



SUCCESS STORY

Blind Justice: Making Courts Accessible to Visually Impaired

Law students advocate for persons with disabilities



Photo: USAID, Bridget Nurre

Driton Obërtinca, a law student and one of two interns relishes the opportunity to gain practical legal experience outside the classroom.



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USAID's Effective Rule of Law program distributed Braille brochures on the legal system to every court and branch of the Association for the Blind throughout Kosovo.

Driton Obërtinca lost his vision at the age of 18, a challenge that has only served to embolden the ambitious young man. A third year law student at the University of Prishtina, Obërtinca is also the Chairman of the Youth Forum for Sports Affairs of Kosovo's Association for the Blind.

"I'm passionate about justice," he explains. "I believe that it's my responsibility as a member of the blind community to fight to protect the rights of my peers."

Obërtinca recently became one of two blind law students to earn a paid internship with USAID's Effective Rule of Law program. With a very limited number of Braille study materials available through their law school, the students relish the opportunity to gain practical legal experience.

"I hope my studies go as well as the internship," says fellow intern Felona Bajrami, who has been sight-impaired since birth and joined Obërtinca at University of Prishtina Law School this fall. "I want to be an advocate for other students with disabilities, to ensure they have as many study materials available to them as possible."

The interns are working with the program's legal team to help provide translation and regulation support to the Kosovo Judicial Council. They also provide invaluable council to the program, which has partnered with the Norwegian government to renovate 16 of Kosovo's courts to bring them in line with international standards for access, including accommodations for persons with disabilities.

Through the initiative, USAID recently partnered with Kosovo's Association for the Blind to print and distribute Braille brochures on the country's legal system in three languages to every court and branch of the association throughout the country.

Since Kosovo's courts were restructured in January 2013, the program has undertaken a public outreach campaign that includes explanatory brochures printed in five native languages, and now the Braille brochures in Albanian, Serbian, and Turkish.

"It is our goal to ensure that Kosovo's blind community can be active members of society," says Association for the Blind President Bujar

Kadriu, who has succeeded in quadrupling government compensation for the blind and getting Kosovo's constitution printed in Braille during his ten years at the helm of the organization. "The blind community must know their rights and these brochures and internships for our future community leaders are important steps towards that goal."

USAID's Effective Rule of Law program has worked with Kosovo's justice institutions since 2011 to strengthen their capacity to better serve the needs of the country's citizens, including increased public outreach and accessibility initiatives.