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**BULGARIA**

# FIRST PERSON Grant Expands Factory's Opportunities

**Fund for new machines benefits firm and its ethnically diverse staff**



Photo: USAID

Nefie Yusein demonstrates the new heavy-duty running stitch sewing machine that the company can now use to complete orders from Greece for uniforms.

***"USAID saved my business," said Yumer Salim, who received a grant for economic development through a local NGO.***

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Tucked away on a side street near the central square of the Bulgarian town Momchilgrad, the Egeya-Yumer Salim apparel factory is a bright room where 12 employees work on multicolored sports apparel and crisp white and green hospital uniforms. The company supplies uniforms to hospitals throughout Bulgaria, and recently won a new contract to supply uniforms to a Greek company.

But a few years ago, owner Yumer Salim and his wife, Nefie, almost had to close their business because they couldn't afford to buy a heavy-duty running stitch sewing machine and other equipment needed to sew stripes, belts and other features onto clothes. Orders had to be sent to another factory for completion, which sometimes delayed production.

Yumer applied for a USAID grant that funds small projects focused on economic development and educational advancement in communities with a high percentage of ethnic minorities. With the grant, Yumer was able to buy the new equipment to enable the company to fulfill orders on time and satisfy clients.

The company's employees reflect the ethnic diversity of Momchilgrad, a small town nestled in Bulgaria's Rhodope Mountain range in an area whose population is primarily ethnic Turkish with an ethnic Bulgarian minority. By maintaining an ethnically diverse work force, the Salims provide a forum for interaction between ethnic groups and help to address the issue of unequal labor market access for minorities, which continues to plague many mixed communities in Bulgaria. The grant also enabled the company to hire six additional workers representing both ethnic groups from the local community, an important achievement given the area's relatively high unemployment.

Now he is focused on expanding his company's work for the Greek customer, and hopes to increase staff to 20 employees. "USAID saved my business," said Yumer.