

FACT SHEET

Global Engagement in Europe & Eurasia

An ongoing challenge in many E&E countries is that of bridging social, religious and ethnic differences. This FACT SHEET provides a few illustrations of USAID programs reaching Muslim and other populations in the Europe and Eurasia Region.

Albania

Albania's population is roughly 65-70% Muslim, 20-25% Orthodox and 13% Catholic. Between 2004 and 2007 USAID's "Fostering Religious Harmony in Albania" project sought to cultivate understanding and dialogue among religious groups, reinforcing Albania's tradition of tolerance and preventing tensions that beset other multi-religious countries undergoing democratization. The project worked in seven different target areas of the country and has: helped religious leaders to work with other groups towards common goals; organized public dialogue and raised awareness on religious tolerance; enhanced the skills and tools of the religious leaders to improve dialogue within the community by reducing conflicts, fractionalization and radicalization. As a result of the project, more than 100 participants were trained on community development through tangible interfaith development projects; 80 participants of different faiths were trained to act as conflict mediators; around 56 religious leaders and activists received formal training on leadership and management. The training provided them with skills to play a positive leadership role in the development of their communities. More than 200 youth attended summer camps, were trained in conflict resolution, learned about other faiths and built long-lasting friendships among youth of diverse religions. A film "Living together" documented Albania's interfaith heritage and was aired 22 times on national and local television stations. The key to all these successes has been USAID's constant efforts to build strong relationships with religious leaders and activists in the communities in which the project works. As a direct outgrowth of these efforts, in October 2008 after the project was closed out, the Albanian Government officially signed an agreement with the four religious communities, formalizing harmonious interactions among the different faiths and the State. The US's contribution to this effort was recognized. It was a monumental occasion for Albania, a country once officially atheistic and completely isolated from the rest of the world. This agreement could very well be a model for other countries in the region.

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan has very few female legal professionals and support to women lawyers is greatly needed. A gender-specific bar association was conceived to help create solutions to the professional challenges and barriers facing women, and to provide a forum for women to lobby for their rights. The Women's Bar Association (WBA) was officially launched in May 2007 and currently has more than 270 members. In March 2009 the Women's Bar Association was awarded a \$96,000 grant through the jointly-sponsored USAID/DOS One Woman Initiative, for the "Woman to Woman" program to provide Azerbaijani women access to legal advice and training on issues related to women's

rights, including domestic violence, trafficking of women, early marriage, and gender equality. The one-year project specifically targets four regions of Azerbaijan and funds a training program for approximately 400 women. By the end of the project, 12 community leaders will be identified and trained to act as WBA liaisons in targeted regions and a number of educational materials on women's issues will be produced and distributed. With funding from the EU, the WBA also formed a *pro bono* group of legal advocates to represent victims of trafficking in criminal cases in the courts of Azerbaijan. Despite its short tenure, the larger legal community and the public are recognizing the WBA as a source of expertise on gender-related issues.

Kosovo

The Support for Kosovo's Young Leaders (SKYL) Program is helping young people ages 16-26 from Kosovo's diverse communities become active participants in building a viable shared future for themselves and their communities. The program addresses key youth concerns in economic security, civic participation, and interethnic reconciliation. Emerging young leaders across ethnicities are brought together to design and implement community projects that address joint issues and concerns. Youth engage local leaders and other community organizations to support their projects and accept involvement of people of other ethnicities in their communities. The program is being implemented by USAID's partner, Mercy Corps, along with the Center for Community Development, Mitrovicë; Kosovo Center for International Cooperation, Gjilan; and Galaxy Stars, Mitrovicë, in close cooperation with local businesses, Chambers of Commerce, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, and the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sport.

Serbia

Throughout Serbia, including the Sandzak region and southern Serbia, areas with significant Muslim populations, USAID is helping municipalities be more resilient to crises and disasters; assisting businesses in difficult environments grow and expand into new markets; and working with Serbia's youth to empower them for the future. USAID's Preparedness, Planning, and Economic Security program (PPES) works in 10 municipalities across Sandzak and southern Serbia to: 1) develop and strengthen local disaster management committees and systems; 2) develop youth business and entrepreneurship skills; and 3) enhance market access for micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises. The Municipal Economic Growth Activity (MEGA) provides technical advice and support to 5 municipalities with large or predominant Muslim populations. Support includes establishing Local Economic Development Offices, assisting with local revenue collection and asset management, and the realization of local development projects (local governments are responsible for leveraging resources to fund the projects).