

SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN  
ACTIVITY REPORT



**2014-2016**

## CONTENTS

Preface	3
Introduction	5
Human Rights	7
Social Inclusion	11
Transparency and Accountability	17
Local Budget	21
Youth Program	25
Public Policy	31
Media Program	35

# DEAR READERS,

It is my pleasure to offer you the activity report of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan for 2014-2016. To sum up our activity over the past three years, we decided to make a departure from the traditional annual reporting practice. The main reason behind it is that the foundation plans its activity for three years ahead, and the most relevant time for the summary falls at the end of the strategic cycle. Another reason is that modern information technologies enable us to speak in a timely fashion of current projects supported or implemented by the foundation in real time on the foundation's

pages in Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Above all, we regularly publish information on our website about the foundation's budget and allocated grants. All these aspects taken together set completely new requirements for the format and content of a periodic report, demanding more analytical depth, greater reflection, more examples, and more success stories.

This report, hopefully, reflects all the above criteria and will serve as a useful and interesting source of information on the activity of the foundation and its partners amid open society development in Kazakhstan.

**Anton Artemyev**  
Chair of the Executive Council





Al-Farabi Avenue, Kazakhstan.  
Photo: Zhanara Karimova

# INTRODUCTION

The foundation's mission is to promote open society values in Kazakhstan. During the period 2014 to 2016, we have been continuously supporting projects that strived to promote and protect values such as human rights, equality, transparency and accountability, freedom of speech and thought as well as self-expression.

In its previous strategy, the foundation focused on playing a role of a policy broker. In 2014 - 2016, the foundation's function of a transmitter of values, came more to the fore.

While selecting the areas of activity, the Board of Trustees and program personnel had to make some difficult decisions. The development of an open society calls for methodical work on a wide range of areas, while the foundation's resources are always limited.

To illustrate this, in 2014 the foundation had to stop its support for palliative care after many years of funding this area. However, in making such a decision, the Board of Trustees appreciated the fact that palliative care in Kazakhstan has gained public support and has a sustainable organizational network that offers aid to patients receiving palliative care. At the same time, the foundation's strategy for the period 2014 to 2016 included new areas such as the Local Budget, Social Inclusion, and Public Policy initiatives.

Over these three years, SFK supported many best practices in various areas of its operation. Beginning a new strategic cycle, the foundation intends to share its accumulated experience with its partners from among government agencies and non-governmental

organizations.

In 2017, the foundation will continue with most of the programs and initiatives covered by this report: Social Inclusion, Transparency and Accountability, the Media Program, and Public Policy. The Local Budget initiative will merge with the Transparency and Accountability program.

From 2017, the Youth Program will be transformed into the New Civil Initiatives program. We are happy to note that many projects which had been initially supported by our foundation, such as urban development projects, now find support from new donors. Youth will remain a prime focus, though new opportunities will emerge to cooperate with all civil society's representatives.

The program will strive to support innovative forms of cooperation between different representatives of civil society to protect free speech, develop civil participation, and promote non-discrimination and inclusion.

Open Economy, a new initiative, will be launched to support inclusive economic reforms that respect and promote social justice, human rights and participatory policy-development practices.

New ambitious goals lie before each area, all of which will lead to an open, active, and progressive society in Kazakhstan. Only concerted efforts on the part of civil society and public bodies will help to achieve these goals. The new 2017 to 2019 three-year strategy pins its hopes on encouraging active dialogue between these parties.

**Nargis Kassenova**  
Chair of the Board of Trustees





Lyazzat Kaltayeva, Early Parliamentary Elections in Kazakhstan.  
Almaty, 20 March 2016  
Photo: Vladimir Tretyakov



# HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights in Kazakhstan were to the fore in the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan's (SFK) recent activity. For the period 2014 to 2016, the foundation accomplished two important tasks in Kazakhstan: encouraging the development of a new generation of professional human rights defenders and supporting existing human rights organizations.

## NEW GENERATION

In 2013, SFK launched a scholarship program Building the Capacity of Human Rights Defenders with the aim of engaging young activists, including political scientists, lawyers, and journalists, to work together and improve their human rights qualifications, thus ensuring a continuously refreshed legacy of trained human rights defenders.

Each year, between 10 and 12 new students are selected to study four training modules based on international standards for human rights education. The first module is an introduction to human rights; the second module sees trainees select a topic and conduct a monitoring study; the third module sees the trainees develop an advocacy strategy

to resolve their selected topic; and the fourth module sees the strategy defended before a panel of human rights experts. The best projects are eligible for an SFK implementation grant.

The foundation invites the trainees to meetings with international organizations and encourages dialogue with experts from across the globe. This collaboration is reflected in their research projects, in which the course participants, under the leadership of experienced mentors who are independent human rights defenders, raise a wide range of issues and provide detailed analysis in their studies. Over the past three years, the project participants have submitted research studies in different human rights fields such as free speech; access to

In 2016, SFK launched the third round of the program, in which human rights studies were submitted in the state language, Kazakh, for the first time.

a fair trial; the rights of socially vulnerable groups; access to education; access to information; and introduced their advocacy strategies to areas beyond the training program.

*«The program has helped me to maintain a professional approach to human rights that are universal for all, regardless of gender, race, age, social origin, gender identity, or sexuality».*

*Zhanna Baitelova, course participant, Building Capacity of Human Rights Defenders project*

SFK supported the project of course participant Gulmira Birzhanova on strategic litigation, which is the process of appealing rulings made by Kazakhstan's Supreme Court at the UN Human Rights Committee.

Veniamin Alayev, another course participant, studied the right to work for disabled people. With SFK's support, he developed guidelines for employers on the employment of disabled



### 30 trainees

graduated from the scholarship program over the past three years



### 6 projects

received implementation grants



Early Parliamentary Elections in Kazakhstan.  
Almaty, 20 March 2016  
Photo: Vladimir Tretyakov

Kazakhstanis and submitted his proposal to members of the Mazhilis, the lower chamber of Kazakhstan's Parliament.

*«The program has enabled me to grow professionally and meet like-minded people. The knowledge I've gained encouraged me to take a global approach to the problems of the group of disabled people that I defend».*

*Veniamin Alayev, course participant, Building Capacity of Human Rights Defenders project*

Parkhat Yusupdzhanov, a visually impaired person, developed draft amendments to Kazakhstan's legislation regulating equal access to higher education for disabled people in cooperation with SFK. These recommendations have been submitted to the Mazhilis.

The studies of the program participants are available on the SFK's website in its publications section.

The most important thing the scholarship program offers Kazakhstan is a new generation of human rights defenders equipped with the skills to analyze

and monitor the situation on the ground and prepare high-quality studies for the further protection of human rights in our country.

## SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

SFK has long cooperated with the entire human rights community of Kazakhstan, including the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, the Human Rights Charter Public Foundation, the Kadyr-Kasiyet Public Union, and the Kazakhstan Children's Fund Public Foundation.

