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Bi-weekly Newsletter

>> USAID helps Bulgarian young people entering the job market with new website

USAID Labor Market Project (LMP) introduced www.KakviDaStanem.bg a website that will assist Bulgarian youth make better informed and educational career decisions. With this initiative LMP marks the successful conclusion of its operations in the country.

“The new website enables young people to link the subjects they study to career opportunities in different occupations and calculate the potential return on investment in their education”, explained Gergana Rakovska, President of the Business Foundation for Education. The organization was established in 2006 by the LMP and JobTiger, a recruitment company established in November 2000 by the Bulgarian-American Enterprise Fund and will continue to work for the development of the career facilitation system and the career facilitator’s profession.



Michael Fritz (right) – USAID Mission Director in Bulgaria dubbed the Labor Market Project one of the most successful USAID partnerships.

Alexander Karagiannis – U.S. Embassy’s Deputy Chief of Mission and Mrs. Ekaterina Vitkova – Deputy Minister of Education were among the distinguished guests of the close-out ceremony held on February 22. In Mrs. Vitkova’s words LMP’s initiatives play an important role in the career development of the youth of Bulgaria. She highlighted the building of a career orientation system in higher, secondary and vocational education, the training of 120 career consultants and the implementation of a network of 24 university career development centers throughout the country.

Labor market reforms are critical to the sustained economic growth and increased prosperity of the country. USAID’s efforts were focused on helping Bulgaria address shortages in the market of skilled labor force in key sectors. Since 2002, USAID has been actively engaged in increasing the flexibility of the Bulgarian labor market and in strengthening the linkages between academia and businesses. It has been an important part of the U.S. overall support and investment in Bulgaria. ❖

Key results from different initiatives of the Labor Market Project:

- ✓ A network of 24 university career development centers (CDC) established.
- ✓ Over 150 thousand students have access to the services offered in the CDCs and thousands have acquired practical skills for seeking and keeping jobs at the trainings organized by the centers;
- ✓ Promoting student internships and their many benefits. Launching the website www.staj.bg. Over 4000 internships in 2006;
- ✓ Revival of career orientation in secondary and vocational schools;
- ✓ Promoting the career consultant’s profession;
- ✓ A master’s program in career development introduced in 2006 at Rousse University;
- ✓ Business Foundation for Education, a new NGO established with the purpose of ensuring continuous support for the career consultation system in education (2005);
- ✓ Fifty teachers from twenty vocational schools took part in a pioneering internship program for teachers in the area of tourism;
- ✓ Supply Chain Management programs enhance the competitiveness of hundreds of organizations and companies working together.



>> USAID Director and SJC Members Honor Four New Model Courts

Members of the Supreme Judicial Council traveled to Varna to join USAID Mission Director Mike Fritz in honoring four new Model Courts on 28 February. The courts are the latest partners of the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative (JSI) to successfully implement their respective Court Improvement Plans, thus achieving USAID Model Court status. The ceremony honored the Varna District and Regional Courts, and the Dobrich District and Regional Courts. The award ceremony took place during a two-day event which began with the regular Chairpersons Meeting of the Model Courts and Courts in Partnership program. Eight members of the Supreme Judicial Council attended the ceremony, including Court Administration Committee Chair Panayot Genkov, who addressed the honorees.



Four new USAID Model Court Chairpersons show their honors in Varna (left- right): Vesselin Monov, Milen Slavov, Encho Enchev, Vanuhi Arakelyan. SJC Court Administration Committee Chair Panayot Genkov (far right).

The four new USAID Model Courts were represented by their chairpersons: Vanuhi Arakelyan of the Varna District Court, Milen Slavov of Varna Regional, Encho Enchev of the Dobrich District Court, and Vesselin Monov of Dobrich Regional. The Varna and Dobrich courts became part of the USAID Model Courts and Courts in Partnership program in late 2005. Working with the JSI, they achieved more than 75 % implementation of the goals under the Court Improvement Plan. Increased transparency, reduced case delay, improved qualification of judges and clerks, and intense work with the public are only some of the elements of their successful work. The number of the Model Courts has now reached 21.

In March, six new courts will be announced to have achieved Model Court status: Plovdiv District and Regional Court, Sliven District Court, Montana District Court, and Burgas Regional Court. Smolyan Regional Court, already a Model Court, also will be honored as a court that has successfully implemented the Court Improvement Plan – above and beyond its early status as a Model Pilot Court. ❖

>> USAID-supported Journalist Training Stimulates Usage of Out-of-Court Dispute Resolution

The activity of the Bulgarian National Bank's Conciliation Committee for out-of-court settlement of payment disputes was given a boost recently due to the publicity given at a USAID-supported Journalist seminar on 24-25 November, last year. The Seminar conducted with the assistance of the USAID Financial Sector Integrity Project had a very positive outcome.

The theme of the seminar was Financial System Integrity and Development: Challenges and Expectation. At the event, the journalists were informed in great detail about the activity of the BNB's Conciliation Committee for out-of-court settlement of payment disputes. A brochure about its activity was presented for the first time to the public. The presentation of Mr. Ivan Iskrov, Governor of the BNB was a highlight of the seminar.

Due to the publicity given, the work of the Conciliation Committee since the end of November, 2006 through February, 2007 includes 15 claims filed. This is a substantial increase compared to the entire first year when there were only 10 cases filed. ❖



>> USAID supports the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to award small grants for combating trafficking in human beings in Bulgaria



The participants in the event grouped for a photo

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) awarded six small grants to four NGOs, one community center and one Municipality supporting local initiatives against trafficking in human beings on February 21 in Bourgas. Within the USAID-funded project “A Multiagency Model of Cooperation for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in Bulgaria”, IOM supports the collaborative effort of Bulgarian state institutions and civil society organizations to create partnership models for combating trafficking in persons on the local level.

The first stage of the program finances a range of projects including prevention, trainings for minority groups, creating opportunities for professional orientation, professional qualification and improvement of the social-economic environment.

At the ceremony in Bourgas, the Chief of the IOM Mission in Bulgaria Ms. Iliana Derilova greeted the six grantees and outlined the important role of the civil society in the fight against human trafficking. Ms. Derilova emphasized the importance of establishing a mechanism for partnership among the state, local authorities and the NGO sector and an environment of intolerance to this negative phenomenon. During the networking session, IOM discussed with the grantees their individual programs and different ideas for complementary activities, in view of achieving maximum synergy and impact. ❖

>> U.S.- Funded Events Provide Bulgarian NGOs with Funding and Support Information



Left to right: Matt Brown, BCDT Director, Ivan Krastev, Expert, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Nedko Natov, State Expert, Ministry of Economy and Energy, Svetla Ivanova, Chief Expert, Ministry of Environment and Water, and Biliana Raeva, Director, Ministry of State Administration and Administrative Reform

On 26 - 27 February, the Bulgarian Center for Development and Training (BCDT) implemented its first medium-size, independent project with a \$24,000 grant from the U.S. Democracy Commission. BCDT was established as a legacy organization of USAID Participant Training Program (PTP) and its implementer, World Learning. The program will end this August after fourteen years of supporting the portfolio of USAID technical assistance in Bulgaria.

The grant-funded project featured a conference to support NGOs that have received Democracy Commission funding since 1994. At the event, nearly 160 NGOs learned about potential sources of funding and support from 30 presenters representing Bulgarian, American, European and international funding mechanisms. The Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL) was a key partner in organizing the conference.

On 28 February, PTP repeated the highlights of the conference for an audience of more than 50 partners from the USAID portfolio such as legacy organizations, partners and beneficiaries. ❖