Is the issue of torture still relevant? If we were to ask this question to passers-by on the street, most would answer in the negative. Those who would hear our question would certainly, intuitively imagine traditional instruments of torture or possibly enhanced interrogation techniques. However, the issue of torture and other forms of ill-treatment are still present, despite the international consensus that every person in the world should be treated with respect for their inherent dignity. People who are particularly vulnerable to ill-treatment are those in places of detention, where the public eye does not reach.

Within the United Nations (UN), an effort has been made to create a system for the detection of the risk of ill-treatment in places of detention before human suffering occurs. This system of prevention, based on two pillars, international and national, was established by the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). One of the main components of the prevention system is the monitoring of places of detention with regular visits to them undertaken by the treaty body, the Subcommittee on Prevention (SPT), and the national preventive mechanisms (NPMs). It must be pointed out that states received a wide margin of appreciation in establishing NPMs. The OPCAT formulates the requirements relating to the NPMs in very general terms. The majority of states have decided to delegate a mandate of NPM to existing institutions protecting human rights – the ombudspersons and human rights commission (ex. Austria, Kazakhstan and Poland).

This project is focused on NPMs that operate within the structure of the human rights commission or the ombudsperson office because little difference exists in the challenges faced by these institutions while exercising the mandate of NPM. The project has two main aims.

The first aim is to map the NPMs from the analysed group. During the first phase of the project, selected examples of mechanisms will be described. It is expected to find out similarities regarding NPMs in countries with a similar structure and context, which will be the added value to the mapping process.

The second phase of the project is aimed to reconstruct the matrix of requirements for NPMs that operate within the structure of the human rights commission or the ombudsperson office on the basis of requirements interpreted from the SPT's guidelines and the good practices of countries. During this phase, the desk research will be complemented by qualitative empirical research conducted in the form of in-depth interviews with NPMs' personnel and coordinators, current and/or former members of SPT and NGOs.

The conclusions on the analysed group of NPMs will be placed in a broader context of other types of NPMs. Furthermore, the project contributes to the discussion on the role of human rights commissions and ombudsperson institutions in the international human rights protection system and adds to the research on the cooperation between State parties and the UN to strengthen human rights protection in general.