



# News from ISC

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Guljdzan Shain, 5 years old

### THE BALKANS

## A Brighter Future

### Helping Macedonia's Roma secure their rights

In a settlement on a hillside in Gostivar, Macedonia, one-room houses dot the hillside. A few residents carrying buckets step carefully over open sewage ditches on their way to their only source of clean water, two communal faucets provided by the city. As Muhamed Toci walks up, the settlement's Roma residents crowd around him, greeting him affectionately by his nickname, Muki.

Toci, himself Roma, leads Mesecina, a local nonprofit that helps the Roma community (sometimes inaccurately called gypsies) by offering assistance with obtaining identification papers, providing free legal council, and advocating on their behalf with local and state agencies. Demand for their services is high: they serve some 100 people a month, and as one Roma man put it, "everyone knows if they need help to come to Mesecina."

Today, people crowd around Toci to update him on their latest news. One woman carries a new baby. Another tells Toci that although he has arranged for her children to go to school, she is

embarrassed to send them without new clothes. A young man thanks Toci for helping him get his identification papers, which have allowed him to leave Gostivar for the first time in 15 years without the police stopping him.

Mesecina was founded in 1993 to deliver much-needed food and clothing to the Roma as the former Yugoslavia dissolved. By 1999, however, Toci and his colleagues wanted to move their focus from humanitarian aid to assistance that would equip the Roma to help themselves and to fight the widespread discrimination that is at the source of many of their problems. The largest ethnic minority in Europe, the official number of Roma in Macedonia is 54,000, but nonprofits estimate that there are more than 100,000. A 2003 United Nations Development Program report stated that most "endure living conditions closer to those of sub-Saharan Africa than to Europe."

One of Mesecina's main goals is to help Roma get identification papers, without which

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## CLIMATE CHANGE

# The Magical Multiplier Effect

## In Russia, saving energy adds up to community gains

Sasha Barnes, ISC's senior program officer for Russia, readily admits that energy efficiency seems like a dry concept—even as it is a powerful tool in the fight against climate change. Just back from visiting ISC projects in the Russian Far East, she is quick to point out the far-reaching effect that energy-efficiency measures can have on the wellbeing of a community.

Barnes calls it “the magical multiplier effect,” and it works on many levels. Installing a more efficient boiler in a kindergarten increases the temperature of the water and air, resulting in fewer illnesses for the kids. The savings creates new funds that can be spent on improving other kindergartens or on a job training program for young people.

In Gorbatovka, a town several hours north of Moscow, the energy efficiency savings begin to multiply: “Excited by its suddenly flush budget,” says Barnes, “the local administration chipped in \$5,000 to repair pipes that supply water to the school, and the efficient streetlights they’ve installed will save them about \$12,000 per year, which they’ll use to replicate the program throughout the municipality.”

Since 2001, ISC has helped 39 towns and cities across Russia become more energy efficient, and, with community input, funnel those savings into positive community change. They have restored more than 75 acres of land, eliminated 406 tons of waste through recycling, and annually save some 4.6 million kilowatts of electricity.

They are also demonstrating that what is good for the community can be good for the globe. So far, the communities have decreased emissions from coal and natural gas by more than 56,000 tons.

Another example of the magical multiplier effect of energy efficiency, says Barnes, is the unusual story of the community of Razdolnoye. Nestled in the gently sloping hills some 30 miles from Vladivostok, is the Family Hearth Village. There, on what used to be a military base, live five families determined to give orphaned children a

better life, a loving environment, and more opportunities than the state system of care would ever offer. Between them, they have brought 27 orphans into their community and family-centered life.

At the Family Hearth, the orphans have the rare chance to be regular kids: they go to the local school, swim in summer and sled in winter; they attend karate and art classes and help care for their foster siblings. When Barnes visited, she saw a football field where local children come to play with Village children, a small library, horses to ride, rabbits to feed and a new sports hall. And when the kids grow up, the Family Hearth sends them to nearby universities and colleges to become metal workers, bakers, agricultural specialists, and teachers.