Open lecture by KIMEP Assistant Professor Sergey Sayapin.  
Astana, 10 December 2015  
Photo: Ainel Kainazarova







Debate Tournament.  
Kazakh State Law University,  
Astana, 11 December 2016  
Photo: Ainel Kainazarova

SFK also supports the participation of Kazakhstan's human rights defenders in the UN's global human rights mechanisms and in the submission of alternative reports, in which our partners focus on aspects that require the participation of state-level reformers. This is an important cooperation tool that encourages dialogue between the authorities and the human rights community. It acts as a reminder to the state of its human rights obligations, assesses positive changes, identifies remaining problems, and encourages an exchange of best practice at global level between the parties involved and with UN agencies.

## HUMAN RIGHTS VALUES

*«Each year, we support World Human Rights Day to demonstrate that human rights are not something alien, rather the universal values of modern society».*

*Aizhan Oshakbayeva, Human Rights project coordinator*

World Human Rights Day, marked annually on December 10, is one of the most important dates for SFK. In Kazakhstan it is celebrated with a variety of public events: debate tournaments, lectures, conferences, and exhibitions. In this way, we are engaged in the global movement to support human rights. In 2016, SFK helped Open Mind launch the Living Memory lecture series, dedicated to historical memory, political repression, and deportations.

The project's goal is to encourage widespread discussion of the political repression and other tragic events of the 1930s to 1950s and provide answers to underexplored questions through the talks of speakers and historians as well as from personal stories, and, most importantly, to prevent the repetition of the same mistakes of those tragic years.

Within SFK's new strategy for 2017 to 2019, the Human Rights program envisages continuing the New Generation of Human Rights Defenders scholarship program in both Kazakh, the state language, and Russian, to support projects related to this initiative, and to develop innovative approaches to the protection of human rights and freedoms.



Alexey Kapustin, Training Café employee.  
Photo: Vladimir Tretyakov



# SOCIAL INCLUSION

Less than seven percent of people living with disabilities in Kazakhstan are in employment and able to support themselves to maintain an independent life. Among the group of people suffering from mental illnesses this ratio is close to zero. Life for these people offers two choices: either an isolated existence in residential care facilities or an isolated existence in the family home. Their interests are of little concern to most, and hardly anyone speaks about their rights.

SFK has always supported the rights of the most vulnerable groups in society and in 2014 the Social inclusion initiative was set up with the aim of ending isolation for people from these vulnerable groups and providing equal opportunities to education, work, and housing for all members of society.

## INDEPENDENT LIFE

The right to live an independent life and to employment is inalienable for all. Many countries offer alternative types of accommodation for people with mental health issues who need support, such as apartments and residential care, along with employment opportunities in protected workplaces and in social enterprises.

Kazakhstan only has large-scale residential care facilities, such as the 700-bed facility in Almaty that is home to people with psycho-neurological and psychiatric disorders, Down syndrome, and various forms of autism. SFK supports the handful of NGOs that offer, through their projects, alternative forms of accommodation and employment for people suffering from mental illness.

## TRAINING CAFÉ

Almaty's Training Café is Kazakhstan's first café staffed entirely by people living with learning disabilities and mental health disorders. It was founded in 2016 by Anna Kudiyarova, the head of Kazakhstan's Psychoanalytical Association, with

the help of an SFK grant.

This experience is a first for Kazakhstan; 40 people with mental health disorders, who mostly reside in medical and social care facilities, have found employment in the small café. Both mass media and social media covered the café's opening, with many bloggers visiting the café for lunch and then



Saule Toganbekova, Training Café employee.  
Photo: Vladimir Tretyakov

Training Café, Almaty.  
Photo: SFK Archive

*«I really like to work and be useful. In fact, I'm not afraid to work. Each working day in Training Café is like a gulp of fresh air. Frankly, I just want to live like a normal person».*

*Alexey Kapustin, 23, who lives in a residential care facility, found his first job in Training Café*

inviting their followers to visit. Almaty City Hall also offered its support by providing free premises for the project. Soon, there will be a second Training Café in Almaty.

Having learnt about this alternative model for social inclusion, similar cafés were opened in the city of Aktau and in the town of Kokpekty, in East Kazakhstan Region, with the support of the local authorities. Training Café has become a place of work, but it also offers a chance for 40 young people with mental health issues to play a meaningful role in society. An unexpected outcome of the project was that four Training Café staff members – Kairat, Aksaule, Zhuldyz, and Dima – managed to reunite with their families.

*«At first, I feared people would laugh at me, call me bad names, tell me I have a mental disorder. But our psychologist taught us to accept ourselves the way we are and pay no attention toward the opinion of others. I love my job a lot. I learn a lot here and feel I have something to share. I like to welcome guests, serve them, talk to them».*

*Kairat Sarsenbiyev, 25, Training Café's most smiley worker*



place for people living with mental health disorders. The clubhouse operates with the support of the local authorities in collaboration with SFK.

Alrami's visitors learn to live an independent life and gain communication, housekeeping, professional, and employment training skills. The last aspect is particularly important as the clubhouse's main goal is to enable its members to adapt to living independently in society.

SFK supports Alrami's aspirations to gain international accreditation and comply with best global practice. Since the clubhouse opened over 30 users of its services have found jobs and, despite having been diagnosed with various mental disorders, they continue, with some ongoing support, to live an active, autonomous, and independent life.

### CHILDREN HAVE GROWN INTO ADULTS

Working together with SFK, the Kenes Comprehensive

Rehabilitation Center established an Adult Employment Center to solve a problem identified by teachers and parents of children living with mental health disorders. After leaving school, as these children grew into adults, they had nowhere to go and nothing to do. Kenes set up its employment center to train the school-leavers to create handicrafts and make pottery, at the same time engaging and maintaining links between the former students. The center's products make popular gifts.

Kenes has replicated its experience by organizing numerous practical training seminars for regional specialists over the past three years. In 2016, based on the Kenes Center model, an Adult Employment Center was set up in Astana; negotiations are underway on setting up such centers in other cities. The support to the Adult Employment Center is very important as its work helps change the perceptions of the public toward people living with mental health issues. This is where inclusion starts.

### ALRAMI CLUBHOUSE

The Alrami Clubhouse, in Pavlodar, provides an alternative meeting



**70 people**  
visit Alrami day care  
center every day



**30 regular visitors**  
to Alrami have found  
jobs





Kenes Center pottery.  
Photo: Vladimir Tretyakov

## SHOW ME, AND I WILL UNDERSTAND. TELL ME, AND I WILL HEAR

With SFK's support, the Rukh Public Foundation organized an unusual forum «Show Me, I Will Understand, Tell Me, I Will Hear». For the first time, young people with different mental disorders were able to speak openly and on equal footing about themselves, their daily life, and the difficulties and challenges they face because of their status.

