

CARDS

Country

Serbia and Montenegro

Implementation period

2002-2004

Funding

€2 million

Results

Education and training of unemployed, and development of a national human resources development system based on Lifelong Learning

Coordinator

European Agency for Reconstruction

Contact person:

Ms Meri Lorenčić

Mr David Doyle

Radoja Domanovica 8,

34000 Kragujevac

Serbia

Fax + 381 34 334 930

E-mail kraguje@EUnet.yu

<http://www.sumadijahrd.org>

“Learn to earn”: training the jobless

Changing demands of the market place

Since 2000 Serbia has privatised or closed many socially owned companies and state-run banks as part of tough economic reforms to improve growth and develop a market economy. In Kragujevac, the main town in the district of Šumadija, the loss-making Zastava car manufacturing plant, once well known for its “Yugo” cars, was singled out for restructuring in 2001. Its gradual downsizing has resulted in annual lay-offs of around 2-4,000 people. In a region already heavily affected by economic decline, these job losses have pushed up local unemployment to around 30%.

Like other people in the region, the car plant’s former employees were faced with a bleak future. Many of them (62%) had never had to look for work before, and lacked the skills required to find new jobs. With a four year average length of unemployment for redundant workers in the region, the situation was becoming acute.

Training, training, training

“Learn to earn”, a two-year EU pilot programme was set up in 2002 to tackle general unemployment in the Sumadija district. The focus has primarily been on assisting the region’s long-term unemployed and redundant workers. During the first year of the project, over 50 local trainers and teachers were trained in the latest adult education and training methods, and 235 local organisations have been accredited to provide training courses to redundant workers.

The training programmes devised by the project offer job-seekers in the region the opportunity to learn skills in such areas as catering, tourism, food processing, construction and agriculture. These sectors promise to be the new growth and employment industries of the area, and, by the time the project ends, some 2,100 people will have passed through the courses.

Training, however, is just a part of the pilot scheme. It also aims to contribute to the development of a national system of Human Resources Development, based on the principles of Lifelong Learning. To this end, a partnership group of organisations, which includes international donors, employers associations, chambers of commerce, trade unions and the Ministry of Education, has been set up. Under Serbia's new Labour Act, this development is considered imperative, if long-term national commitment to getting unemployed workers back into the workforce is to be assured. By mid-2004, some 31 organisations had joined the partnership group.

Job clubs set up

The project has helped the National Employment Service to set up the first two Job Clubs in the district – places where the unemployed can go for training in how and where to look for a new job. The Job Club in Kragujevac, with computers donated by the project, was opened at the end of August 2004. Another club will open in the nearby town of Arandjelovac in September.

Plans for scheme to go national

Plans are now afoot to continue the project at national level with the focus on developing the National Employment Service. The project drafted guidelines and regulations for certification and provided advice on how to introduce the methodology applied. Potential participants to the training courses, which last between several weeks and six months, will be referred to the project via the newly created labour offices. The emphasis has been on ensuring that the project's 'holistic' approach to assisting job-seekers in their search for work is maintained.

Supporting enterprise to generate jobs

In addition to this return-to-work initiative the EU is investing in several economic development programmes. In 2003, the EU set aside a further €13 million to develop vocational education and training around the country. Also, support has been given to small- and medium-sized enterprises in the form of loans and the creation of regional enterprise centres. As new business is generated, so the job prospects for the unemployed across the country, will improve.