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## INTERNET ACCESS AND TRAINING PROGRAM



### MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS, NOVEMBER 2009

The USAID-funded, IREX-administered Internet Access and Training Program (IATP) uses information and communication technology for development (ICT4D) to meet community needs through a network of centers offering free access to the internet, training, and citizen-led events. ICT facilitates the free access to and exchange of information, the modernization of local organizations and businesses, and the creation of community-based and international networks, thus empowering citizens to advocate for change in their communities.

## Moldovan Community Mobilizes to Save Local School



IATP user Vitalii Stanciu during the celebration of the Day of knowledge at the School No. 6 from Comrat, Moldova

As the IREX-implemented Internet Access and Training Program (IATP) prepares to pass the torch to local partners in December, program public access computing centers continue to bridge the digital divide and provide motivated citizens with the access to information and ICT tools necessary to make a difference in their communities.

When graduates of Comrat School No. 6 in the Gagauzia region of **Moldova** learned in May that their alma mater was at risk of being closed due to a lack of government funding, they were shocked; the news broke amidst preparations for the school's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. A dedicated group of alumni, led by graduate and local resident Vitalii Stanciu, organized to advocate to save the school. After

registering an official association with the Department of Justice and leading community outreach events, they began to receive local news coverage (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5QHPFFiA9w>).

Stanciu and the group then came to the local IATP Center in Comrat—the only center in the region offering free internet access and technical training—to leverage the technology and know-how to help spread their message. Working with IATP staff, they created an online wiki resource (<http://komrat-shkola-6.wikidot.com>) explaining the looming closure, detailing the group's goals of the association, and calling on others to join the association's efforts to save the at-risk school. To increase traffic to their wiki page, Stanciu and the group also used IATP resources to e-mail the site's link to their database of graduates, both in Moldova and abroad.

Although the organization's outreach efforts specifically targeted alumni, they were also successful in bringing the plight of the school to the attention of the broader community. IATP trainee Dorin Rusu echoed the sentiments of many Comrat residents, saying, "I personally never studied at School No. 6, but I was really disturbed by the decision of the Department of Education to close it. In two years, my son will start school, and as a parent, I want him to go to a school that is close to home. I join with all the graduates and the students of the school who are trying to revive it and return it to its former glory as one of the best schools in Comrat. Together, we can really make a difference."

Within four short months Stanciu and association members had raised enough funds to purchase a school computer, printer, scanner, copy machines, and a digital camera. They presented the gifts to the school on September 1, 2009, on the traditional Day of Knowledge ceremonies commemorating the first day of school ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BPQsx6LoOw&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BPQsx6LoOw&feature=player_embedded)). Addressing the crowd of students, teachers, parents, and community members, Stanciu credited the support of a wide network of alumni: "This is only our first step on the way to rescue our home school. The gifts are small but were bought thanks to the generosity of many caring individuals, including numerous graduates from all around the world."

The association quickly got to work on a larger and more pressing goal—to repair the school's damaged roof. Appealing to donor organizations, philanthropic business owners, and their established alumni group, the organization again employed the resources of the local IATP center to create an official website for their association, Tucaneasca, named after the local district (<http://tucaneasca.md>). Soon supplies were purchased with donations received from the community's tireless fundraising efforts and repairs were made by the association members

themselves. On October 24, 2009, School No.6 in Comrat celebrated its 40-year anniversary under a newly-laid roof.

Overwhelmed, School Director Nelly Tricolici expressed his gratitude to supporters at the anniversary celebration, “This summer, former graduates took this school under their care. I never could have dreamed that within one summer, the school’s physical building could have been restored, and that on the school’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it would be buzzing proudly with students, parents, teachers, guests, and employees of the Department of Education of Gagauzia. Our pupils are again actively involved in extracurricular activities, such as writing for the school newspaper, playing basketball in the gym, preparing for theater performances, and many other things. In short, life will go on at School No. 6 because now it is safe and no longer at risk.”

The story of Tucaneasca and School No. 6 is just one example of what concerned, dedicated community members have achieved by harnessing local ICT resources to assist them in their missions since IATP first opened its doors in Moldova more than ten years ago. Moldovans from all walks of life and professional backgrounds have used the training, technology, and free internet access available at IATP centers across the country for personal, professional, and community development. More than 100 young women gained ICT and leadership skills through the Tech Age Girls (TAG) program, which helped them find employment opportunities and reduced their vulnerability to human trafficking; over 240 medical professionals representing 13 institutions and six regions participated in the MedIT program designed to improve patient services across Moldova through digital record-keeping; and dozens of librarians have graduated from the IT4Librarians program with the knowledge to leverage online information resources and provide modern library services in their communities.