The forum has generated great interest in mass media and among the public. Statements made by the participants can be found through the following [link](#).

*«I was diagnosed with a disability. Disability is when*

*a person cannot stand up, cannot take care of himself, and waits for others to help him. I don't believe I am disabled, I can take care of myself, help myself, and others».*

*Karlygash Umbetova, 25, forum participant and resident of the municipal Center for Special Social Services*

## ON THE ROAD TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

SFK supports inclusive education in Kazakhstan's schools, but at the present time not all schools are ready to introduce it. While some schools are willing to launch the process, but are not quite confident enough yet, others have embarked on the road and are gaining more experience year by year.

Between 2014 and 2016, SFK

supported projects launched by Karaganda school #27 and Kokshetau school #19 that approached the development of inclusive education practice in their regions in different ways. Kokshetau school #19, with the support of the Education Department of the Akmola Region, was used as a pilot scheme to set up the Coordination Council for Inclusive Education Development that identified management procedures and introduced a comprehensive approach to the development of inclusive education at the regional level.

In the period from 2014 to 2016, a pilot project was launched to develop an Inclusive Education Basics course, with SFK partnering with the Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University. The course's methodology and contents were tested in practical workshops and training sessions provided in both Kazakh and Russian for teachers from



### КӨЛЕҢКЕДЕГІ ӨМІР

Сандық иллюстрация, 2016 ж.

Бұл Иван. Иван пісірілген кремді, өз үйі, теңізді, сонымен қатар өзін жақсы көретін Эннiді ұнатады. Иванның не жегі, қайда тұру, сақатқа қайда бару, өз өмірін кіммен өткізу туралы таңдау мүмкіндігі жоқ. Ол үшін барлығын өзгелер шешіп қойған. Иван өмірі туралы фильмде екінші пландалы рөлді сомдаушы болып табылады.

### БЫТЬ ВТОРОСТЕПЕННЫМ В СВОЕЙ СОБСТВЕННОЙ ЖИЗНИ

Цифровая иллюстрация, 2016 г.

Это Иван. Иван любит заварной крем, свой дом, море и Энн, которая также любит его. Но Иван не имеет возможности выбирать, что есть, где жить, куда поехать в путешествие, с кем проводить свою жизнь. Все решается за Ивана. В фильме о своей собственной жизни Иван играет второстепенную роль.





Inclusive class, school 19, Kokshetau.  
Photo: Assel Tsudzhimura

pedagogical institutions from five regions of Kazakhstan. Education professionals are now using the training and methodological materials that were developed, including the Glossary of Psychological and Pedagogical Terms for Inclusive Education, published in both Russian and Kazakh.

An important condition for introducing inclusive education is to come to a common understanding of what the term “inclusion” means. Taking this into account, SFK initiated a project

to have the National Frameworks of Inclusive Education Monitoring in the Republic of Kazakhstan developed by Kazakhstani specialists and international experts in 2016.

### HOW MUCH CAN PARENTS DO?

Parents that bring up children with different mental disorders and learning difficulties have an important role to play in the process of developing inclusive education. For many, the issue of their children’s adaptation to society and the development of his or her educational capacities becomes their lifework.

In 2014, the foundation published a book *How Much Can Parents Do?* in both Kazakh and Russian. It is a compilation of 15 motivational stories of Kazakhstani families from different parts of the country, whose children with special needs attended public

schools and kindergartens. The parents recount how they fought depression, and through soul-searching and specialist help, and a belief in their own children, were finally able to achieve success.

All these projects supported by the foundation between 2014 and 2016 under the auspices of the Social inclusion initiative show that “to live, study and work without isolation” are not just beautiful words, but practical, achievable goals for those children and adults that are often left by themselves with their problems. The projects primarily focused on people living with mental health problems. A general message that the foundation sends through its projects is that members of society who think they are “normal” must acknowledge the rights of people with special needs and accept the world’s diversity as a fact of life. The program is set to continue within the foundation’s new strategy.



#### 42% of schools

in Kazakhstan, as of 2015, were ready for inclusive education. 70% of Kazakhstan's schools must be ready for inclusive education by 2020





# TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

## TRANSPARENCY OF EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES

SFK's Transparency and Accountability program focuses on the disclosure of information about revenue earned from Kazakhstan's extractive industries. These revenues are an important source of Kazakhstan's budget income. As a recent study shows, a majority of Kazakhstanis, some 83%, have no idea how much the country earns annually from its oil and gas sales.

The foundation was instrumental in helping a coalition of NGOs in Kazakhstan join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). EITI is a reconciliation check, where the government

reports the amount received from the extractive industries, and extractive companies show the amount submitted to the budget. International audit companies oversee this procedure annually.

After joining the initiative, the National Stakeholders Council on EITI implementation in Kazakhstan was established, with SFK's active participation. This council is comprised of representatives from government, NGOs, and extractive companies. This format is used to discuss the EITI report results. SFK's goal is to support widespread discussion of EITI and the revenues of the extractive industries in the region.

## NGO'S ROLE

When dealing with state bodies in Kazakhstan, NGOs sometimes lack concise arguments to support their position. To address this, SFK has cultivated an evidence-based approach using studies and data analysis to support each statement, rather than relying on emotional stereotypes. By using such an approach, the authorities are compelled to address the NGO's concerns.

In 2016, the foundation commissioned a comprehensive study conducted by BISAM-Central Asia, an Almaty-based social and market research organization, into public awareness of the role EITI plays in Kazakhstan. The study results showed that Kazakhstanis know little about EITI and the country's oil revenues.

SFK recommended that EITI stakeholders implement changes that engage the public in the process of improving the transparency and accountability of revenues. The survey will be repeated after six months to monitor progress in this area.

## AT THE LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING

The annual EITI report, a 120-page document that uses detailed accounting terminology, is difficult for the public to understand and interpret. Despite the report being available as an open source





*«EITI means little to the most important stakeholders of Kazakhstan - its citizens. Kazakhstan has to use revenues from the energy sector to the maximum extent for the development of public health, education, and infrastructure. In the current difficult economic conditions, the government must ensure a more efficient, as well as more transparent, and accountable expenditure of funds».*

*Anton Artemyev, SFK Chair of the Executive Council*

document, this problem with making sense of the report has meant that it has had virtually no effect on raising public trust in the authorities. SFK urges the promotion of public discussion of the report across all the regions of Kazakhstan.

Another factor that has slowed the process of interpreting the report's findings is the lack of standard translation of extractive industry terminology into Kazakh. In 2016, SFK, at the request of the government, financed the publication of a trilingual glossary of resource management terms. The working group consisted of members of the EITI Implementation secretariat, NGOs, and experts from the A.Baitursynov Institute of Linguistics. The glossary was produced within four months, approved by the National Council of Stakeholders of EITI Kazakhstan, and posted on its website.

