



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**BULGARIA**

## SUCCESS STORY

# Cameras Shed Spotlight on the Roma

**Young photographers offer outsiders a glimpse into community's world**



Photo: Spektar M&L/ Mustafa Sevim

The talented photographers captured the spirit of even the youngest residents of the Borovets district of Kardzhali, such as in this photo by a participant who later was hired as a newspaper photographer.

***At the insistence of the mayor of Kardzhali, Hasan Azis, the photo exhibition of the Roma community was put on temporary display at the town's City Hall, bringing awareness to a oft-ignored group.***

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

Prejudice persists against Bulgaria's Roma minority, with many non-Roma Bulgarians unaware of Roma culture. A project in the southern Bulgarian town of Kardzhali sought to bring the Roma community out of isolation. Through photos, the USAID-funded initiative aimed to preserve the colorful lifestyle and customs of the Roma living in Kardzhali's Borovets district who identify as Turkish and Muslim.

A local company organized photography classes for 18 people, mostly from Borovets. For ten months, the young participants learned about the history of photography, techniques of taking photos, composition and lighting, and had practical training in shooting film and video. They went out into their community to capture simple and celebratory moments in the lives of local residents, such as children playing, women making traditional foods, and young brides preparing for their weddings. Many of the photographs were published in a local newspaper.

The best photos became an official exhibition at the community center in Borovets. The town's website provided information about the exhibit and stimulated widespread interest, including from the mayor, Hasan Azis. On his insistence, the exhibition was put on temporary display at the Kardzhali City Hall, where it attracted positive feedback from visitors.

In addition, the exhibit was also shown at the Military Club in the national capital, Sofia, in June 2007.

Mladen Savov, the owner of the project's sponsoring company, hired two of the course's best-performing participants fulltime for his company. Mesut Ahmed, trained to be a cameraman, has already received requests to film Roma weddings. And Mustafa Sevim, who once considered photography only a hobby, gained the professional skills to be a photo reporter for the local newspaper.

To become sustainable, the project intends to open a small photo lab in Borovets, staffed by Mesut and Mustafa, to meet the residents' needs for quality photo printing.