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Bringing International Career Counseling Services and Standards to Schools and Universities in Macedonia



Universities and vocational schools play an important role in career development and creating job opportunities for their students. Some prospective students even select a university based on its track record for facilitating job placements. In Macedonia, most universities have career development or counseling centers available to students, but the quality of the services varies; often successful placements are linked to a professor's relationships with employers rather than a systematic and effective career development program.

Now, however, 26 educational institutions in Macedonia (including universities, faculties and vocational schools) are directing students to the My Career internship portal developed by the USAID Competiveness Project. Several are also adopting the practices promoted by My Career to upgrade or introduce career development services to better serve their students. Bitola University, for example, developed a new career center and is working with My Career to not only offer students career development services, but to also serve as an important bridge between students and the business community.

With USAID support, a number of educational institutions with career centers are also taking part in the Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) program. Ten career counselors from different educational institutions are among the 28 individuals who recently completed GCDF certification training and are now offering advice based on international guidelines and practices.

Ljubinka Rtoska, a Career Center Administrator and GCDF career counselor at Dimitrija Cupovski Secondary School in Veles, said the GCDF program will help her work with students as "they start thinking about their careers, the skills and aptitudes they need to develop to be ready for the future challenges in their professional life... The combination of career development services and internship placements will help students to upgrade their CVs and to learn how to leave good impressions when presenting themselves in front of their potential future employers."

"Today we face the need for a qualified workforce that can answer the needs of the business community, meaning having the right profile in the right working environment" said Dushan Milanov, Career Center Administrator and GCDF Career Counselor at Goce Delcev University in Shtip. "I see GCDF as an organized, structured and professional program that enables students, the unemployed and all other individuals to make the right decisions about their career paths, in accordance with their wishes, needs, interests and potential." Under the GCDF concept, the career center at Goce Delcev will expand its career counseling services to offer students individual or group counseling, covering topics such as good job seeking skills, interviewing, time management, presentation and decision making skills and how to get more information about the labor market.

Some universities are going even further. The American College in Skopje not only has its counselors in the GCDF program, it is integrating My Career training on CV and cover letter writing plus other communication skills into its curricula. In 2009, the college made such training compulsory for all third-year students. After completing the training, students must develop a CV and cover letter which they send to the career center manager in order to receive one school credit. The Competitiveness Project expects other universities to follow suit, creating a more sustainable means to enhance student employability skills without the direct involvement of My Career or donor-funded projects.

School Boards Capacities Strengthened Nationwide



School board members designing strategies to become influential players in school life

School boards have an essential role to play in the work of schools. A strong school board can result in a well-managed school that has a great reputation within the local community. In the process of decentralization, the roles of school boards become even more pronounced as the responsibility for governing educational structures is finally placed with those who have the greatest stake in it: municipalities, teachers and parents. However, precisely because school boards in Macedonia are legally responsible for recruitment and selection of school directors and teaching staff, their members are often pressured by both central and local government to hire individuals who are politically affiliated. Hence, school boards' roles in lobbying, fund raising and using all

available resources for the development of schools are marginalized.

Recognizing the crucial role of school boards, the Ministry of Education and Science has worked closely with the donor community to design and implement programs aimed at building the capacities of school boards so that they can better cope with numerous forces in society, including political influence. In 2009, The USAID Human and Institutional Development Program initiated the Strengthening of the School Boards activity implemented by the Macedonian Civic Education Center.

All school board members from 441 primary and secondary schools in the country took an active part in the project activities. Through interactive training sessions, participants engaged in dynamic discussions on clarifying the roles, responsibilities, rights and duties of school boards delineated in national education laws. These sessions, together with subsequent mentoring during actual school board meetings, were very effective in getting school board members to share their experiences and learn how to utilize the best while avoiding the worst practices in coping with their responsibilities. Participants also discussed their challenges in building and maintaining productive cooperation and partnership among all stakeholders in school governance.

Throughout this project, school board members have shown significant interest in not only fulfilling their responsibilities, but also in taking more proactive initiatives. One recent example is that all 17 primary school boards in the Eastern Region of Macedonia have formed a regional affiliation to jointly advocate to local education authorities for key areas of school development. While the results of the project are already tangible, sustainability remains one of the most important areas which USAID will continue to be address in the future.

Strumica Receives 9.8 M Euro - USAID's efforts to assist the Municipality of Strumica in attaining an internationally recognized credit rating have helped the municipality receive a 9.8 million Euro grant from the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) environment component. The grant will be used for construction of a waste water treatment facility. Through its Macedonia Local Government Activity (MLGA), USAID works with municipalities to enhance their creditworthiness and establish the necessary tools for achieving credit ratings, which allow municipalities to access credit markets and borrow money for municipal development. Enabling municipalities to access other sources of financing is especially important because transfers from the central government and local tax revenues are not sufficient to finance new municipal infrastructure and other capital development projects. Strumica and Veles were the first municipalities in Macedonia to obtain credit ratings from Moody's Investor Services. "Gostivar and Tetovo were also interested in getting these (IPA) funds, but since we had all the documents in place and we also submitted the issued credit rating, we were given the grant," said Zoran Zaev, the Mayor of Strumica. "Our Municipality is now looked at differently as compared to others simply because the international institutions confirmed that we have the necessary fiscal capacities." USAID partnered with the Macedonia Financial Excellence Center (MFEC) and Moody's to develop a local credit rating capacity compatible with those of leading rating agencies worldwide.

