

# Human rights of women in prison – Advocating for women victims of violence who are in prison

Victimology Society of Serbia has implemented a two-year (2011-2013) project entitled Human rights of women in prison - Advocating for women victims of violence who are in prison. The project aimed to improve the living conditions of women in the Correctional Institution for Women in Požarevac, empowering women prisoners, particularly those who have previously suffered violence, and supporting the process of their reintegration. In addition, this project should contribute to reducing marginalization and discrimination against certain categories of female prisoners, as well as strengthening the capacity of prison staff in sensitive attitude to prisoners, especially those who have been victims of violence.

During the 2011th The following activities were implemented:

- Examination of the prison for women conditions and respect of human rights of prisoners. As part of these activity, the following was realized:
  - The workshop was organized for the VDS volunteers (April the 13th, 2011th) in order to acquaint them with the project, the prison system, with particular emphasis on international and European standards in relation to the execution of prison sentence, as well as the instruments used to collect data on prison conditions and the level of respect for the rights of women prisoners.
  - Creating the data-gathering instruments.
  - The collection of data, including:  
Observing conditions in the institution (visit of the Correctional Institution for Women was organized on April 26th, 2011th for the group of 6 volunteers and 2 coordinators of project activities)
- Through interviews with prisoners and staff of the Correctional Institution for Women in Požarevac.
- Campaign for battered women who committed (any) crime of violence because of the violence they were suffering, which continued the nine years ago started campaign Amnesty for victims of violence  
Through this activity, have been identified women who will in the future make a key target group for advocacy - older women (over 60 years) who suffered years of domestic violence and who committed crime related to that violence.
- Providing support to prisoners, including: emotional support, practical assistance and legal aid.
- Support is provided during direct contact with prisoners, which were held in the Correctional Institution for Women, as well as through writting letters and telephone conversations.
- Lobbying government authorities - in the framework of this activity, meetings were held with representatives of the Directorate for Execution of Criminal Sanctions of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Serbia and principal of the Correctional Institution for Women, Anka Gogić-Mitić.
- Raising public awareness about women in prison and their problems - Victimology Society of Serbia organized a press conference on May 5th, 2011th in Belgrade. The aim of the conference was to inform the public about the project and its related activities and to draw public attention to the problems of women in prison, and the prisoners themselves. At the conference were: Jasmina Nikolić, manageress of VDS info and victim support, Anka Gogić-Mitić, principal of the Correctional Institution for Women and prof. dr Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović, directress of Victimology Society of Serbia.
- Organize a series of six workshops for prisoners called To a life without violence. Workshops were organized for a group of 10 female prisoners, in order for women to learn how to recognize violence, victimization and bullying, to recognize the psychological processes of self and others relating to the violence, to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for coping with conflict constructively, to exit situations of violence and prevent their own violent behavior, as well as to strengthen the quality of a relationship with themselves and others. Workshops were organized from October untill Decembar 2011th in the premises of the Correctional Institution for Women. The workshops were designed and implemented by: prof. dr Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović, Dr. Sanja Čopić and Jasmina Nikolić.

During the 2012th activities in the field of advocacy for the advancement of women in prison were continued, both at the individual and at a general level:

- The amnesty campaign for women victims of violence who have committed crime was continued. Through the study of prison conditions and by providing direct support to prisoners who are serving a prison sentence, women prisoners that are involved in the campaign have been identified. The campaign organized a petition for a pardon of three women which committed a crime in connection with the violence they were previously exposed. We collected 103 signatures of individuals and organizations throughout Serbia. In addition, to the jurisdictional courts were sent the letters of support applications for parole for two women. The results of these activities are: two women got probation, two women were rejected for clemency and for a woman who has received a conditional release decision on pardon has not been made.
- During the 2012th the cooperation with the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights on the occasion of the launch of the campaign 16 Days of Activism, with respect to the commitment to pardon the women who were victims of domestic violence in relation to that committed the crime, has been continued. In this regard, the preparation of the public hearing was organized on November the 26th, 2012 in the Assembly of the Republic of Serbia as an inducement of the November 25th - International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.
- Lobbying government bodies also continued, and in this activity held meetings with the principal of the Correctional Institution for Women, Anka Gogić-Mitić, and heads of services for treatment, Deputy Ombudsman for the protection of persons deprived of their liberty, were held. The activities were carried out also in the framework of the National mechanism for Prevention of Torture, which will be discussed in the following report.

In the implementation of activities related to efforts in this project were directly involved: prof. Dr. Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović, Jasmina Nikolić and Dr Sanja Čopić.

Advocacy activities on the part of the project, which is **financially supported by the Open Society Institute, Budapest (Hungary)**.