



USAID
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Strengthening Bulgaria's Judiciary 1999 – 2007



USAID promotes activities designed to achieve transparency, competence and efficiency in Bulgaria's judicial system.



Cover photo:

The Chair of the Bulgarian Supreme Court of Cassation (left), the United States Ambassador to Bulgaria (second from left) and the Chairs of the Plovdiv Courts at the launch of the new Information Center, November 2006 in the Plovdiv Palace of Justice.

JSI and the Work of the Courts

The USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative mission supports the work of the courts to protect the Bulgarian people and the Constitution. Themis, seen in the stained glass of the Ministry of Justice, embodies the bedrock democratic principle uniquely guaranteed by working and efficient courts: fairness.

United States Agency for International Development work with Bulgaria's courts has involved over thirty staff members of the Judicial Strengthening Initiative and the Judicial Development Project, and has benefited from the leadership of several individuals.

Michael Fritz, Mission Director
USAID/Bulgaria

Gene Gibson, Democracy and Local Governance Chief
USAID/Bulgaria

Adrian Hewryk, President
East-West Management Institute, Inc.

Mark Dietrich, Senior Legal Advisor
East-West Management Institute, Inc.

Ken Stuart, Director
USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative

A More Professional Judiciary

The USAID work to strengthen Bulgaria's judiciary is based on a wide network of partnerships with local courts, judiciary institutions, professional organizations, the executive and legislative branches, the press, and civil society groups. At the same time, these efforts with Bulgarian partners have been mirrored by other cooperative work with European Union institutions and other American agencies.

The primary goal of all project work has been to build a more professional judiciary – one that operates with modern systems of judicial administration and case management, is well-trained, and which takes an analytical approach to courthouse-wide reforms that lead to increased efficiency.

Modeling Success

A strategic approach of JSI and JDP has been to use modeling to promote excellence across Bulgaria's judiciary. Much work has centered on 32 Model Courts and Courts In Partnership, but also with the Supreme Judicial Council as a bridge from these courts to the rest of the judiciary. Other work has centered on the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) as the key provider of training. JSI projects also emphasize Local Training Plans where courts around the country can link to the NIJ through local magistrate and clerk trainers.



Five chairpersons of JSI Courts in Partnership deliver presentations to the 2005 National Judges Conference on their courts' ongoing work under their Court Improvement Plans.

Better Bulgarian Courts

The bedrock of USAID judicial reform work has involved efforts to improve court administration. At the regional level, USAID develops court administration best practices through Model Courts and Courts in Partnership with a special focus on reducing case delay and fostering transparency. At the national level USAID works to strengthen the strategic and management capacity of the Supreme Judicial Council to operate as a national court administration office, placing it at the center of the efforts to reengineer the judicial system.



Intake clerks in the Veliko Tarnovo courthouse are now armed with modern computer case management systems, and also with training in customer service. The result: information is provided faster, more accurately, and more efficiently.



Plugging In

A necessary step toward modernizing Bulgarian courts has been the assistance in information technology. Through the JDP and JSI, millions of dollars in hardware, software, and training has been provided to the judicial system by USAID. The IT programs have involved intensive trainings with over one thousand participants over the years, and regular “help desk” support from the JDP and JSI offices in Sofia.

Verbatim Audio Recording

The Verbatim experience began in eight pilot courtrooms, and later expanded to over fifty. Each court is provided complete hardware, including a PC work station and microphones for each party, and special multi-channel software designed specifically for courtroom and conference room recording. The software compresses the size of the audio files and allows notes to be inserted during the proceeding to identify exhibits or to index witness testimony. The result is a more accurate trial record, easier review of the record, and more professional proceedings.

The experience has been a positive one for the courts, the attorneys and the litigants, and there are improvements in the openness and transparency in these courts and in the accuracy of the court protocols. The use of computer digital audio recording technology provides a cost effective and sustainable means to improve the transparency, efficiency, and accuracy of court proceedings in the Bulgarian courts.

Information Technology

Several key areas of assistance have included: the electronic Case Management System (CMS) and servers to support it, computer work stations, court website development to assist public access, Verbatim Audio Recording equipment for more accurate records of court hearings, and evidence carts with multi-media equipment to assist in trial proceedings. The results have been more modern and efficient courts, clerks who have the tools to better serve the public, and judicial administrators better able to track the flow of cases and the delivery of justice.