1000 Teachers Trained – The USAID Primary Education Project works with all public primary schools in Macedonia to help improve the quality of instruction, and has developed a certification process to establish a system of permanent professional development for teachers. To be certified, teachers must not only attend a workshop, they must also provide portfolio evidence that they are incorporating the new skills and knowledge they gained into their teaching. As a result, there is an improved the quality of instruction and increased employment skills of students. At the beginning of the current school year, the 1000th teacher was certified.

New Agricultural Association Formed - Fresh fruit and vegetable exporters recently established the Macedonia Agro Exporters Association (MAEA) with support from the USAID AgBiz Program. USAID has been working with these companies since 2003 to help increase their export markets. Together, they realized there was little cooperation among companies working in the sector and no functional organization to serve their needs. AgBiz assessed the companies' common interests and found a strong interest in addressing the challenges they face, and a joint vision for development actions in this sector emerged. After further support to encourage cooperation, representatives of 13 companies - which together employ over 1,000 people - formed the MAEA. They already organized a five-day study tour for members to learn from a similar association operating successfully in Bulgaria, and AgBiz will continue to work with the MAEA to build its capacity and assist them in developing a Five Year Strategy and Action Plan.

Summer Camp for 21st Century Employability Skills - In August, USAID conducted a one-week summer school in partnership with SEAVUS, a Macedonian multinational IT company, to introduce life and entrepreneurial skills to 50 top high school students in Macedonia. Graduating seniors were introduced to skills related to leadership, negotiation, public speaking, career development, successful entrepreneurship, new media, and others necessary to succeed in today's modern economy. The students learned directly from representatives of a successful private sector company. In a country of only two million people where unemployment is over 30% and youth unemployment over 60%, it is vital to teach youth relevant 'work-ready' skills and empower them for entry into the labor market.

100 Schools Renovated - On October 6, U.S. Ambassador Philip Reeker and Minister of Education & Science, Nikola Todorov, visited the Strasho Pindjur Primary School in Karbinci to celebrate the completion of the school's renovation project. This event marked the 100th school that the USAID Primary Education Project (PEP) has helped to renovate in Macedonia, in partnership with the local municipalities and the school communities. PEP works with each renovated school to improve math, science and technical education curricula, student assessments and ICT use in the classroom. PEP also organizes trainings in parental involvement and preparation of effective learning environments at each of these schools.

USAID Newsflash

USAID Welcomes New Senior Staff who arrived this year:

Erin Nicholson Pacific, Director, Program Office, mainly in the Europe, Central and South Asia regions. Most recently, she served as the Macedonia Mission's Acting Mission Director for several months this summer and fall. Prior to arriving in Macedonia, she served two years as the Deputy Director for Economic Growth (EG) in USAID/Afghanistan where she led a \$200 million Economic Policy and Trade Team portfolio, supporting bank supervision, customs reform, regional trade cooperation, and business enabling environment activities. Other prior assignments include Special Assistant to USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore, and Acting Office Director and Deputy Director for Economic Growth in USAID/Central Asia. Ms. Pacific joined the Agency in 2000 as a Presidential Management Intern (PMI) starting as the Desk Officer for the Caucasus (Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia).



Joseph Lessard, Director of the Economic Growth Office, has 10 years of experience designing and managing economic development programs with USAID. Just prior to arriving in Macedonia, he completed a 14-month tour in the Agriculture Office in Afghanistan. He previously served as Deputy EG Director based in Kazakhstan covering five countries in Central Asia, and as a Private Sector Development Officer in Nigeria. He began with USAID as a Presidential Management Intern in 2000. Prior to joining USAID, he worked for six years in the private sector.



Erik Pacific, Director, Democracy & Governance Office, served for two years as USAID/Afghanistan's Team Leader for Sub-National Governance, responsible for a \$365 million portfolio that included public administration reform, civil service training, and municipal development. He has over 13 years of development experience, working for a range of implementing partners in very difficult environments, including human rights initiatives in Uzbekistan, food aid in Tajikistan, and humanitarian assistance efforts in the West Bank and Gaza.



LeAnna Marr, Education Office Director, joined USAID as an Education Development Officer in 2004. She served in Guinea and Sudan, and for the Middle East and Asia Bureaus. Most recently, she served as the Director of the Technical Support Division in the Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs where she oversaw a team of seven technical experts and approximately \$5 billion in programming funds for both Afghanistan and Pakistan. LeAnna is co-founder of D.C.LEARNS, a non-profit organization in the District of Columbia and recipient of the 1997 D.C. Literacy Leader award.



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The American people, through USAID, have invested nearly \$500 million in Macedonia since 1993. USAID is implementing projects that create jobs, reduce corruption, and prepare Macedonian students for the workforce. These initiatives improve the quality of life and support Macedonia's transition to a stable and prosperous democracy. USAID provides economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 100 countries. For more information about USAID programs on economic growth, education, democracy and governance, please visit <http://macedonia.usaid.gov>.