Search for Common Ground - Kyrgyzstan implemented a project from 2015 - 2017 - Promoting Religious Freedom through Government and Civil Society Collaboration in the Kyrgyz Republic. A focus point of the project was **monitoring and evaluating current practices for religious freedom and at the same time, drafting new legislation and policy to strengthen religious freedom in Kyrgyzstan**.

While Kyrgyzstan is regarded as one of the most open countries for religious freedom, the nation has struggled in solidifying a legal framework and ensuring that the judicial system fairly judges cases related to religious expression and violent extremism. The improvement of the judicial system is critical, as deliberation and sentencing that infringes on religious freedom undermines the relationship between religious organizations and the state and increase the risks of radicalization and religious extremism among marginalized religious groups.

To respond to these critical risks and establish greater accountability in the judicial system, Search worked with civil society representatives from the northern and southern parts of the country to monitor and document cases where religious groups’ rights to freedom of religion were violated.

- The monitoring process was based on internationally accepted trial monitoring practices to assess compliance with fair trial standards.
- It aimed to assess the way in which certain proceedings, phases, or issues are handled by the authorities. It was an in-depth research exercise aimed at providing critical information to religious freedom cases.
- The subject of the monitoring cases related to the enjoyment of religious rights, including the registration of religious organizations, wearing religious attributes, burial of believers, possessing religious literature (possessing extremist materials), and violations during missionary activities (*davaat*).

As a result of the ongoing monitoring of cases (2016-2017):

- 28 cases were identified across the country and went through detailed monitoring process.
- The monitored cases were analyzed and main conclusions provided in the analytical report of the on-going monitoring the religious freedom status (2017) supported with recommendations to improve the litigation process.
The results of the monitoring laid the ground for the development of recommendations for strengthening the legal framework and enforcement practices which can further promote the enhancement of the situation of human rights in the country.

Throughout the project, Search used its monitoring and evaluation techniques to better understand the present nuances of religious freedom in Kyrgyzstan and assisted in drafting and guiding new legislation to improve the situation. This helped to set the groundwork for a more effective and religious freedom-focused legislative and judicial system, with greater accountability and grounding in international standards.

To increase the reach of this work and ensure its long-term sustainability, further activities to increase the knowledge base of a wider range of stakeholders should be implemented:

- Expand the legal knowledge base by considering the publication of a dictionary of legal terminology and concepts on religious freedom in Kyrgyz, Russian, and English
- Work on improving the knowledge and skills of a wider range of stakeholders - lawyers, advocates, prosecutors, and investigators - to ensure fair trials in the country

The “Promoting Religious Freedom through Government and Civil Society Collaboration in the Kyrgyz Republic” project was implemented in the Kyrgyz Republic by Search for Common Ground (Search) Kyrgyzstan from May 2015 to June 2017. The project was funded by the United States Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. This project aimed at promoting religious freedom in the Kyrgyz Republic through working with executive, legislative, and judicial government institutions, as well as civil society stakeholders. Search applied a multi-faceted approach to achieve the objectives of the project by employing the inclusive participation of all actors related to religious freedom in the Kyrgyz Republic, by facilitating the process of finding commonalities and working collaboratively on shared interests and by intensive interagency collaboration.