



## SUCCESS STORY

### Women Legal Professionals in Kosovo Find Strength in Numbers

Raising the glass ceiling for the growing number of women in justice.



Members of the Forum in front of the U.S. Supreme Court during their October 2014 study tour.

Photo by: Effective Rule of Law Program



Photo by: Effective Rule of Law Program

The organization brings together legal professionals from both sides of the gavel to advocate for women in leadership positions in Kosovo's justice sector.

"I think women are foolish to pretend they are equal to men. They are far superior and always have been."

Kosovo State Prosecutor Laura Pula raised a few eyebrows when she finished a recent speech to law students with this quote from *Lord of the Flies* author William Golding, but she certainly had their attention.

"The work of a prosecutor is very grueling – it requires an incredible amount of responsibility and courage," explains Pula, who is also the co-Chair of Kosovo's year-old Forum of Women Judges and Prosecutors. "I want to encourage young women to join this profession, but they have to understand that there will be even greater pressure on them than their male colleagues."

Currently, women make up just over a third of Kosovo's prosecutors (35 percent) and a quarter of the judges (27 percent), but those numbers appear to be rising. Over half of the country's law students are women (54 percent) and 31 passed the State Bar Exam this year – the highest number yet in the justice system's young history.

USAID's Effective Rule of Law helped establish the Forum following the March 2013 Week of Women, an annual event bringing together women in leadership roles from a variety of sectors to discuss ways to empower more women in each. The Forum was officially established in December 2013 when the first 52 members elected the body's first board and adopted its mission statement.

"The creation of the Forum has not only been a crucial step forward for women in the legal profession, but also for Kosovo's justice system at large," Forum Chair and Court of Appeals Judge Biljana Rexhiq told Voice of America during an October 2014 study tour for Forum judges.

The tour included stops at the U.S. National Association of Women Judges Annual Conference in San Diego, California and Washington, DC, where they met with the International Association of Women Judges, the American Bar Association, and the Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment and Appeals Project.

The study tour was a highlight of the Forum's first year, which saw the membership grow to 135 women legal professionals thanks to

quarterly meetings in six different regions throughout Kosovo and active participation in events for the Week of Protection for Victims of Crime and International Human Rights Day.

In its second year, the Forum aims not only to increase networking and mentoring opportunities for its members and women law students, but also take the lead on a vital legal issue: domestic violence prevention and enforcement. The Forum is already working on a benchbook, or legal reference, for judges and prosecutors.

“Violence against women is a cancer,” Judge Rexhiq explains. “This is a key area where our legal experience and support to women can make a real difference. There is still a lot of work to be done in Kosovo to give victims the protection they deserve.”

USAID’s four-year Effective Rule of Law 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.