

New Wind in Your Sails

Thanks to the MoLSA





Dear readers,

This is the second time I have had the honour, on behalf of all employees of the EU Funds Implementation Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic (MoLSA), to present a few stories of people who have participated in projects that have been supported within the areas of support falling under our responsibility as the Intermediate Body. We have supported thousands of projects, and there are even more individuals or groups who benefit from them. The funds have been, and are, distributed among a wide range of non-profit organizations, companies and other organizations, with maximum effort for efficiency.

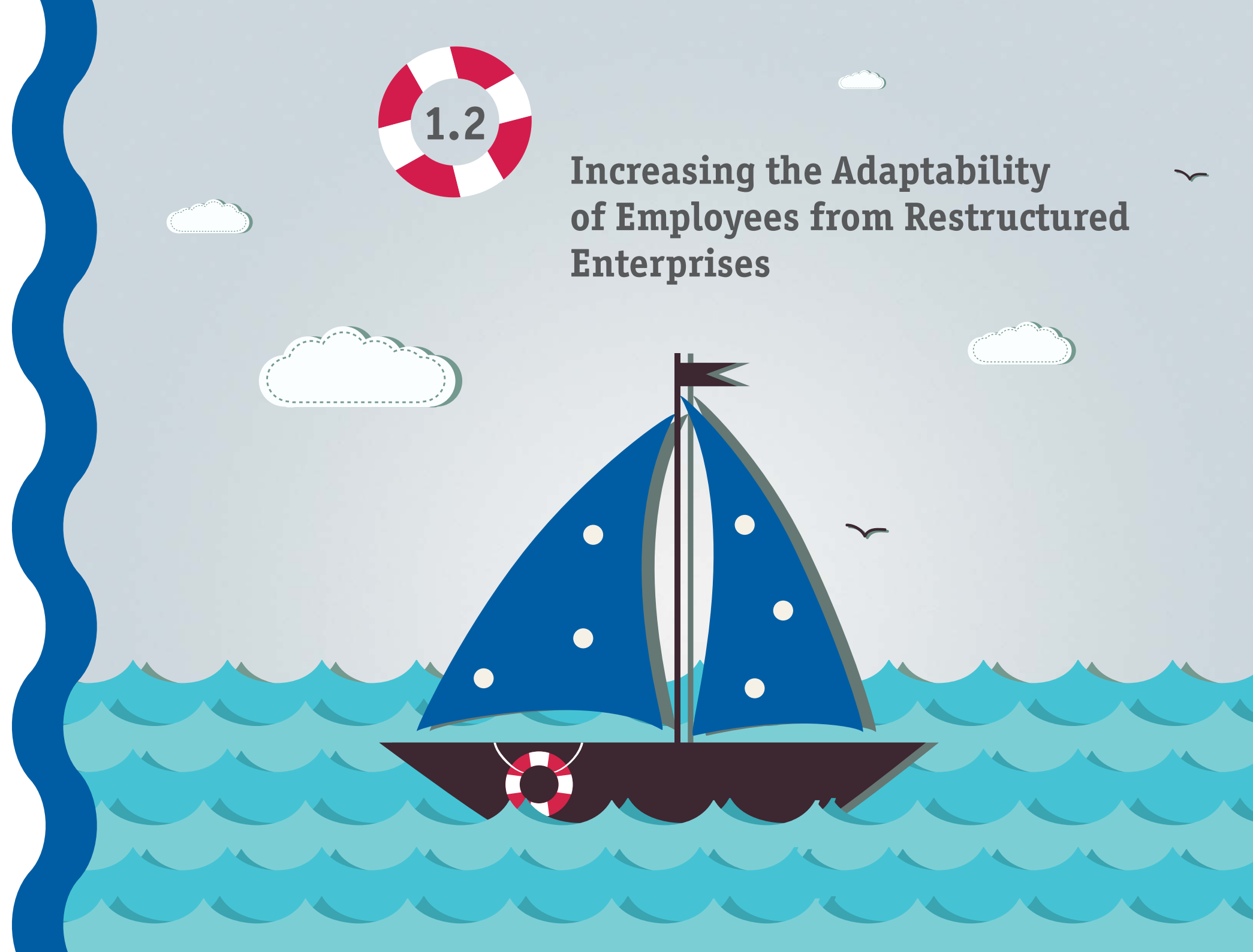
The EU Funds Implementation Department is part of the EU Funds Section of the MoLSA. Within the implementation of the Human Resources and Employment Operational Programme (HRE OP), it is responsible for employment services (areas of support 1.2, 2.1, and 3.3), and the area of social integration and social services (areas of support 3.1 and 3.2). Projects that we support using the European Social Fund (ESF) help the unemployed to reintegrate into the work process in the open labour market, or within sheltered employment, as well as employees. They are aimed at different target groups, such as young people under 25 years of age, people with disabilities, people over 50 years of age, ethnic minorities, persons leaving prisons, and others. Projects that focus on social services and social integration help people find their way back into society. Other supported areas include the education of social service providers' staff and other persons, planning the availability of social services, implementation of quality processes of social services provision, as well as the transformation of residential facilities of social services, and the creation and development of new business activities aimed at social businesses.

