (where these existed). The presence of physical spaces – community policing centres – was also said to be an important factor in encouraging in-person meetings, as long as the functions of these centres were understood by all sides (rather than just being for police use). In addition to these communication measures that increase transparency of police activities, more formal police oversight mechanisms to prevent impunity could be set up. Here it will be important to include input from civil society, Public Councils and communities on existing gaps and ideas to improve accountability mechanisms.

Accountability was also found to be strengthened through **diverse, equal and inclusive membership** of police-public partnerships, Public Councils and in police recruitment. Some communities expressed concerns that selection of members was not always as competitive or transparent as it should be, and

they could sometimes face challenges when the MIA or its regional branches would intervene. These bodies would be more representative and effective with an open and independent selection process, including a diversity of identities and opinions. However, respondents suggested there were other challenges to be considered in relation to establishing inclusive and representative membership, such as existing tensions or reluctance of some groups to join such bodies. These challenges should be considered on a case-by-case basis, to help ensure that priorities and action plans are as representative of a range of community needs as possible – especially those of marginalised communities, including women, young people, religious, ethnic and other minority groups. The diversity of police was also cited as a major factor in determining levels of trust, cooperation and more sensitive responses to complaints. For example, women police are often more trusted by other women, especially when it comes to issues relating to gender-based violence.

In all three countries, the differences between **urban and rural** community policing efforts were clear. In rural areas, it was much easier to create connections and build trust, whereas in urban areas police served a much larger number of people and found it difficult to build sustainable partnerships. Respondents highlighted the need for different approaches, including separate modules at the MIA Academy, to tailor more people-focused approaches to policing in different settings.

In all cases, respondents highlighted **incentives for participation** as an important factor that determined the success of community policing. On the police side, this could come from senior-level political will and changes to evaluation systems that incentivise improved police–community relations. For both police and community members (who are unpaid participants of the community policing partnership teams) there should be other benefits, such as through training and building of skills, in addition to improvements to local safety, security and quality of life.

In terms of **issues that community policing addressed well**, those related to young people (through work with schools in particular) and women were seen as especially important. Given the huge barriers women face in reporting cases of abuse (due to stigma or lack of proper responses), this was often prioritised by community policing partnership teams and local authorities. Given the more gender-balanced membership of the teams, they were often well-placed to advise police on issues related to domestic violence, early marriage or other issues. Through the process of joint identification, prioritisation and action planning, the police-public

partnerships were also said to be effective at promoting tolerance, trust and collaboration between different groups who worked together to solve problems jointly. Young people also actively engaged in community policing partnership teams. Members expressed that this was an effective mechanism for discussing and addressing issues of particular relevance to young women and men, including bullying in schools, drug use, road safety, unemployment and vulnerability to online recruitment by violent groups.

The role of civil society and international organisations

Throughout our interviews, most respondents agreed that civil society and international organisations had a central role to play in advocating for and supporting more inclusive, responsive, transparent and accountable security provision, including through police reform and community policing. This included in pushing for progress toward reform at the national level and supporting local efforts where needed, making sure to balance material support with other forms, including training, technical advice and facilitation. While the contexts varied substantially, respondents were consistent in emphasising that reform was a long-term process and that criticism (especially from international organisations) should be constructive, not antagonistic. To do otherwise would risk disrupting cooperation and would frame reform as an undesirable, externally imposed agenda. Given policing challenges in many donor countries, it should not be difficult to frame improved policing as a shared goal, and one in which both sides can learn from lessons and share cases of success and good international practices.

At the local level, civil society – with international support – can plug funding gaps and provide trainings, guidance and tools to make community policing more effective. Civil society can play an important bridging role in connecting communities with local, sub-national and national authorities. In meetings and conferences in capitals, organisations can raise concerns that come out of their locally supported projects, such as through conflict and security assessments conducted by community policing partnership teams. They can in turn advocate for more responsive, inclusive and accountable security provision.