## PUBLIC BUDGET OPENNESS

The Open Budget Index is an international initiative, run by the International Budget Partnership (IBP), which Kazakhstan has been a member of since 2006. Surveys are conducted in more than 100 countries and the results are presented as a transparency score

on a 100-point scale. These scores are then placed on an index, making it easy to compare the data from different countries.

The initiative aspires to make budgetary information more widely accessible and ensure greater public oversight, invite public opinion on budget decisions and oversight, and to encourage strong, independent supervision by the legislative branch of power and public auditors.

Kazakhstan's ranking in the index has gradually improved over the years. The next goal that state bodies and cooperating NGOs should aspire to is to reach a score of 61, the level that acknowledges that the authorities share a considerable volume of budgetary information with the public.

In September 2016, in close cooperation with SFK, representatives of IBP visited Kazakhstan and met the speaker of the Mazhilis, representatives of the Ministry of Finance, and

of the Accounts Committee. The meetings were dedicated to solving problems that are preventing the country from advancing its position on the index and developing opportunities to improve the open budget situation. The attention the authorities paid to this matter leaves hope for considerable improvement of the situation in 2017.

## OECD AND CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

Becoming a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a body that unites the 35 most developed countries in the world, is an important aim for Kazakhstan. In 2015, Kazakhstan and the OECD signed a bilateral cooperation agreement, whereby OECD experts organized a cross-sectoral study and developed recommendations for Kazakhstan's government

### Open Budget Index: Kazakhstan







on issues of open government; transparent and accountable governance; decentralization; gender policy; and many other matters. Despite the completion of the bilateral program at the end of 2016, strategic cooperation between Kazakhstan and the OECD on a wide range of topics continues. Aside from new recommendations that need to be developed, the implementation of recommendations already made will be in focus in the coming years.

SFK sees itself as a mediator between the OECD and civil society in Kazakhstan and supports the active participation of NGOs and independent experts

in consultations with OECD representatives. To this end, the foundation has been actively supporting such meetings and consultations throughout 2016.

Recommendations made by SFK and its partners were included in two OECD reports released in early 2017: *Kazakhstan: Towards a More Effective, Strategic and Accountable State and Decentralization and Multilevel Governance in Kazakhstan*.

### **LONG-TERM VIEW**

Joining the Open Government Partnership, a multilateral initiative that aims to secure

concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance, is a logical step for Kazakhstan. The initiative helps participating countries improve the work and accountability of state bodies, improve public resource management efficiency, create safer communities, and improve corporate reporting. SFK supports the action group in its activity related to Kazakhstan joining the initiative. The viability of such a step was discussed at the government level and the final decision is still under discussion.



Open Budget Training, Kokshetau.  
Photo: SFK archive



# LOCAL BUDGET

In 2014, SFK launched the Local Budget initiative to develop the practice of budget transparency and accountability and engage Kazakhstanis in the local level decision-making process. The foundation has developed a working relationship with the Ministry of Regional Development, which was disbanded and became the Ministry of National Economy. This cooperation resulted in pilot projects being implemented across Kazakhstan's regions. These projects became the basis for self-governance development, prioritized both by SFK and the state.

## SELF-GOVERNANCE PILOT PROJECT

In 2014, SFK organized a visit to Poland for a working group consisting of representatives from NGOs and local authorities to learn from Poland's local self-governance experience. The knowledge and experience gained were then transferred into pilot projects in some rural districts of South Kazakhstan, West Kazakhstan, Karaganda, and Akmola Regions. SFK and its partner, the National Budget Network of Kazakhstan, worked with rural mayors and governors to show them how to engage local communities in decision-making and how to turn local budgets into user-friendly infographics. The selected towns and villages differ in population size (between 800 to 36,000 people), thus, the degree of trust for the rural officials and their initiatives varied. Issues related to relations between the public and the authorities were taken into consideration.

As an experiment, from 2014 the government set up "control cash accounts" in Kazakhstan's towns and villages. These were small sums compared to the whole budget and were made up of fines and some tax revenue. The mayors worked with representatives of the local community, holding public discussions and making joint decisions on the use of funds. These are the first steps to transfer local budget management to towns and villages in the future. These pilot projects help develop self-governance skills.

## SOCIAL AUDIT

SFK, with the methodological support of the International Budget Partnership (IBP), has implemented a number of social audit projects in Kazakhstan. At the end of 2014, a working group visited India, a leader in social audit development, to learn from its experience.

The social audit is an effective mechanism, when

Local Self-Governance  
Draft Law:

In 2018, all settlements with the population of 2000 will have autonomous budget.

In 2020, all settlements with no exception will have the budget.

Sholpan Aitenova, Executive Director  
Public Fund ZERTTEU  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE.  
Photo: SFK archive



### Social Audit of Ak Bulak Public Program

Between 2011 and 2014, four facilities were funded for 828 million tenge in the Ili area in the villages of Tlendiyeva, Boralday, Zhetygen and Tuyebayeva.

**Stage one:** the working group analyzed reports on the Ak Bulak program for 2013-2014, and transferred the reports into a user-friendly format. Volunteers were trained to perform a social audit.

**Stage two:** data on the four water supply facilities was collected through site visits and surveying local inhabitants; local and district mayors were interviewed along with the heads of public utility companies; public hearings were held in the four villages; methodology developed; and social audit guidelines were prepared.

**Stage three:** public hearings were held, resolutions were adopted, and public complaints were resolved.

companies commissioned by the local authorities conduct work or provide services, but the community as the main beneficiaries are not satisfied with the quality. The mechanism functions simply: an active group representing the community, having studied the implementation progress of a specific budget program, files a complaint with the local authorities, then public hearings are organized with a third party where remedies are sought collectively.

### OPEN LOCAL BUDGET INDEX

From 2011, Kazakhstan, with SFK's support, has measured the openness of local budget reporting with the Open Local Budget Index (OLBI). The expert group works with data from the budgets of Kazakhstan's 14 regions, and the cities of Astana and Almaty. The main assessment criteria are the openness of information and how user-friendly it is.

OLBI helps to identify levels of budget process transparency at the regional level. The scores of Kazakhstan's regions can be compared and this motivates local administrations to improve

the transparency of budgetary information. In addition, this index helps identify which regions better enable their citizens to participate in the budget process.

Any citizen who wishes to know the amount of money their region spends on education or public health, for instance, will now find it easy to understand the published budget. In 2011, the Ministry of Finance set up a working group of NGOs and SFK's experts who developed Instructions on Creating a Citizens Budget, a resource that is now used by governors in all regions.

The 2015 index has revealed that local authorities submit to the

public a minimum of information on their budget and financial operations. This means that citizens have no chance to track how the budget is spent. In other words, the regions are not yet accountable to the population.