Despite this cozy atmosphere, the residence halls are drafty and expensive to heat. We funded the insulation for one and replaced their large and inefficient boiler with two smaller ones in time for winter. Vladivostok businesses donated another \$20,000 to replace the windows. The windows and insulation are expected to save at least \$2,000 a year. Yearly savings from the new boilers are expected to reach \$4,200 per year—or 36 tons of firewood and about 4,500 kilowatts of electricity. This month, the Family Hearth community is gathering to decide on how they will reinvest the savings.

“Often when people talk about global warming, we think of inconvenience—less available oil, more expensive gasoline, more recycling,” says Barnes. “This shows how energy-efficient technology at the grassroots level can actually bring people together and galvanize people toward making their communities better places to live.”

ISC is proud to do this work in partnership with the Moscow-based Fund for Sustainable Development, which will celebrate its first birthday as an independent Russian nonprofit this January. Founded by the staff of ISC's Moscow office, they have implemented more than 100 community-level projects in the past year. 🍌



“This shows how energy-efficient technology at the grassroots level can actually bring people together.”

## A New Resource for Advocates

This summer, ISC's new Advocacy and Leadership Center provided a training for 17 community leaders from the U.S. Gulf Coast on building multi-ethnic, multiracial coalitions. Held in New Orleans and sponsored by Tulane University's Institute for the Study of Race and Poverty, the training was part of an effort to ensure an equitable and inclusive recovery from Hurricane Katrina. We also brought Leadership for a Changing World awardees together with key leaders from the coast for an advanced leadership course.

The Center, based in Washington, D.C., offers training, consulting, and mentoring to established and emerging leaders and advocates. Our trainings and tools, including a publicly available curriculum, have been honed internationally over two decades by ISC and the Advocacy Institute, which we absorbed in the fall of 2006. Learn more at [www.iscvt.org](http://www.iscvt.org). 🍌





Over 1 million people live in the city of Tbilisi, capital of the former Soviet Republic of Georgia.

## Letter from Tbilisi

ISC's Matthew DeGroot, in Georgia to launch our new project, writes about the dramatic events that took place the day after he arrived.

**November 7, 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia**—The crowded traffic in Tbilisi came to a total standstill that afternoon as some 2,000 protesters wearing surgical masks thronged the thoroughfare chanting slogans, blaring horns, and waving Georgian flags. It was clear from the back of my taxi that major changes were afoot.

The surgical masks had appeared like an instant fad, an all-too-real necessity for protesters to protect themselves from tear gas.

The protesters were calling for the resignation of President Mikhail Saakashvili and for early elections in the spring of 2008. The demonstrations were largely peaceful, however, so the sudden police crackdown—with the gas, truncheons, water cannons, and rubber bullets—came as a deep shock to the Georgian public. More than 500 protesters were injured, some severely, and a popular opposition television station was invaded and almost destroyed by special military forces.

In the immediate aftermath, the President declared a State of Emergency in this small, vibrant, Western-leaning country, claiming that hostile Russian intelligence operatives had been behind the protests. Public reaction was mixed: disgust over dramatic television footage of the police action led many to question the government's tactics and motives. President Saakashvili, under strong pressure at home and abroad, suddenly reversed course and surprised his opponents by declaring the early elections the protesters had demanded. Presidential elections would now be January 5th, rather than in the fall as planned, and a plebiscite

the same day would allow the public to determine whether Parliamentary elections should be held in the spring or fall.

I was there to set up an ISC project for the International Foundation for Election Systems to ensure that Georgian voters of all backgrounds are informed about election procedures and motivated to participate. In the course of 48 hours, we went from enjoying a leisurely start-up period to looking at accomplishing three months of work in just a week's time.

