



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

ALBANIA

SUCCESS STORY

Soap Opera Teaches Life Lessons

An outreach campaign educates girls on the dangers of trafficking



Photo: Pine Street/Elton Verzivoli

An actress playing a social worker, left, counsels Marta during the recording of an educational soap opera.

“A soap opera can really contribute to solving problems of trafficking. While it cannot replace prosecutors, police, or the courts, it remains a medium for raising awareness and for eliminating trafficking,” said Arben Papadhopulli, executive director of a USAID-sponsored radio soap opera.

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

Dreaming of a life far from the Albanian countryside, 18-year-old Marta suddenly sees what she’s always wanted within reach. Her new boyfriend, Roni, has proposed marriage and a life in Italy where he has a job offer. An opportunity of a lifetime awaits the couple, or so it seems.

“Having this job, Marta, means a lot to me. I’ll have a lot of money, and you don’t need to work. We can also pay for your studies,” Roni says. She responds, “Everything you’re saying about Italy seems to be a dream. I feel like I’m watching a movie on television.” Without telling her parents, Marta leaves to join Roni in Italy. But soon it becomes clear that there will be no happily ever after. Marta has been unwittingly lured into a life of prostitution.

Marta’s story is part of a radio soap opera, “Pine Street,” broadcast across Albania to raise public awareness about trafficking of unsuspecting girls and young women into a life of prostitution. While Marta’s story is fictional, it is too often a reality for girls in Albania who leave the country seeking better employment and educational opportunities, escape from troubled homes, or “new lives” with their “fiancés” in foreign countries, only to fall prey to traffickers. Some of these young women escape and return home, but then they are often ostracized by their families and society.

“One impact of the show is to create a national atmosphere which is supportive of trafficking victims — to build a climate of understanding among society and families of the victims that will contribute to victims’ reintegration,” said Arben Papadhopulli, executive director of Pine Street. The program receives support from USAID, which aims to strengthen the ability of Albanian community leaders, organizations, and government entities to improve programs that decrease human trafficking and improve and expand services that assist and help reintegrate victims.

Marta’s story ends well. With help from anti-trafficking groups, Marta returns and overcomes her experience to become an activist who helps other girls and young women avoid the traps of traffickers. Her family eventually agrees to accept her, and Marta becomes fully reintegrated back into her community.