SFK and its partner NGOs continue to work with the administrations of Almaty, Astana and Kyzylorda Region that have the worst scores. The report is presented, the results explained, and specific examples are used to demonstrate what needs to be done to improve the score in future.

Following consultations with SFK and experts from Kazakhstan's National Budget Network, the OECD included a proposal to use the Open Local Budget Index to assess the level of accountability of local authorities in its recommendations to the government.

### FACILITATING DIALOGUE

SFK supported the launch of the [aktaulife.kz](http://aktaulife.kz) website, an online forum for citizens to discuss pressing matters of everyday life in Aktau and discuss the city's future development. This website distinguishes itself from others by the fact that representatives from the local authority are present. The project is a pilot one; the



Social Audit Training, Taraz.  
Photo: SFK archive





experience gained will be applied to projects in other cities. The operational dialogue platform will in future be funded by the local administration.

SFK also places a special focus on reporting about self-governance and local budget transparency. To this end, a grant was allocated in 2015 to the Kazak Tili organization for training Kazakh-language journalists

in budget transparency and accountability. Over 50 journalists working for regional outlets from South Kazakhstan, Zhambyl and Kyzylorda Regions took part in the training programs. In 2016, this project for journalists and bloggers was repeated in North Kazakhstan, Kostanay, Akmola and Pavlodar Regions.

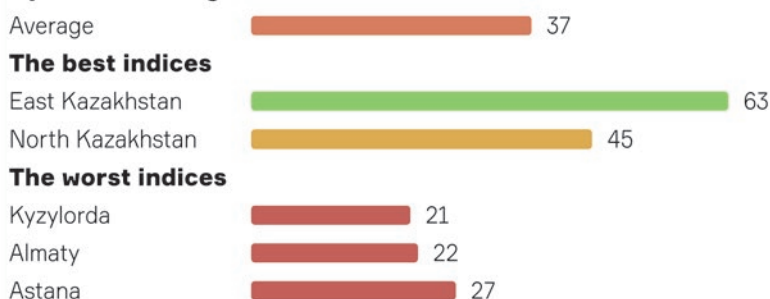
For the past three years, this Local Budget initiative, in

Journalist Training in Budget Transparency, Kostanai.  
Photo: Ainel Kainazarova

partnership with local authorities, has been tackling the important problem of involving the local community in self-governance. SFK aims to show Kazakhstan's citizens that they have the right to know how the budget is set and spent, where best to spend money, and how to rate the efficiency of expenditure. Moreover, it must become an inalienable part of life across Kazakhstan.

From 2017, SFK will continue with its activities on enhancing transparency and accountability at the local level within the framework of the Transparency and Accountability program.

### Open Local Budget Index score in 2015







# YOUTH PROGRAM

## YOUTH IN THE LIMELIGHT

Over the years, SFK's Youth Program has gathered the most active, energetic, open, and progressive elements of Kazakhstan's youth. Projects supported by SFK within this program reached almost every region of the country.

Between 2014 and 2016, the development of a volunteer movement became one of the Youth Program's key areas. SFK focused on training the trainers, where young, active people from the regions could not only participate in the training in the basics and standards of volunteer work and project management,

but also transfer the knowledge they gained to others to initiate volunteer projects in their regions. Our partner, the Seimar Social Foundation, held training sessions across the country within the framework of the School of Trainers project.

The Shanyrak Public Foundation held a series of training sessions in Kazakh in 20 villages in four regions under the Auyt Shakyrdy (The Village is Calling) project. The participants received not only classics of Kazakh literature, but also materials on the main training topics: leadership, communication, and fundraising.

In Atbasar, a city park was renovated by young volunteers.

The renovation of the park attracted socially active citizens and became an excellent example of community unification in the efforts to resolve a shared problem. A team of 1700 young volunteers from the city was set up to help renovate the park, with 10 jobs created in the process.

In Pavlodar Region, under the Engagement of Rural Youth into Local Self-Governance project, young people from the Pavlodar, Aktogai, Zhelezinsk, Bayanaul and Maisk Regions attended a series of five practical workshops on local self-governance, budgeting and electoral participation.

In Shymkent, training sessions were held for hearing impaired people to improve their employment opportunities and draw the attention of fellow residents to their problems.

In Semey, young activists launched the GeoHunt.kz website, a mobile-based city map that enables any resident to tag an urban problem and receive a reply from one of the local authority's departments. The nature conservation service noted the positive impact that GeoHunt had made, with an increase in budget revenues from fines paid by offenders.



Youth contest.  
Photo: Zanara Karimova

ZhasCamp, an informal platform for the discussion of youth issues, has been supported by SFK's Youth Program since 2010. Its slogan, "Think Informally, Act Efficiently," is still relevant today. Over the past two years, the youth dialogue platform has been operating in different parts of Kazakhstan. Initially it was based in Almaty, bringing together up to 250 people from across the country to discuss youth themes and issues every year. In 2015, young activists held meetings in Astana, Aktau, and Shymkent, and in 2016 in Taldykorgan and Semey. In two other cities, Atyrau and Pavlodar, the meetings could not be held because of local government interference. This was the first time that this had happened in the six years of ZhasCamp's existence.

ZhasCamp.  
Photo: web-site zhascamp.kz

*«With the help of ZhasCamp, a coalition of 20 youth organizations became members of the Mazhilis working group. We made 120 proposals to the Youth Policy concept and 43 proposals to amend the law. Thanks to this platform over 30 social initiatives were set up».*

*Irina Mednikova, director general, Youth Information Service of Kazakhstan Public Foundation*

## SUPPORTING CREATIVITY

The support of creative activity among young people has always played a special part in the foundation's work. The task of the Youth Program in this regard is to focus the younger generation on artistic and creative activities that can be used to raise awareness of social topics and reflect some of the pressing issues of our society.

Over three years, the program has supported many important social projects.

Tolerance, a competition for young cartoonists, was organized by SFK, together with the Goethe Institute in Kazakhstan, in 2014. The competition drew attention to cartoons, an art form that is undervalued in Kazakhstan, and the social issue of tolerance. The work of the finalists was displayed at the Tengri Umai gallery in Almaty.

The foundation also sponsored an art exhibition 1937: Territory of Memory: Mourning in conjunction with the Ilyas Dzhansugurov Public Foundation in 2015, in which contemporary artists took a personalized look at the political repressions of the 1930s. The exhibition was held in Almaty, Karaganda, Semey and Astana.

The wave of political repression that hit Kazakhstan in the 1930s affected almost every family, regardless of nationality. In those







years, Kazakhstan was at the center of mass repression and thousands were deported here to work in its labor camps. The sheer scale of the repression and the consequences remain a largely underexplored topic among many people, especially the younger generation.

