



SUCCESS STORY

Quality Assurance for Nonprofits

Civil society organizations adopt quality standards



Photo: AED

USAID Mission Director William Jeffers, left, joins Civil Society Educator Milan Ristić, right, to congratulate Duška Milinković, a graduate of the intensive SOKNO mentor training program in Zagreb.

“It’s great to be part of the group that is pioneering this system in Croatia,” said Slađana Novota, a quality assurance mentor. “Because it is such a high quality program well-grounded in a thorough, systematic process, it has the potential to be a tremendous success.”

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Nonprofit organizations in Croatia are increasingly aware of the need to ensure sponsors and donors of the quality of their performance in order to build a strong civil society. A USAID program in Eastern Europe is helping them do exactly that. The Croatian Quality Assurance System for Nonprofit Organizations (SOKNO) provides these groups with a framework for assessing current performance and creating action plans to improve the quality of professional services.

After developing the system, USAID tested the system in 21 organizations before making it available to the wider community of nonprofit organizations in Croatia. One of the first groups to pilot the system was Hepatos, a health advocacy and service organization based on Croatia’s southern coast in Split. Tatjana Reić, the group’s director, explained, “As our programs expanded, we realized that we had to do more to ensure the quality of our services. We needed an objective view of our strengths and weaknesses to help us plan for functional improvements.”

SOKNO was exactly the tool Reić was seeking. Its self-assessment structure fosters continual learning and improvement. “Working through the SOKNO process was not simply a matter of bringing our organization into compliance with the law and being transparent,” said Reić. “As we worked together to address quality in each of our service areas, the contributions of our staff and volunteers were affirmed. Ultimately, everyone felt valued. We hadn’t necessarily expected the ‘SOKNO side effect’ of higher morale and better performance.”

SOKNO was adapted specifically for Croatian organizations. Representatives from leading civil society groups provided input and feedback into the model, and more than 20 professionals were trained and licensed as system mentors to provide expert guidance to organizations in the self-assessment process. “It’s great to be part of the group that is pioneering this system in Croatia,” said Slađana Novota, one of the mentors. “Because it is such a high-quality program and it is well-grounded in a thorough, systematic process, I think it has the potential to be a tremendous success in the country’s civil society sector.”