The publication "New Wind in Your Sails Thanks to the MoLSA" that you are holding tries to show specifically how the funds received within the HRE OP through the ESF help real people around us. It presents authentic stories of people who found themselves in difficult life situations, and it was also thanks to projects supported by the MoLSA that the people were given a chance to change their situations. I believe that after you have read the stories you will share the good feeling that we have at the MoLSA of how public resources can assist in solving specific problems.

PhDr. Karel Vít, Ph.D.
Director of EU Funds Implementation Department
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic



Increasing the Adaptability of Employees from Restructured Enterprises



Nad'a Sedlářová

At fifty-six she found out she was a born masseuse



Type of project: Grant project 1.2

Project title: New Chance

Project number: CZ.1.04/1.2.05/36.00004

Recipient: Přerov District Chamber of Commerce

The aim of the project was to help employees find new job opportunities, retrain, or start a business. The target group included persons who were dismissed due to organisational reasons and persons whose fixed-term contracts had expired. The project involved a total of 143 persons. The courses within the project were successfully completed by 152 participants (some persons were involved in more project activities, so they were included in the final number of successful participants more than once). The project is followed by the “New Chance 2” project, which aims to enable redundant workers to adapt to the current situation of the labour market in the Olomouc region, and to provide them with maximum support in order to increase their qualifications and help them find suitable jobs.

Nad'a Sedlářová worked until she was 56 years old. She was approaching her retirement. But from one day to the next, after 36 years, she was “fired” from a company where she worked as a computer network and property administrator. In March 2012, she found herself at the Labour Office. Because she still had six years before retirement, she started looking for a job. She seized the chance offered and joined the project financially supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic. Now she has her own business – she has become a masseuse.

However, it was not so easy. When she saw the approach of some companies, she chose a radical solution. “During the notice period, the representatives of the Chamber of Commerce came to the company. There was a collective dismissal, so we were informed about different options of retraining courses. I was interested in masseuse training. It immediately occurred to me that I could move from Přerov to Chvalčov, where my late father had a sewing workshop,” says Nad'a Sedlářová, who has only had a massage twice in her life, for her sore neck.

Mrs Sedlářová successfully completed a three-month massage course, and after she prepared a business plan for the “New Chance” project, she also received a financial subsidy, thanks to the MoLSA, which allowed her to start a business. “I got positive feedback about my massage business. My friends from Chvalčov said it was great, because they wouldn’t have to travel to Bystřice pod Hostýnem, which is quite far. So I thought I might find enough clients. I’ve been doing this for less than a year, and I have a number of clients proportionate to this period. Everybody I have talked to about the massage profession has told me that it takes at least a year to build up a regular clientele,” Nad'a Sedlářová describes her first business experience.

When she attended the course, she learned something surprising about herself. The teacher even told her that she was a born masseuse. “She said I have very warm hands, which is necessary for massage. It gave me a lot of energy,” masseuse Nad'a Sedlářová laughs.

Jan Ogurčák

At fifty, he radically changed his job



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An interesting career can begin even at fifty. This is illustrated by the story of Jan Ogurčák from Přerov. He was helped by the “New Chance” project, implemented by Přerov District Chamber of Commerce with the support provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

High unemployment in the Přerov region doesn’t make the situation for people who lose their jobs in middle age easy. There are almost forty people for every vacancy. But every cloud has a silver lining. “I worked in a company as a service technician in an electronic telephone exchange, and one day we were all fired,” says Jan Ogurčák. In June 2012, when he had to leave, it occurred to him that he could actually pursue his hobby. “I thought about what to do next. I’d done programming for a couple of years as a hobby, and I knew that there was a demand for that field. And I’d actually wished to do automation for a long time,” he explains.

