



SUCCESS STORY

Kosovo's Apparel Industry Explores New Markets

New association helps businesses to create jobs



With over 80 employees from the local community, sportswear manufacturer SSPrint is setting the standard for job creation and employee benefits in Kosovo's apparel industry.

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November 2016— Some corners of Kosovo's major cities could easily be mistaken for Milan or Paris, with flashy designer shops and boutiques lining the streets. But unlike Milan and Paris—which attract designers from all over the world—Kosovo's designers are all home-grown and draw from a rich 200-year history in textiles.

Many, like Metush and Nadira Zymberi—the husband/wife team behind Menakon Fashion House in the eastern city of Gjilan/Gnjilane—have focused their efforts on the domestic formal market, catering to Kosovo's lucrative bridal industry. However, a recent grant from USAID enabled Menakon to train and hire an additional 15 employees, preparing them to boost their nascent off-the-rack line for broader export throughout the region and beyond.

“This assistance, so graciously offered by the American people, gave us the support we needed to take our business to the next level,” explains Metush, who is a board member of the Kosovo Apparel Marketing Association. The association, backed by USAID, is part of a multipronged strategy to increase employment in this growth-ready sector through targeted grants and support to reach new markets at foreign trade shows.

“The association has given the apparel sector a way to work as one body, advocating on its behalf before the Kosovo Government and representing a strong Kosovo apparel industry to foreign markets,” says Metush.

Kosovo's apparel industry is growing by the day, with younger designers like Yilka Brada, a ready-to-wear and theatrical costume designer, recently joining its ranks. Thanks to a startup grant from USAID, Brada presented her first fashion show in neighboring Skopje, Macedonia.

“The financial support that USAID has provided has made a huge difference, but it is the ongoing consultation and encouragement from the team and other members of the association that have made the biggest difference in helping me launch my company,” explains Brada.

With the ultimate goal of creating jobs, USAID also supported the development of an investor portal giving foreign investors access to information about Kosovo's entire apparel sector—from designers like Menakon and Yllka Brada, to sportswear manufacturers like the Podujevë/o-based SSPrint.

“The investor portal is an innovation for Kosovo's apparel sector,” says Hykmete Bajrami, Kosovo's minister of trade and industry. “This is a crucial first step to seeing the kind of investment that could lead to real job growth in apparel and related industries.”

Thanks in part to the rapid expansion of SSPrint, Podujevë/o is becoming a microcosm of this kind of job growth in Kosovo. First established in 2007, the company opened a new production facility in 2014, which now employs over 80 people from the surrounding villages—most of them women. A grant for new equipment from USAID helped the company increase efficiency in producing its main line, allowing them to launch a new line of underwear.

“With the recent expansion of our facilities, and the support from USAID to attend foreign trade shows, we are in a good position to start exporting our products in the coming years,” says SSPrint co-owner Xufë Sopa.

The five-year USAID EMPOWER Private Sector project, which is also funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, has been working since July 2014 to stimulate large-scale job creation by elevating the competitiveness of Kosovo firms in the growth-ready sectors of apparel, wood processing, ICT, renewable energy, tourism and metal processing. To date, thanks to USAID interventions, the apparel industry has added 109 jobs, with plans to add 205 more by 2019.