



SNAPSHOT

Private Sector Fills Gap in Kosovo Education System

Preschools and Kindergartens Broaden Access to Learning at Crucial Age



Photo: USAID Young Entrepreneurs Program

Valbona Thaqi, USAID grantee, teaches children at Brilliant, a nursery school and kindergarten she manages.

“Thanks to USAID I am sure I could easily add another 100 children. The only real competition is the child’s grandparents,” Ms. Thaqi said.

Across Kosovo, there is no missing the thousands of children. Kosovo isn’t just one of Europe’s poorest countries, it’s also the youngest. More than 35 percent of its population is under 18.

Just 10 percent of children between the ages of three and five attend preschool. Among five and six-year-olds, 70 percent go to school, below the 100 percent target. While tradition accounts in part for the low participation rates, insufficient capacity also plays a role. Indeed, parents say it is harder to get into a public kindergarten than into the University of Prishtina. While USAID supports reform of Kosovo’s public school system, it also is helping the small number of entrepreneurs who have opened private pre-schools and kindergartens. Together, they are providing a demand-driven opportunity to broaden access to formal schooling for children at a crucial stage of development.

USAID, through its Young Entrepreneurs Program, has supported the owners of 11 such schools by providing grants and training over the life of the project which started in September 2010 through September 2013. Among them is Valbona Thaqi, owner of Brillantët (Albanian for “Brilliant”), a nursery school and kindergarten she opened in 2010, starting with six children. USAID helped defray the cost of installing a central heating system to replace the woodstoves used to heat the classrooms. Thaqi chose her location, in a long-empty school building leased from the municipal government, based on her analysis of local demographic trends. The community has affordable housing, making it popular with young families. Today, Brillantët operates at full capacity, with 60 students, including Thaqi’s own daughters.

Even when Brillantët’s students go on to public school, Thaqi continues to keep tabs on them. In general, students who have received even some pre-primary education are better behaved, socialized and engaged than their peers, Thaqi said, adding, “They know the meaning of learning.”

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USAID's Young Entrepreneurs Program is designed to assist Kosovo's new and emerging entrepreneurs, ages 18 – 35. The Young Entrepreneurs Program recognizes that young entrepreneurs need more than mere training—they need capital and real-time support during the critical early business start-up period. To achieve this, the program provides business start-up matching grants and financing options with practical business training and sustained, hands-on coaching services for fledgling enterprises.