

Results in Europe and Central Asia



FYR Macedonia: Cash Transfers Keep Students in School

Denis Boskovski, Communications Officer in the World Bank Skopje Office, offers this story.

Kristina Donevska and Zulejla Abdulova are no different from their schoolmates at "Boro Petrushevski" secondary vocational school in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The future flight controller and freight forwarder come to school every day with the same hopes and dreams as other youngsters their age. They work hard for good grades and hope for the best. The difference between them and other students is they've had to work harder to get here and do well, because money at home was so tight. Paying for textbooks and notepads, clothes, and transportation has been difficult. Fortunately, obtaining the basics is now somewhat easier thanks to a conditional cash transfer program.

Kristina and Zulejla are not alone. Families of approximately 9,000 students throughout the country struggle to make ends meet and educate their children. All of those students now receive conditional cash transfers through a program supported by the World Bank, which provides small sums of money to poor families as long as they keep their children in secondary school.

Photo Gallery



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Kristina Donevska

"These are the funds that I use for notebooks and transportation to and from my home town. It greatly relieves the strain on my family's budget and facilitates my education," says Kristina, the secondary school student who came from Kumanovo to study in Skopje.

"Besides the financial assistance," Zulejla adds, "the program also inspired two very important notions: the self-initiative to apply and receive it, and regular attendance at the classes, which is a pre-condition to receive the assistance, both of which contribute to our development as students and future professionals."



Zulejla Abdulova

The connection between poverty and education has a long history. While FYR Macedonia has demonstrated solid economic growth, poverty has not decreased since 2002, and remains a major development challenge. An estimated 20% of the population lives below the absolute poverty line, unable to buy enough food or meet basic needs.

Different studies have shown that poverty is driven by unemployment, which is directly related to low education attainments. Indeed, the country's National Employment Strategy diagnoses a lack of skills as a key determinant of individual unemployment: almost 70% of those with primary education or less

are poor.

The government recognized the need to act fast and carefully target the root of the problem. To break the cycle of poverty, it needed to increase access to education. With the support from the World Bank, the Conditional Cash Transfer project was designed, and began paying out in 2009. The program provides EUR 200 annually to families receiving social assistance whose children regularly attend secondary schools.



Sonja Ristovska

"Boro Petrusevski" high school has long served as an example of an institution that inspires the best in its students and teachers. It has a practical curriculum and offers international competitions for students. It cares for needy students by connecting them with private companies that have a demand for skilled labor and are willing to hire students before they graduate, and let them work flexible schedules so they can stay in school while working.

"The conditional cash transfer program comes at the right time and complements the activities our school already had with an aim of making it possible for the students to have brighter and more secure futures, with adequate education," says school principal Sonja Ristovska.



Amanda Arifovska

Looking ahead, Kristina and Zulejla's ambitions have a greater chance to be fulfilled than ever before. The old saying says that "sometimes it takes a little to make a lot." This program may be just the thing to do it. As Amanda Arifovska, future student of Business and Logistics at the Skopje University, puts it: "Besides its financial benefits, the program has also brought a bit more optimism among the students. And optimism is contagious."