Beginning in December, four graduated IATP centers or Independent Internet Centers (IIC) will operate in Moldova. The IATP center in Chisinau will continue offering services as an IIC under the management of Moldova State University, providing free internet access and training to community leaders—such as NGO representatives, librarians, entrepreneurs, and media professionals—as well as Moldova State University staff and students. Similar services will be offered by the center in Comrat, whose operations will be overseen by the Gagauzian Department of Education. The center in Tiraspol, Transnistria, will continue to be the only source of free internet access in its region and will be sustained by the NGO World Window Youth Information Center. The NGO plans to offer paid technical training to cover the center’s expenses but continue to provide internet access to the public free of charge. These three will join a fourth IIC in Causeni, operated by the Creativity Center for Children. Together they will continue to be a resource for local residents and organizations, such as “Tucaneasca,” who are working to bring new opportunities to their communities.

IATP activity begins in Moldova: **1998**  
Centers offering free services: **Chisinau, Comrat, Tiraspol, Causeni**  
**# users** (since June 2007): **3,712**  
**# trained** (since June 2007): **1,964**  
**# of visits to IATP centers** (since June 2007): **38,099**  
**# of training sessions** (since June 2007): **366**

### **Small but Strong: IATP Georgia Graduates 13<sup>th</sup> Center, Trains Record Number of Users**

The final IATP center in **Georgia** will graduate as an Independent Internet Center (IIC) on December 10 of this year in Gori, joining a long line of sustainable centers that have continued their services after IATP funding ended since the program began its activities in Georgia in 1997.

Georgia has a solid track record of successfully graduating centers as stand-alone IICs thanks to its dedicated partners, well-planned transfer strategies, and quality services.

The Gori IATP Center will become Georgia's 13<sup>th</sup> IIC. Gori State University, its current host, will take over operations after the December graduation and will continue providing free ICT training and internet access to the Gori community. The center will also maintain its special focus on serving internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the 2008 conflict with Russia who live in the local community.

Three other IICs are also based in universities across Georgia—in Tbilisi State University, in Kustaisi's Georgian Scientific Academy, and in the Poti Engineering-Economic State Institute. IATP also has transferred services to successful IICs in libraries in Telavi, Khashuri, Batumi, Kutaisi, and Tbilisi, as well as in NGOs in Rustavi, Zugdidi, and Gori.



**Internally displaced persons (IDPs) receive ICT training at the Tbilisi IATP Center**

Because a primary focus of IREX's mission for IATP emphasizes internet access and technical training for the most marginalized segments of society, transfer strategies ensure that partners do not take over an IATP center as purely commercial ventures. Each partner signs an agreement when they become an IIC to continue offering a minimum number of hours of internet access and technical training to their community free of charge.

Some IICs in Georgia go above and beyond; the IIC in the Batumi Public Library (graduated in March 2009) does not simply offer a minimum number of hours, but continues the full spirit of IATP by offering free services and training at all times. In many sense, libraries are a natural partner of IATP as the IICs' missions are similar to their own—to be a resource of information and education to an entire community, free of charge. Batumi Public Library Director Genadi Makharadze addressed a room full of the IIC partners in September, explaining, "I definitely understand the importance of the center for the local community, as well as for improving library services, and therefore I vow that as long as I will be the head of the library, all the services at the IIC will remain free of charge and the center will work for the benefit of the whole community."

The library worked hard to find money in their budget to retain the experienced IATP trainer and administrator so that the proven, high-quality training courses would continue. The bustling center continues to see nearly 200 visitors every month, including users, such as Lela Verdzadze, who recently drew on her ICT training to conduct market research, come up with a business plan, and launch her own driving school business with her father.

Other IICs in Georgia are using paid services to subsidize free internet access for the public. The Rustavi IIC, for example, partnered with the local NGO Georgian Association of Educational Initiatives (SIQA) to charge a fee for technical training courses and maintain four hours of free internet services per day. "People pay because our trainings are of high quality," explains SIQA Director Giorgi Tvaliashvili, who says the strategy has been sustainable for a number of years.