I was amazed and humbled by the professionalism and energy our Georgian counterparts exhibited in adjusting to the new circumstances. In short order, our local partner developed a comprehensive nationwide voter education and mobilization campaign of just 45 days, and organized a series of 20 local television debates to air in the three weeks before the Presidential election. And our local staff initiated an ambitious, competitive grant round to support media and civil society organizations in conducting pre-election coverage and advocacy activities.

Georgia, just four years removed from the Rose Revolution that toppled the old Soviet guard and set the country on a path toward democracy, now stands at a new crossroads. I was privileged to witness these dramatic events and the Georgian people as they met unforeseen challenges head on. ISC is playing a critical role helping Georgians ensure free and fair elections that are responsive to the needs of all citizens—enabling them to take a direct hand in shaping their common future. 🍷

**"The demonstrations were largely peaceful, so the crackdown came as a deep shock to the Georgian public."**

## News from Serbia

ISC's nationwide project in Serbia is working to get ordinary citizens, and the nonprofits that support them, involved in public life. Encouraging corporate philanthropy is key to helping nonprofits survive over the long term.

With this in mind, we launched the First Annual VIRTUS awards with our partner, the Balkan Community Initiatives Fund, to recognize businesses that have distinguished themselves by supporting nonprofits over the past year.

The Serbian television and radio station B92 won first prize at the national level for its fundraising to build a Safe House for Women on behalf of a Belgrade nonprofit serving victims of domestic violence and trafficking, and for its campaign to popularize voluntary blood donations.

The awards were presented by the Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia, Božidar Đelić, and U.S. Ambassador Cameron Munter at a ceremony in the House of the National Assembly on November 20<sup>th</sup>. Over 200 people attended the event, including retired NBA star Vlade Divac. 🍷

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Macedonians cannot legally work, attend school, access health insurance or social services, marry, travel freely about the country—or be counted in the nation’s census. With high rates of illiteracy and unemployment, many cannot navigate the system for getting such papers nor afford the fees. Children cannot get birth certificates unless their parents have them, so often the path to obtaining them is long and complicated, particularly if they were born in another part of the former Yugoslavia.

ISC provides intensive trainings and mentoring to Mesecina to help this already exceptional nonprofit become more sustainable over the long term—and lead a network of six civic advisory centers across Macedonia working with the Roma. Toci says ISC’s Advocacy Fellowship, for example, showed him that educating civil servants was equally important as educating Roma, and now offers training to both groups.

This work is part of ISC’s nationwide program to boost the effectiveness of a core group of nonprofits, ensuring that they and their valuable work will thrive well into the future. In partnership with the Macedonian Institute for the Media, we are training Roma to be journalists so that they can elevate Roma issues in the media. And we also work with two other Roma-led nonprofits, including KHAM in eastern Macedonia, and ARKA, based in Skopje, the capital city.

“Without identification papers, how can we

**“This is the first step if we want to improve the situation of Roma in Macedonia. It all starts here.”**

talk about education, employment, human rights, or integration?” says Rexhep Alicupi, a lawyer for ARKA. “This is the first step if we want to improve the situation of Roma in Macedonia. It all starts here.”

Back in his office in Gostivar, Toci explains how state agencies often take advantage of the Roma’s illiteracy and lack of education to deny them services, harass them, or arrest them without cause. He cites an incident from several years ago in which a teenaged Roma boy was killed when a car ran a stoplight. Because the boy had no identification, the police decided that he didn’t officially exist, and therefore the driver could not be prosecuted.

While this is an extreme case, says Toci, the lack of identification papers continues to be a source of daily problems. While Mesecina has a strong relationship with the local schools and has convinced them to allow Roma children to attend without birth certificates, Roma in other cities are not so lucky. On weekdays, settlements around Macedonia are filled with out-of-school children and unemployed adults.

Still, the mood is bright. “What makes me proud is what we do on a daily basis,” says Shukri Toci (no relation), who works with Toci at Mesecina. “I get my energy from how we help the Roma change their lives—when they share their problems with us and we help them.” 🍌

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