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ALBANIA

CASE STUDY

Students Enlisted to Tackle Domestic Violence

USAID-supported training for law students gives ‘teeth’ to implement law against domestic violence



Photo: UFO Studios

Students in TV spot informing people of the help offered for domestic violence by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives

“These student volunteers offer an important contribution,” explained Aurela Bozo, Coordinator of the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives. “This pro bono work made possible by USAID prepares legal professionals who are more sensitive to the issues of implementing legislation addressing gender-based violence.”

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Challenge

Many laws are passed in Albania that are not implemented for various reasons. In the case of the law against domestic violence, passed in December 2006 with overwhelming bipartisan support and coming into effect in June 2007, the effort by Albanian citizens, including the Albanian Center for Legal Civic Initiatives made a big difference and helped ensure the law was enforced.

Initiative

With the help of a grant from USAID, the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives, drew up boilerplates of the legal document needed to request protection orders and they were accepted by Albanian judges and police. The protection orders sent a clear signal to many abusers that they could not inflict violence on family members without repercussions.

Through a second grant from USAID, the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives set out to train students from the second and third years of law school to offer free legal counseling and assistance to victims of domestic violence. As soon as students heard about the opportunity to participate in practical application of the law, they rushed to sign up. Legal experts developed a special training manual with USAID support and 27 students were trained to assist with cases and monitor the implementation of the law against domestic violence. The students also attended workshops in rural areas to help explain the law and what it means for the rights of family members. Finally, a TV spot with the law students was prepared and broadcast on local television.

Results

The TV spot resulted in many additional women contacting the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives to receive free legal aid, especially from outside the capital. The students were there to offer assistance, together with lawyers from the Center, to hundreds of clients, out of which 21 required protection orders. The 21 protection orders represent a huge increase over the total of six protection orders issued by courts during the first nine months of the law being on the books. Other clients required assistance to file for divorce, alimony, custody, or the enforcement of court decisions. And many just needed counseling. Not only did the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives have the USAID-trained law students there to respond to the influx of people, but the students acquired valuable, hands-on experience. Several students have continued to volunteer at the Center and elsewhere, even after their official program ended.