



# Union Leadership Supports Diversity

## Challenge

Macedonia's trade unions were at risk of fragmenting into ethnic camps during the 2001 conflict because leaders did not promote diversity. The Trade Union of Education, Science and Culture (SONK) was one of those unions ready to split along ethnic lines. Teachers in Kumanovo and Tetovo had reached the point where they refused to conduct classes in each other's presence and began to hold classes in separate buildings.



Photo: USAID Macedonia

*"We are very proud of our activities... in the Balkans. We are the only multi-ethnic trade union."*

*- Dojcin Cvetanovski, SONK President*

## Results

SONK is now the largest branch union in the Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia. Over 100 local leaders of different ethnic backgrounds in Macedonia have participated in the program. SONK's policies supporting diversity have helped the union grow from 16,000 to almost 37,000 members, including 5,000 ethnic Albanians, while other unions continue to lose members. Two more ethnic Albanian women have been elected president of their union locals. Cvetanovski and Sinani regularly visit Albanian and Macedonian schools in villages surrounding ethnically mixed towns such as Tetovo, Gostivar and Arachinovo where ethnic tensions can still be felt. SONK, along with Cvetanovski and Sinani, have earned the respect of union leaders. SONK has been invited to host the first conference, since the Kosovo war, where the leaders from the Albanian and Serbian education unions in Kosovo can share experiences and discuss future cooperation.

## Initiative

In 2001, delegates of SONK elected a new leader, Dojcin Cvetanovski, who promised to rebuild the trade union movement in Macedonia. USAID, with the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, brought in experts from the American Federation of Teachers to assist Cvetanovski in shaping a new policy of ethnic inclusion for the trade unions.

SONK started with union leadership training programs focused on skills development, inclusion, and tolerance. SONK translated its membership cards and constitution into Albanian - trade union materials had never before been translated into a minority language. SONK created a vice president position and elected Muzaferre Sinani, a female ethnic Albanian. She is now a volunteer instructor in union workshops, and is active with the Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia in the women's section.