His former employer co-operated with the Chamber of Commerce, through which he helped Jan Ogurčák find a job. “He recommended the ‘New Chance’ project to me, so I attended the training course. It eventually helped me find a job in a company in Kroměříž,” says Jan Ogurčák. He believes it is very difficult to find a job in a field in which you have no experience. “I completed a basic course, and was lucky. Currently, I work as a programmer, and I also do visualizations of technological processes. I enjoy my profession perhaps more than the previous one, although I’ve found it so late. You can’t be forced to this job – you’ve got to enjoy it. But to really start doing it full time, I had to be pushed by dismissal from my original job,” concludes Jan Ogurčák.



Reinforcement of Active Employment Policies



Štěpán Lichovník

Working with judges was an invaluable experience



Type of project: Regional individual project 2.1

Project title: Young Chance

Project number: CZ.1.04/2.1.00/70.00005

Recipient: Labour Office of the Czech Republic,
Regional Branch of the Labour Office in Jihlava

The project is aimed at helping job seekers/ graduates (less than two years after graduation) with little or no experience. The main objective of the project is to ensure professional experience and to support the jobs that have been newly created by employers for this target group. A total of 186 young people from the target group have participated in the project activities. In total, 70 internships in public administration were planned within the project, which has been fulfilled to 100%. With respect to newly created jobs, the same number, i.e. 70, is planned. So far, 39 agreements with employers have been entered into, which means 60 % fulfilment. The project is still in the implementation phase; the activities will be completed in February 2014.

Professional work experience, knowledge of the inner workings of the court, as well as work habits, independence and responsibility – twenty-five-year-old lawyer Štěpán Lichovník from Stržanov in the Vysočina region acquired all of that in six months within the “Young Chance” project, funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

“I came to the court as part of my training. They were apparently satisfied with my work, and asked me whether I wanted to stay for six more months, within the ‘Young Chance’ project,” says the young lawyer.

The young law graduate had a chance to work on interesting cases: *“When I started out in court, I was in charge of simple procedural tasks. Later, thanks to the ‘Young Chance’ project, I worked directly with the judges. I got a specific file that I analysed, and then I prepared documents for the decision. I also helped in the writing of the judgment, which was an invaluable experience,”* says Štěpán Lichovník. Within the “Young Chance” project, he was surprised by the activation module used by the teacher to show the students how to write a CV or a cover letter, or how to behave during an interview. *“I admit that I first considered this part of the project to be useless, but I changed my mind when I was looking for a job. I just couldn’t believe how much I’d learned in the course. I realized how a well-written cover letter can help you persuade a potential employer,”* says Štěpán Lichovník.

The fresh law graduate eventually found a job in another region: *“I’m going to work in Brno. In the Vysočina region, it is difficult to find a job in my field. During interviews, I could draw on my experience. When you leave school, your knowledge is mostly theoretical. And if you don’t have a job after school, which was also my case, this project is the perfect bridging period before you get it. I didn’t have to deal with existential issues. On the contrary, I had the opportunity to acquire knowledge, while looking for the job that would suit me.”*

Kateřina Vlachová

A trained dancer reads the news on the radio



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Project title: Young Chance

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Thanks to the “Young Chance” project, supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, twenty-year-old Kateřina Vlachová from Jihlava has found an interesting job in the capital of the Vysočina region. Now she knows that the search for her next job will be easier than when she found herself in the labour market as a graduate without any experience.

She attended a dance conservatory, and then a higher vocational school. But she ended up at the Labour Office. *“I wanted to complete a retraining course, because finding work as a dancer in the Vysočina region is very difficult,”* says energetic Kateřina Vlachová, who was informed about the “Young Chance” project by a Labour Office clerk. *“I was shortlisted and then completed a ten-day training course. That helped me learn how to be assertive at the interview, and how to write a CV and a cover letter. Excellent experience,”* she adds.

She became an editor in a radio station, although she wasn’t actively interested in this position: *“I wouldn’t have thought that I would ever get to the news section of a private radio station, and that I would work as an editor. But now I’m really grateful for this job, because it has broadened my horizons.”*

She considers the “Young Chance” project to be a very good idea. *“At least for young people to start off in the job market. We just don’t have the experience usually required by employers, and real life shows that it is experience that is sometimes more important, for example, than a university degree. I think ‘Young Chance’ is one of the ways to help young people get the necessary experience,”* says the editor.