Since June 2007 alone, IATP in Georgia has welcomed over 9,000 visitors to its centers and has trained over 10,000 local residents in ICT skills. Not only do these impressive stats rank Georgia in the top three of all IATP countries in Eurasia for the combined number of visitors and trainees (outpacing even Ukraine, with a population of 45 million), but Georgia ranks first in the number of users who receive technical training from IATP staff. In fact, it is the only country where the number of trainees, on average, exceeds the number of regular visitors at IATP centers. With an excellent record of graduating sustainable IICs, IREX expects these local internet access centers will continue to meet the growing demand for information and technology training in Georgia for years to come.

IATP activity begins in Georgia: **1997**

Centers offering free services: **Gori (2), Tbilisi (3), Telavi, Khashuri, Rustavi, Batumi, Kutaisi (2), Poti, Zugdidi**

**# users** (since June 2007): **9,211**

**# trained** (since June 2007): **10,373**

**# of visits to IATP centers** (since June 2007): **90,031**

**# of training sessions** (since June 2007): **1,372**

## From Ministry Officials to Farmers—IATP Tajikistan Brings ICT to All

After more than nine years of working to close the digital divide and promote civil society, IATP **Tajikistan** will close its doors on December 10. IREX's USAID/ECA-funded IATP program has provided free internet access and technical training to more than 15,000 local residents in the last two years alone, forming close partnerships at all levels of society—from Tajik Ministries all the way down to rural farmers.



**Ministry officials and journalists learn ICT skills during IATP mobile training in Dushanbe, Tajikistan**

In IATP's e-Government project trained more than 250 ministry officials in ICT skills necessary to make full use of their modern office equipment, improve bureaucratic efficiency, and streamline services for Tajikistan's citizens. Migration Service Senior Lieutenant Istat Shomirzoeva recalls before she learned to use her computer it took her at least an hour to prepare a simple letter. Now it only takes her 20 minutes using word processing software. Her colleague Sergeant Ismoil Zokirov also explained that the office can now process documents required for passports much more efficiently and provide more timely feedback to their citizens via e-mail.

IATP also assisted organizations in developing electronic databases to improve their services for the public. A notable example is the International Organization for Migration, who worked with IATP to develop an e-database for shelter workers designed to document reports of human trafficking they receive from the public. The national database collects, stores, and cross-references information on both victims and alleged perpetrators of trafficking.

Over the years, however, IATP in Tajikistan learned that more than just white collar workers were interested in ICT training. Rustan Nasritdinov, a businessman and head of the agricultural NGO Lola Farming, has partnered with IATP for the past several years to streamline his own organization and provide more than 145 rural farmers with mobile training programs on how to use computers and the internet. Now, farmers research questions on the use of imported feed additives and treatments for common livestock diseases on the internet at their local IATP centers. Other graduates of the training conduct online market research to price their produce competitively and stay abreast of the latest developments in their field. Nasritdinov explains, "Earlier, most of the farmers in my region conducted business in the traditional way—buying and selling crops at the local market. Now, many of them do it online." Some farmers have even established clients and partners abroad, selling and shipping to foreign markets.

Although IATP in Tajikistan will close its doors in December, the centers will live on and continue to serve their communities as Independent Internet Centers (IICs). IATP partners will sustain the

mission of bringing internet access and IT skills to more individuals in Tajikistan, where still less than five percent of the population uses the internet. Upon graduation, Tajikistan will have a total of six IICs in cities and regions across the country: Kulyab, at a branch of the Technological University; Khujand, at the Pulatov Private School; Kanibadam, at the headquarters of the local NGO Civil Bridges; Dushanbe, at the Science Academy Library; Garm, at the NGO Rasht; and Khorog, at Khorog State University. Director of the Science Academy Library and soon-to-be head of the Dushanbe IIC Alla Aslitdinova remains deeply committed to the program, “The IATP program made a considerable impact on a wide range of individuals in Tajikistan by providing opportunities for all levels of human development—from as lofty as broadening an individual’s worldview, to as concrete as helping them find a job. Our goal is to help these centers continue to do just as well in the future.”

