

Business Support Services

Establishing Business Centres in Bulgaria

Creating job opportunities through business support to small and medium enterprises

In late 2000, the Job Opportunities through Business Support (JOBS) Project was implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy with the support of the UNDP. The project aimed to foster job creation by supporting micro and small businesses and agricultural producers in regions of Bulgaria that experience high unemployment levels.

Unemployment is consistently ranked as the most important issue effecting Bulgaria today, most visible in the rural, agricultural regions. Despite that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Bulgaria account for 98.8% of all companies and employ about 45% of the labor force, structural problems such as limited access to financing, lack of information access to markets and high business transaction costs hinder their growth.

The JOBS project addresses unemployment by creating business centers, registered as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which provide technical and financial assistance to the emerging private sector.

Services Available through Business Centres:

- Providing comprehensive business support to both new and experienced entrepreneurs
- Introduction of new management techniques and new technologies (business advice, counseling)
- Delivery of a wide range of information services
- Consulting services provided by international and local consultants
- Facilitating access to credit
- Stimulation and support of a "dialogue" at the local and national level, between the public and private sectors aimed at promoting entrepreneurship

Services Available through Business Incubators

- Providing premises to the tenants at below market rates
- Access to technical services - telephones, word processing, secretarial support, copying, bookbinding; use of common facilities such as the conference room, computers, internet, etc.
- Consulting and training on both an in-house basis and through arrangements with outside consultants
- Internal and external networking advice for the entrepreneurs to develop fruitful contacts among themselves

- **Country:** Bulgaria
- **Launched:** 2000
- **Partners:** Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, UNDP
- **Program Highlights:** \$ 29.5 Million USD budget, 34,660 jobs created, 53,500 people trained, 42 sustainable business support organizations (JOBS Business Centres), \$ 24 Million USD in resources from operations



Business Centres have helped promote entrepreneurship in Bulgaria, significantly contributing to the shrinking unemployment rate.

The project has been running since 2000 and has become a nationally-recognized entity in Bulgaria. It provides uniform integrated packages of services by a nationwide network of 43 autonomous and sustainable business support organizations (the JOBS Business Centers). Services are differentiated depending on the maturity of the clients. JOBS centres have special outreach programmes for unemployed and other marginalized groups. With a budget of \$29.5 million USD from 12 different donors, JOBS applies unique and proven approach to job creation and local economic development. Additional figures:

- Jobs created and sustained: 34,660
- People trained: 53,500
- Entrepreneurs served: 20,000
- Utilized grants: 331
- Resources attracted for communities: \$24 Million USD