



SUCCESS STORY

Scholar Inspires Kosovars to Travel One Visa at a Time

World traveler urges others to overcome bureaucratic obstacles



Being part of the world while traveling around the world.
Lavdi Zymberi, Chiang Mai, Thailand

“Through my blog and through my traveling, I want to help make a name and put a face to Kosovo.”

July 2017—Two of her close friends from university are getting married in India this December. But, unfortunately, Lavdi Zymberi cannot be there for them. Although she is an avid world traveler, like many of her fellow citizens, she faces a challenge: a very limited list of countries she can travel to. India is not on that list.

“I can travel to only a handful of countries without a visa, and a lot of those countries are very far away or require that I get a transit visa,” she explains.

But this has not stopped Zymberi, who has been to 27 countries and 24 U.S. states. Getting a visa is not easy process overall, and for a Kosovo passport holder even harder. Many countries have not recognized Kosovo as a country, not its passport. In addition many countries have no consular representation in the nearby countries so Lavdi had to travel to different countries where the embassies were located.

Zymberi is one of 185 promising bright Kosovars who have pursued graduate studies in the United States under USAID’s **Transformational Leadership Program—Scholarships and Partnerships**. After returning from her graduate program—she studied public administration at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago in 2014 through 2016—she started a blog (<http://kosovogirltravels.com/>) where she documents her travels as a young woman and as a Kosovar.

“I started the blog with two goals in mind,” she says. “I want to share my travels as a woman, and I want to inspire other women to travel more and to not be afraid of traveling alone. This isn’t something that is done or encouraged in our society, and I think it can be a great way of discovering yourself.”

The second aspect of her blog is that she wants to help promote Kosovo. “People don’t know of Kosovo or, if they do, they don’t know a lot. Through my blog and through my travel-

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ing, I want to help make a name and put a face to Kosovo,” she says.

This is not the first time Zymeri has been a vocal ambassador for her country. During her studies, she campaigned for and succeeded in getting Kosovo on Facebook’s country list, getting over 15,000 signatures on her change.org campaign in one week. Facebook recognized Kosovo since 2013, but the users could not “check in” showing that they are located in Kosovo. This petition allowed Kosovo users to list their hometowns in Kosovo, not Serbia, as was previously the case. “There’s a lot of instances where even countries that recognize us just don’t have their border control systems updated with Kosovo on the list,” says Zymeri, noting how Kosovo travelers are sometimes delayed when attempting to enter other countries. “I’ve had this happen to me a few times and it can be unpleasant. But it usually gets resolved quickly. That’s why it’s important for us to branch out and talk to everyone abroad and help put Kosovo on the radar.”

Zymeri hopes that, through her blog, she can inspire everyone to take their role as informal Kosovo ambassador seriously. She plans to continue her travels, despite all barriers and inconveniences, and wants to keep telling people around the world about her small Balkan home.

USAID’s five-year Transformational Leadership Program—Scholarships and Partnerships began in 2014 and strives to develop a cadre of leaders that will drive change in priority economic, political and social areas in Kosovo.