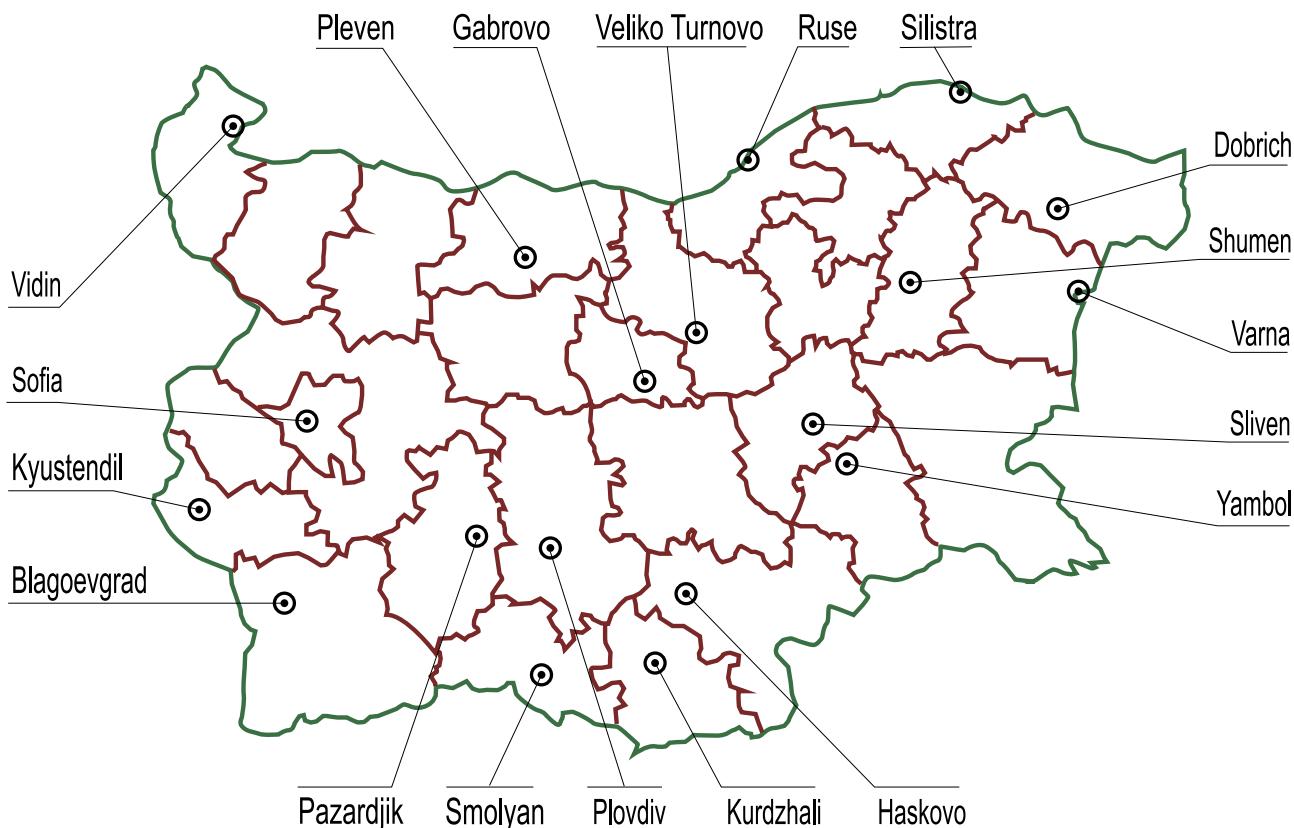


USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative staff (center and right) assist the Shumen District Court with installing the Verbatim Audio Recording system in a courtroom.



NIJ Funding

	USAID Direct Grants	USAID Judicial Development Project (JDP)	USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative (JSI)	East-West Management Institute (EWMI)
Annual Funding				
1999	\$45,717			
2000	\$91,434	\$226,348		
2001	\$91,434	\$156,776		
2002	\$91,435	\$113,669		\$90,000
2003				\$75,000
→ Beginning period of Bulgarian government funding				
2004			\$230,000	
2005			\$112,000	
2006			\$60,000	
2007			\$178,000	
Totals	\$320,020	\$496,793	\$580,000	\$165,000
Grand Total 1999-2007: \$1,561,813				



Expanding the NIJ Reach

Through the Correspondent Magistrate program, the NIJ has implemented a system of training at the local and regional levels to supplement its Sofia-based programs. This delivery mechanism builds a stronger constituency by meeting local training needs. In 2007, the Institute further expanded this program by adopting the JSI Local Court Training Plans. As a result, in 2007 alone, the NIJ supported a new wave of locally-designed trainings in nineteen cities and towns in Bulgaria.

Program Highlight: Mock Trials

The JSI media campaign has involved work with print and broadcast media partners, and also with “community media” – student mock trials, and forum theatre. The JSI remains aware that two important target audiences for public outreach are the younger generation, and the smaller towns in rural communities. To this end, outreach work has involved participatory media that help young people absorb more deeply the lessons of the work of the courts. One such tool is student mock trials, supported by the Competitive Grants Program in schools and courts across the country to raise youth understanding about the judicial system.

Top: After lengthy research and scriptwriting with judges, forum theatre performers enact a mock trial of a domestic violence case at the National Institute of Justice.

Middle: Two high school students serve as jurors with a District Court judge in a mock trial in Targovishte.

Bottom: Elementary school students participate in the case “Little Red Riding Hood” at the Sofia Palace of Justice, with the assistance of a Sofia Regional Court judge.



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Sofia Palace of Justice