

Basic Education Program Improves Reading Instruction and Outcomes in Kosovo

BEP Literacy Accomplishments

At-a-Glance

- Developed a national Albanian language Early Grades Reading Assessment (A-EGRA) and trained over **230** teachers in EGRA administration
- Conducted national A-EGRA baseline and progress studies which have confirmed improvements in reading performance, particularly in Reading Comprehension
- Designed a Ministry-accredited Albanian language EGR course and trained over **2,400** teachers as part of a school-based approach to professional development
- Distributed over **33,000** leveled reading books to **200** schools to improve access to literacy opportunities for students
- Extended access to literacy opportunities by making leveled readers and student-created content available online. These materials have been accessed more the **2,000,000** times!



Kosovo is one of the world's youngest nations and has a young population—nearly a third of all people are under the age of 15. A recent population boom has put additional strain on schools. To respond to the increasing need for quality education at the primary level, FHI 360 is working with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) to implement the Basic Education Program (BEP). One of the main goals of the program, which is funded by the US Agency for International Development and the Government of Kosovo, is to improve reading instruction and outcomes.

A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO DEVELOPING A LITERACY STRATEGY

Through the course of its programming BEP identified several challenges to achieving positive literacy outcomes including limited instructional time, lack of relevant and accessible reading material, ineffective teaching practices and limited use or availability of reading assessment instruments. In response, FHI 360 experts developed an Albanian Early Grades Reading Assessment (A-EGRA) to better inform a comprehensive literacy strategy aimed at improving the capacity of educators and service delivery systems across Kosovo.

A national A-EGRA baseline of Grade 2 students conducted by the program revealed that reading is taught in Kosovo with some measure of success. Almost all students demonstrated basic phonemic awareness and knowledge of letter-sound correspondence, most had a reasonable level of decoding skills, and some sight vocabulary. The results also revealed areas of weakness. About 50% of all students tested did not achieve an acceptable level of oral fluency for their grade level and 40% could only answer reading comprehension questions at the very lowest level.

42,000

children have benefited from the Basic Education Program's literacy programming

About FHI 360: FHI 360 is a nonprofit human development organization dedicated to improving lives in lasting ways by advancing integrated, locally driven solutions. Our staff includes experts in health, education, nutrition, environment, economic development, civil society, gender, youth, research, technology, communication and social marketing — creating a unique mix of capabilities to address today's interrelated development challenges. FHI 360 serves more than 70 countries and all U.S. states and territories.

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STRENGTHENING TEACHER CAPACITY THROUGH RESPONSIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Informed by the results of this national baseline, BEP has worked in partnership with MEST to provide targeted supports to teachers and students. As part of these efforts BEP engaged more than 2,400 teachers throughout the country in accredited professional development courses designed to strengthen understanding of the essential components of reading and to improve literacy-focused pedagogy. These trainings have led to the establishment of the first community of practice in early grades reading assessment within Kosovo. This community is grounded in the use of appropriate assessment tools in the early grades and continues to develop capacity in assessing early grades reading on a wider scale.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO LITERACY MATERIALS

BEP experts have also led the development of the first-ever leveled readers in the Albanian language, the mother tongue of most children in Kosovo. Project experts established standards and systematically selected vocabulary to guide the production of 25 readers available both digitally and in print. This process, informed by the results of the A-EGRA baseline assessment, specifically targets the sight vocabulary of early readers through word recognition and improves their verbal fluency and comprehension skills. Moreover, contextually relevant stories and characters were created by local authors to appeal to and motivate young readers which further promotes reading for understanding from an early age.

BEP complemented these leveled readers with the development of additional activities and materials. Children's book fairs, parent workshops, author caravans, and annual events to mark International Literacy and Mother Tongue Days help to raise awareness about the importance of reading in communities across Kosovo. Easily replicable mini decodable books and student bookmaking competitions serve to extend authentic writing and reading opportunities for students both in print and online.

A FOCUS ON SUSTAINABLE IMPROVEMENT

Intermediate assessment data shows that reading outcomes have improved, particularly in the area of reading comprehension. In the 2012 baseline, approximately 40% of students were classified as exhibiting a "deficit" in comprehension. By contrast, a 2014 assessment found that only 27% of students fell within the "deficit" classification. To ensure sustainability of these efforts, BEP has trained 230 teachers on how to administer the test and has partnered with the education faculty at the University of Pristina, which will continue to provide EGRA and other professional development activities after the program ends.

"Our school benefited from all the BEP courses," said Shemsije Shyti, a third grade teacher at Avdullah Shabani school in Mitrovica. "Lately, myself and some other teachers completed the EGRA and reading course and I must say that the strategies that we have learned are very helpful and practical to identify the lack of reading skills in my students and then to work on improving those skills. I regularly use the graded readers with my students and encourage the parents to use the online version at home. The graded readers are very attractive to children and very useful for improving the students' reading skills."

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