IATP activity begins in Tajikistan: **1999**

Centers offering free services: **Dushanbe, Garm, Khorog, Kulyab, Khujand, Kanibadam**

**# users** (since June 2007): **12,127**

**# trained** (since June 2007): **3,465**

**# of visits to IATP centers** (since June 2007): **82,693**

**# of training sessions** (since June 2007): **624**

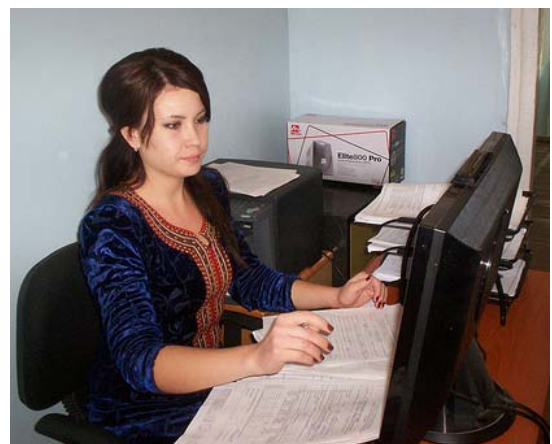
## **Turkmenistan’s Small Businesses Modernize, Increasing Profits and Salaries**

When the CEO of Melhem, a firm specializing in the shipment of building materials, decided to send his employees to ICT training, he had no idea how quickly it could improve their overall efficiency or that it would quadruple company sales.

In June of this year, Melhem employees attended ICT training at the IATP center in Turkmenabat, **Turkmenistan**. The employees learned basic computer and internet skills and achieved proficiency in various MS Office applications. Throughout the process, participants focused on how to apply their ICT skills in their jobs and realized how much it could improve business operations. Not long after the training, the company invested in three computers and connected them all to the internet.

Now the company keeps track of their clients through e-databases and finds and maintains new contacts online. Thanks to the modernized system, the company estimates it has improved its efficiency by almost 70 percent. The majority of employees’ time is now spent developing the company, which suits workers well, as their salaries are based on a percentage of the company’s profits. Melhem accountant Margarita Hemraeva explains, “Before learning IT skills, we spent most of our time doing paperwork and did not have as much time to seek out new clients. Our new IT skills are allowing us to spend our efforts in achieving our real goals—to expand our customer base and increase profits.”

Just recently, Melham established a significant new partnership with a client in China through internet outreach. Employees’ salaries are now four times what they were prior to the June training. In February and March of this year, staff salaries ranged from \$100-150 per month. Since working with IATP, the modernization of their office and the acquisition of new partners through the internet, individual salaries have increased to about \$400-500 per month.



**A Melhem staff member using her new ICT skills acquired at IATP for routine paperwork**

Not wanting to be left behind, in September another local Turkmenabat firm, Azatlyk, specializing in market research and consultations, also furnished their office with three computers and began sending employees to training at the local IATP center. Employees have since used their new office equipment and skills for processing routine paperwork, as well as advertising and diversifying the company's services. Azatlyk owner Agamurat Hallyev remarked, "Thanks to the IATP training, we understood that it was impossible to work without computers. Now our staff is using their new knowledge and skills to help us find new clients and increase our work efficiency and profits." IATP has trained more than 30 representatives of the business sector since the IATP center in Turkmenabat opened in 2004.

In December, four IATP centers in Turkmenistan will graduate as Independent Internet Centers (IICs), each with a unique local partner and sustainability plan. The IIC in Balkanabat will be run by the local NGO Turkmen Society for the Deaf and Blind, which is also collaborating with American Councils in Balkanabat to support the fledgling independent center. The partner will continue to provide free training in computer and internet basics and offer free internet access, while American Councils will cover administrative costs and retain the current IATP administrator. In exchange, the center will offer consultations and information for users about American Councils' exchange programs and other information about studying in the US. American Councils will also fund the new IIC in Dashoguz.

Under a different model, IICs in Turkmenabat and Mary have partnered with local economic associations (Hemayat and Gulnahal, respectively) to provide free internet access that is subsidized by offering low-cost technical training. The Turkmenabat IIC will continue to focus services on youth, low-income families, and people living with disabilities. All four of the newly-graduated centers will strive to support IATP's mission of providing free internet access and ICT resources to support the personal and professional development of members of their local communities.

IATP activity begins in Turkmenistan: **2000**

Centers offering free services: **Ashgabat, Turkmenabat, Dashoguz, Mary, Balkanabat**

**# users** (since June 2007): **5,058**

**# trained** (since June 2007): **4,682**

**# of visits to IATP centers** (since June 2007): **48,567**

**# of training sessions** (since June 2007): **1,637**