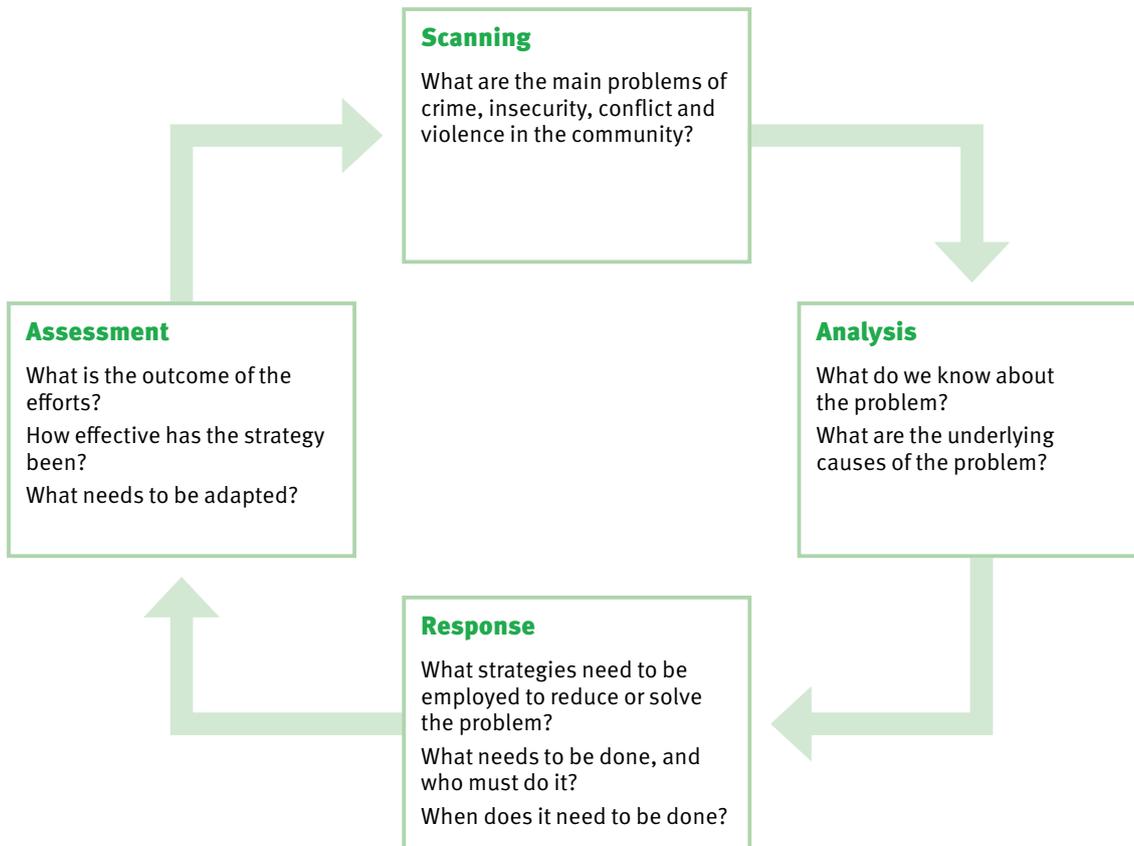
There were also areas where international organisations were well placed to add value – including exchanges of experience with other countries – due to their presence in multiple countries and regions. Efforts of international organisations should be coordinated to a greater degree within the countries, to see where overlaps occur and where a united advocacy front can be pursued in relation to specific changes and targets. Donors, multilaterals and intergovernmental organisations like the OSCE, which already engages substantially with governments in the region on community policing, should coordinate with civil society to continue to identify opportunities and gaps where additional technical expertise or funding can help governments meet their goals on community policing or police reform more widely.

In partnership with civil society and international organisations, the governments of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have made progress towards reforming the police and supporting local-level community policing initiatives that seek to build trust and cooperation with communities in order to improve community safety and security. But there is still a long journey ahead to truly move towards a more people-centred, human rights-compliant police service that is inclusive, accountable, transparent and responsive to people's day-to-day needs. At the national level, police still face significant distrust and are seen more as a repressive institution than one that serves the people. Because public confidence, police effectiveness and legitimacy are intrinsically linked, this mistrust directly impacts their ability to effectively carry out their duties or keep communities safe. Community policing provides an adaptable approach that can help improve trust between the police and the public, support collaborative problem-solving partnerships, and jointly identify and address issues of crime and insecurity so people can live free from fear and insecurity.

Annex



The SARA problem-solving model



Adapted from OSCE Mission in Kosovo/Department for Security and Public Safety CITAP 2007: SARA Problem-Solving Worksheet, Pristina 2007.

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe in a world where everyone can lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from fear and insecurity. We are a not-for-profit organisation working in 12 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

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ISBN 978-1-912901-22-7