*«An enduring value of art lies in its enormous power to influence the heart and soul of a person through emotional perception, and then influence his conscience».*

*Azhar Dzhandosova, president of the Ilyas Dzhangugurov Public Foundation*

SFK has also been active in supporting the documentary section of the Clique Film Festival with *Chuck Norris vs Communism*, *Wolf Pack*, and *Project of the Century* shown in 2015, and *The Days of North Korea*, and *Turksib*, shown in 2016. *Turksib* was shown

with a live soundtrack written especially for the occasion by famous Kazakhstani composer Kuat Shildebayev.

In summer 2015, the art project *Eighth River* took place in the Ile-Alatau National Park, south of Almaty. During a three-week stay near Kok-Zhaylau, young artists from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia got acquainted with the territory, the way of life of local inhabitants, and interpreted the history and culture of the region. This trip resulted in a four-month open-air exhibition of contemporary art along the hiking trails to Kok-Zhaylau.

Boris Baykov, Kuat Shildebayev.  
Music-writing to *Turksib* movie.  
Photo: Sabina Kuangaliyeva

## DOCUMENTARY THEATER

In 2015, as part of celebrations marking SFK's 20th anniversary, Almaty welcomed *Teatr.doc*, the innovative Moscow-based documentary theater collective, which performed its plays *24 Plus*, *Lear-Klesch*, and *Akyn-Opera 2*.

In the same year, Heiner Meuller's *Medea Material* was performed in Almaty. This play

*Turksib*, shot in 1929, chronicled the construction of the Turkestan to Siberia railway in Kazakhstan. *Turksib* is considered to be Kazakhstan's first documentary. It nicely reflects the spirit of the time, raises questions on identity, transformation, and the modernization of Kazakhstan's society - issues that remain relevant today just as they were 80 years ago.



Sports Concept Project.  
An urban initiative contest winner at the Urban Forum Almaty, 2016.  
Photo: Zhanara Karimova



is an example of postdramatic theater which focuses on the aesthetics of the performance rather than the drama itself. This performance sparked debate about contemporary avant-garde theater in Kazakhstan, which will allow theater companies and individual authors greater freedom in the search for new forms of expression.

In 2016, the foundation supported three performances of “Communities” by Olga Malysheva, a play about migration, LGBT issues, and soul-searching. The performances were in different city locations around Almaty. This play was an example of documentary theater, which sees no restrictions or limits on topics and formats and looks for honesty in the presentation of materials.

*«I realized that Almaty needs documentary theater and, what's most important, is that Almaty's ready for documentary theater».*

*Olga Malysheva wrote on Vlast.kz after the performances*

## PARTISAN CINEMA

The Plague at the Karatas Village, a film by Kazakhstan's Adilkhan Yerzhanov, made with SFK's support, was awarded the best Asian feature film prize at the Rotterdam International Film Festival in 2016 and won the grand prize of Kinoshok – Open CIS and Baltic Film Festival, 2016, as well as picking up a Best Director award at Kazakhstan's Eurasia International Film Festival. This film is part of a trilogy supported by SFK; the first part, Constructors, was filmed in 2013 and the third part, God in the Karatas Village, is due for release in 2017.

Adilkhan Yerzhanov is a major player in Kazakhstan's “Partisan Movement,” which is opposed to movies shot with generous state backing and wants to show the market that pictures with big ideas can be shot on a low budget.

The “Partisan Movement” manifesto is based on three tenets: shooting without a budget; social realism; and creating one's own cinematic language. These movies pointedly and grotesquely reflect the modern reality of Kazakhstani society. After official screenings, the films are posted on the web and made accessible for the public to watch.

## URBAN INITIATIVES

In cities, as in a drop of water, the key challenges and opportunities of our society are reflected. The fundamental principles defining the foundation's priorities in this field are the engagement of citizens in the decision-making process and interaction between citizens and the administration on an equal footing.

In 2015, with SFK's support, the first Urban Forum Almaty (UFA) was held. UFA is a platform where interested and involved citizens can discuss the problems and issues related to urban development. The forum brought together a group of experts in architecture, urban planning, political science, social science, and marketing. One positive result of the forum was the establishment of the Urban Planning Center at Almaty City Hall and the implementation of eight city development projects which came out of a contest held by SFK's Youth Program.

The theme of UFA 2016 was Resilience (sustainability, viability, elasticity). It explored questions of how the city, as a sustainable system, could develop itself in a constructive way, and how the city can resist negative factors, and cope with a deficit of external and internal resources without losing its identity. These issues were discussed jointly by city dwellers and representatives of the administration, business, and mass media.

The forum also summarized the interim results of the work of the city development projects implemented after UFA 2015.

*«SFK is a general partner of Urban Forum Almaty and played a key role in creating and developing a platform which enabled professional growth and the revelation of new important, civil roles for all those engaged in the forum».*

*Asel Yeszhanova, organizer, Urban Forum Almaty*

At the end of UFA 2016, SFK announced a contest for proposals on how to develop suburban areas of Almaty in 2017; a logical follow-up to the urban development initiatives started in the previous year.

2016 was the last year for SFK's Youth Program in its traditional form. During the next strategic cycle, it will be transformed into the New Civil Initiatives program. This is not to say that youth will no longer be the target audience for the foundation. On the contrary, the foundation hopes to expand its engagement with all active members of society, offering fresh perspectives on how things stand, and strives to support innovative forms of cooperation between different representatives of civil society. Often, it is the younger generation who are full of fresh ideas.

*«The development of the Youth Program has been based on the energy, enthusiasm and dedication of our partners committed to their projects. We believe that the majority of youth in Kazakhstan has a positive approach to the future and they strive to contribute to the development of life in their country. They are promoting universal values in each of the projects that are shared by SFK as well».*

*Saule Mamayeva, coordinator of the SFK Youth Program*





# PUBLIC POLICY

## PUBLIC POLICY: LOST IN TRANSLATION

The Public Policy initiative became a new field in the foundation's strategy for the period 2014 to 2016. Before that, SFK supported individual research projects within its thematic programs, however, it started to apply an organized approach to the development of political and management analysis only from 2014.

One of the first steps was to adopt an unambiguous translation for the term "public policy" into Russian and Kazakh in order to select a proper title for the initiative to fully match its profile. This helps to raise awareness of the main ideas of the initiative.

