



SUCCESS STORY

Kosovo Courts Reduce Backlog

8,500 pending cases are resolved in 11 months



Photo by: USAID Effective Rule of Law program

USAID professional associates work alongside court staff in a Court Management Registration Office.

June 2015- When Kosovo's new de-centralized judicial structure went into effect in January 2013, courts had a better model for efficiency moving forward, but faced an uphill battle in tackling the many cases left unresolved under the old system.

As of July 2014, Kosovo's seven basic courts and their 20 corresponding branch courts had a backlog of 56,300 major criminal, civil, and serious crimes cases. Seeing the impact of this backlog on public faith in the country's justice system, USAID's Effective Rule of Law program stepped in to help out. Under a pilot program, USAID first embedded a backlog reduction team of professional associates in Podujevë/o Branch Court in late July 2014. Seeing immediate results there, the program decided to embed teams at two of the country's busiest regional courts: Gjakova/Đakovica Basic Court and later, Pristina Basic Court in January 2015.

To date, 11 months after the launch of the first team, over 36,000 cases have been reviewed by the teams and over 8,500 cases have been closed as a direct result of their work. "I am more than pleased with the quality of the review and summary of cases provided by USAID's professional associates," explains Gjakova/Đakovica Basic Court Judge Iliriana Hoti. "Their attention to detail and ability to quickly research and incorporate updates from the Criminal Code is extensive and makes our work as judges more efficient."

The impact in Gjakova/Đakovica Basic Court is especially noteworthy, as the intervention managed to reduce the overall backlog workload by 16 percent in the first six months. In that same time, the team was able to take significant action on over 75 percent of the cases previously classified under "no action taken to date."

"We now have a much clearer picture of the workload in this area, and we now have a detailed inventory and status for thousands of cases that have been suspended for many, many years due to the ongoing issues between Serbia and Kosovo," said Hektor Vula, Chief of File Registry for Gjakova/Đakovica Basic Court.

The court points to its public notice board as a visual representation of the great work being done in backlog reduction. Once only updated sporadically, the board is now teeming with notices of upcoming hearings and decisions that have been rendered. "Each notice on that board represents one case that is moving one step closer to finally being resolved," Vula adds.

USAID's Effective Rule of Law Program ran from March 2011 through September 2015 to help build a more effective and independent justice system in Kosovo.

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