## PROGRAM FOR YOUNG RESEARCHERS

The Young Researchers Program, a scholarship program for young researchers in public policy, is at the center of the initiative. With this mechanism, SFK facilitates the building of a new expert community in Kazakhstan which engages young researchers. Program participants attend seminars over the course of a year, gaining the skills of political and management analysis, and in

*«The program teaches us to influence the decision-making process by carefully analyzing an issue and drafting recommendations, which is undoubtedly good, as it enables the youth to actively participate in the country's public and political life».*

*Anna Gussarova, course participant, Young Researchers Program 2015*

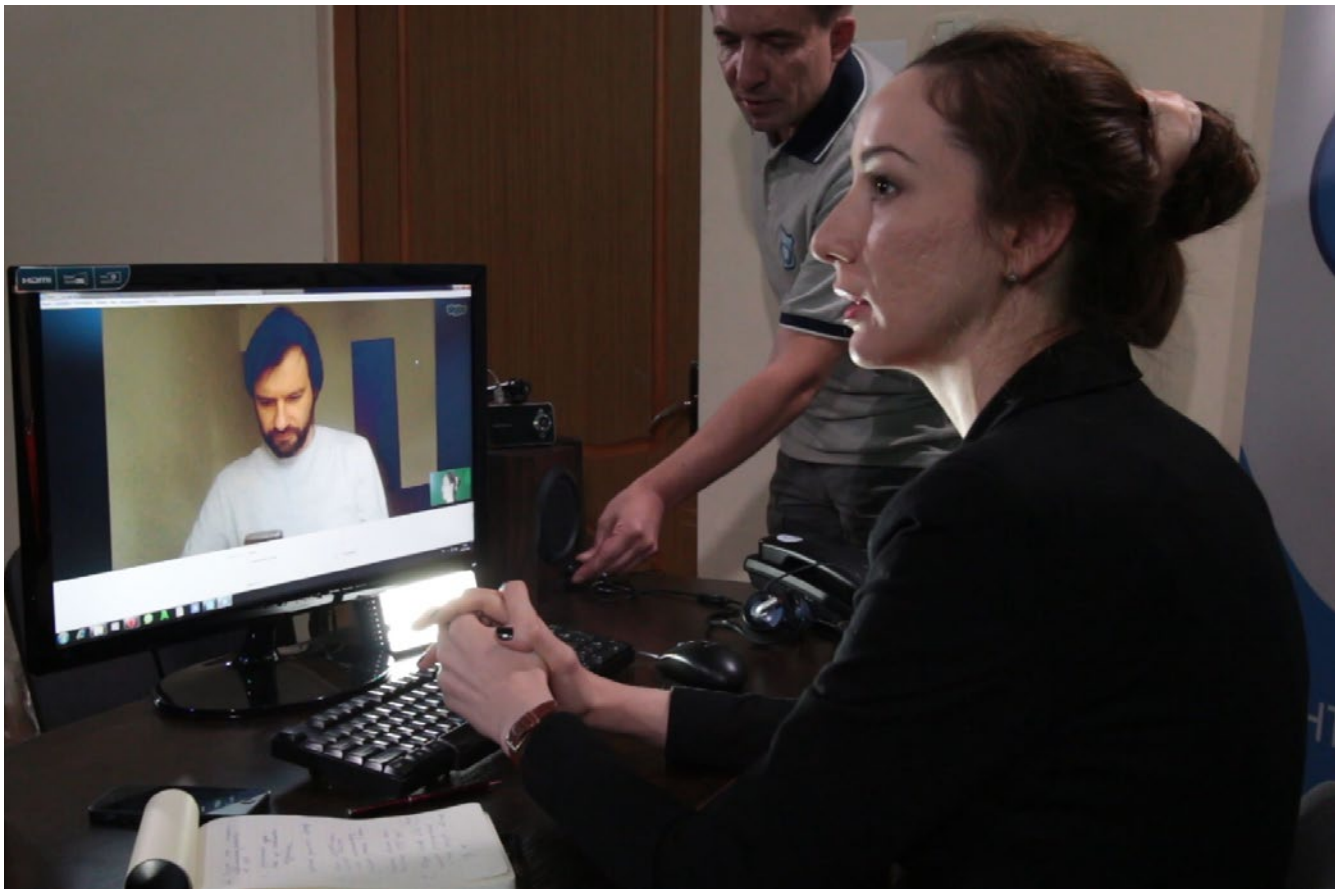
parallel conduct research under the guidance of local and foreign mentors. Russian-speaking trainers from the Berlin-based International Centre for Policy

Advocacy moderate the seminars. They also act as methodological mentors. SFK invites local experts as theme mentors. They take part in the foundation's orientation session where the research work stages for program participants are explained.

The research conducted by our trainees differs greatly from established academic work. Firstly, they are not that long (around 20 pages), secondly, they are precisely focused on a theme, and thirdly, the works focus on the applied part: authors have to offer at least three approaches to change existing conditions. Program participants are also taught to present their studies; to prepare



PaperLab meeting, Astana.  
Photo: Ainel Kainazarova



Ekvilibro work in progress.  
Photo: Rinat Besbayev

stories for media publications; to create presentation slides; and how to use gestures properly while speaking in public.

The scholarship program was launched in 2014 and already has three cohorts of graduates. The foundation offers the program to talented researchers with a genuine interest in the topics they are studying. The main aim for SFK is to introduce new names into Kazakhstan's expert community.

SFK publishes all the completed studies: some are published on the Central Asian Analytical Network and in mass media in Kazakhstan, others are presented at discussion forums.

An annual contest is organized for program graduates, and the authors of the strongest works are eligible for a five-month internship in the Central Asian Program at George Washington University in

the USA.

*«The program has opened new prospects for me as a researcher and social scientist. Thanks to the experience gained, I have become better qualified and, therefore, more in demand by the labor market».*

*Serik Beisembayev, course participant, Young Researchers Program 2015*

## RESEARCH SUPPORT

SFK also cooperates with independent researchers and allocates funds for study visits and field studies. Aside from financial support, opportunities are created for dialogue between the researcher and organizations that will find the research recommendations useful. This makes the studies truly applied as recommendations are offered to

those who can apply them in their work currently or in the future. The presentation of research is the author's responsibility, so the foundation consults authors and helps ensure that their relevant and high-quality studies reach their target audiences.

Between 2014 and 2016, SFK supported individual studies and group research work on different topics: from general inequality in secondary education to the issues of informally employed youth in cities that are reliant on one industry. All the completed studies are openly available on [www.soros.kz](http://www.soros.kz).

## OPEN DEBATE

In order to popularize the basic principles of open society, SFK supports existing discussion forums and helps to create new ones. Open public discussion is a reliable indicator of a healthy society; the more socially active



citizens there are, the more discussions they generate and the more special forums are needed. Many of the graduates of our scholarship programs have presented their findings as discussions.

Since 2014, SFK has supported the KIPD Analytical Group, which was initially set up at the Kazakhstan Institute of Political Decisions, but then became autonomous. The foundation co-finances many discussions held by the group on the pressing issues in Kazakhstani society, such as informal youth employment in cities that are reliant on one industry; Kazakhstan's information policy; state educational assets management; the building of ethical, religious and civil identity by Kazakhstan's youth; social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan; and the efficiency of use of funds from Kazakhstan's National Fund.

In the middle of 2016, graduates of the foundation's scholarship

program organized the PaperLab discussion forum in Astana. This forum discusses applied political studies with a focus on the solution to the problem, not just its diagnosis. By December 2016, PaperLab had held five discussions.

SFK worked with Vlast.kz to create Ekvilibro, an innovative online discussion format. This video project, which ran from 2014 to 2016, brought together two speakers with opposing views on a topic. A panel of three independent experts offered alternative solutions for the speakers to discuss. The aim of the project was to identify the point where the speakers' views met.

The topics covered on Ekvilibro reflected the challenges facing Kazakhstan: gender discrimination; the role of the state language; free speech; capital punishment; doping in sport; the right to abortion; crowdfunding; global brands entering the local market;

*«Recently, we created PaperLab, a research group with a new format, where research should not only be done qualitatively, but also be delivered to the target audience, influence decisions, and be socially important and applied».*

*Malika Tukmadiyeva, course participant, Young Researchers Program 2015, Paperlab organizer*

compulsory vaccination; and the rights of LGBT-communities.

The Public Policy Initiative is set to continue as a key part of SFK's new strategy. Kazakhstan needs more qualified researchers who can produce high-quality studies and discuss their findings in open forums.

PaperLab meeting, Astana.  
Photo: Ainel Kainazarova







# MEDIA PROGRAM

SFK's Media Program has existed since the foundation's establishment in Kazakhstan in 1995. Supporting independent media has always been a main aim, as a free media plays a key role in ensuring access to a range of opinions, which is a key element of an open society.

SFK set itself two essential goals for the period 2014 to 2016: enhancing media professionalism and maintaining freedom of expression, free speech and free media across the country.

## LEGAL INITIATIVES

SFK has sponsored the launch of industry organizations working to promote press freedom and professional journalistic standards. With our assistance, bodies such as the International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech Adil Soz, the Legal Media Center, the Legal Policy Research Center, Internews Kazakhstan, and the MediaNet International Center for

Journalism have become dynamic and sustainable success stories.

SFK worked together with its partner organizations to develop recommendations for the draft Law on Access to Information, a law that is of real importance to media professionals. The law was adopted in November 2015, but, unfortunately, its final version failed to accommodate these recommendations. However, there was some good news in

November 2016 when the Ministry of Information and Communication offered to discuss amendments to the document.

## MEDIA FREEDOM

SFK continues to advocate for the decriminalization of libel in Kazakhstan. Under the current law, libel is a criminal offence that can lead to imprisonment. This leaves the law open to misuse as it can be used to imprison journalists and restrict media freedom.

The government of Kazakhstan maintains a system of state subsidies for mass media, under which authorities pay outlets to cover selected topics in a particular way. These state orders can

sometimes limit free speech and serve as a tool of state influence on media. Therefore, in 2012, SFK started to support the Legal Media Center project to create a database of recipients of media subsidies via the state order.

The project helps to track the



Participants in the iMedia Project, 2016.  
Photo: Kanat Ospanov



Graduate in the iMedia Project, 2016.  
Photo: Kanat Ospanov

amounts the authorities pay to different media outlets for the publication of materials under the state order program. It is important that this information is openly available as the database allows people to decide whether the state is spending budget money effectively.

## INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM

An open society cannot be built and free speech ensured without highly professional journalists. To enhance the qualifications of Kazakhstan's journalists, the foundation supported the iMedia Project, under the slogan "Independent Journalism Starts with You!"

Five multimedia journalism modules, each lasting one week, were taught to Kazakhstani

*«The effect of the iMedia Project cannot be understated, it greatly expands one's thinking. After the first five-day module you come to understand that the global landscape is not how you've imagined it, and this is the most important thing in the project».*

*Mikhail Dorofeyev,  
Informburo.kz, Astana*

*«We report the news in Kazakh, nobody else has similar content in Uralsk. Today our site is in the top 40 news sites in Kazakhstan with 22,000 unique visitors a day compared with 10,000 before joining the project».*

*Marat Makhmetov, «My City»,  
Uralsk*

journalists by their fellow professionals from The New York Times, USA Today, CNN, The Huffington Post, and Pro Publica as well as professors from the Journalism School of Missouri University. SFK supports the position that the best professionals in the industry, considered to be journalism's gold standard, should share their experience with their colleagues.

SFK worked with the Kazakhstan Press Club to implement the iMedia Project from 2014. To date, two groups of 20 students have been trained. Applicants submit an essay and then attend an interview. It is important that the applicant shows a commitment to the values of the iMedia Project and the idea that independent journalism starts with oneself.

The course aims to teach the participants how to make high-quality, visually attractive

material using text, photos, audio and video content, and infographics. Journalists also study data journalism, business strategy, and media management, which are important aspects for media outlets that aspire to be both profitable and financially independent.

*«I completed the iMedia Project and began working at a multimedia site. I have put to good use all the knowledge that I've gained: operating online services, online maps and interactive pictures, creating longreads and so on. Not only do we produce materials ourselves, but we also work with project partners from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan».*

*Zhanar Kanafina, regional  
producer of «Open Asia Online  
project»*

## REVAMPING REGIONAL MEDIA

SFK offers funding for regional media outlets to update and redesign their websites. Many of these websites were created a decade ago and now look dated. Also, problems with functionality make it difficult to use multimedia material properly.





#### Successful Applicants:

- Alau-TV (Kostanay)
- Lada.kz (Aktau)
- Uralsk Week (Uralsk)
- Diapazon.kz (Aktobe)

As a result, visitors lose interest in the site and stop visiting it, with advertisers quick to follow. Only updated platforms can prevent this negative scenario from happening. There are a handful of such platforms in Kazakhstan, and hardly any in the regions. It is also hard to call Kazakhstan's media a highly profitable business, so website owners rarely find the ways and means to update their

websites. To solve this situation, SFK supported more than 10 projects for redesigns and creation of mobile applications for media websites. This has breathed new life into the platforms.

SFK's Media Program has gained wide experience and maintains solid partnerships with media NGOs and is in constant cooperation with foreign experts and leading journalists, helping them to network with Kazakhstani media professionals. A major challenge facing the program is the facilitation of free speech in Kazakhstan. This issue remains on the agenda and will demand further active contribution by all the program's partners in the future.

Story shooting.  
Photo: Zhanara Karimova

#### Multimedia startups of iMedia Project fellows:

- Askar Bekov, redesign of Myprofession.kz in Kazakh language, Almaty
- Marat Makhmetov, setting up regional news resource in Kazakh language, Almaty
- Aset Kailarov, development of multimedia resource, Almaty

# SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN



© Soros Fountadion-Kazakhstan

111A Zheltoksan Str, office 9,  
Almaty, Kazakhstan, 050000

Tel.: +7 (727) 250 13 54

Fax: +7 (727) 250 38 14

   @SFKazakhstan