Radka Černá

Six years of waiting for a hairdressing job she has always dreamed of



Twenty-five-year-old Radka Černá, a trained hairdresser, had to work outside her field for six years. She found her dream job in a beauty, hair, and nail salon – thanks to the “Green Light to Crafts!” project, funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

“I am a trained hairdresser, and after school I just couldn’t find a job in my field. So I spent six years working as a waitress. When I stopped that, the Labour Office recommended me the ‘Green Light to Crafts!’ project to me,” explains the young hairdresser. She attended several group and individual activities where she learned how to behave during an interview, and she was given specific job offers. “We had a few sessions, but then it was up to us. The project helped me get a position I’d always dreamed of. The beginnings are hard. But I am happy – I have a great job in a fantastic team,” says hairdresser Radka Černá.

Radka Černá would also recommend the “Green Light to Crafts!” project to other job seekers. “I’m sure it will help them. Now I have time to find clients, and in the future, I might start my own business,” she says. The project is also spoken well of by employers. “I have a skilful employee,” said Zdeňka Herbstová, the salon owner.

Type of project: Regional individual project 2.1

Project title: Green Light to Crafts!

Project number: CZ.1.04/2.1.00/13.00095

Recipient: Labour Office of the Czech Republic,
Regional Branch of the Labour Office in Pardubice

The project is intended for job seekers under 25 years of age with vocational certification who want to work in their field, but who do not have sufficient experience. The selection for the project was carried out without discrimination, regardless of the length of the persons’ registration with the regional branch of the Pardubice Labour Office. The participants were selected from September 2012 to January 2013. The project was joined by 202 job seekers who had the opportunity to attend the Counselling and Information Programme, to complete their qualifications, and to gain employment based on AEP (Active Employment Policy) tools used in this project. As of 31 July 2013, the subsidized job option was used by a total of 59 project participants, and 85 project participants were recruited using a public contractor. The project is still in the implementation phase; the activities will be completed in January 2014.

Patrik Hloupy

From a panel beater to a machine fitter



What is it like to look for a job after leaving school? Nineteen-year-old Patrik Hloupy from Velké Koloděje near Sezemice has first-hand experience of this. When choosing a suitable job, he eventually found help within the “Green Light to Crafts!” project, funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

“I was trained as a panel beater at the Secondary Automotive School in Holice. After leaving school, I started looking for a job. I sent my CV everywhere, but they just replied that they might contact me later, or they didn’t reply at all,” Patrik Hloupy describes the difficult situation of young people without employment.

Finally, he received an unexpected offer. “I was asked by the Labour Office whether I wanted to get involved in the ‘Green Light to Crafts!’ project. I liked it, because I thought that I could use this project to find a job,” says Patrik Hloupy. This was followed by group and individual activities where he learned, for example, how to apply for a job in the right way and other information. Patrick finally became a machine fitter in a company in Pardubice. The “Green Light to Crafts!” project fulfilled its purpose.

“I can recommend the project to everyone. If I hadn’t joined it, I might still be looking for a job,” says Patrick, who “suffered the consequences” of age discrimination. “I did get some offers, but everyone required experience,” adds Patrik Hloupy. The “Green Light to Crafts!” project is there for young people under 25 years of age without work experience to help them.

Type of project: Regional individual project 2.1

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Lucie Vávrová

From tests to the sales department

In the past, she taught children the German language and physical education, now, in a new job, she's learning new things herself. And she's enjoying it. Thanks to a project supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, the former secondary school teacher has found a new job as a sales department clerk.

In May 2012, thirty-three-year-old Lucie Vávrová finished her maternity leave. At that time, her former employer informed her that she could no longer work in her previous position. The unemployed teacher therefore intensively started looking for a job. On the Internet she came across information about the "Targeted Measures in the Labour Market in the Zlín Region II – Focus on Graduates" project, supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic to create jobs in the Zlín Region.

"Euroface Consulting s.r.o. analysed my handwriting, so the experts identified my personality characteristics and traits. Based on this assessment, we started looking for a suitable job. It took a month, but finally we succeeded," says Lucie Vávrová. The smiling woman in her thirties currently works as a sales department clerk for a company based in Staré Město in the Uherské Hradiště region. *"I mostly handle incoming orders, communicate with our customers regarding deadlines, and clarify some details. I'm really happy that I can use my German skills in communication with our business partners,"* says the mother of a four-year-old son.

As a teacher, she could enjoy the holiday season, but, in her opinion, this is the only advantage of working in education. *"I can say that I'm happier in my new job. A lot of employers would see my motherhood as a handicap, but it's no problem here. I like working in a friendly team, and that I leave home after work with a clear mind, instead of thinking of correcting tests,"* says the former German teacher.

Type of project: Grant project 2.1

Project title: Targeted Measures in the Labour Market in the Zlín Region II – Focus on Graduates

Project number: CZ.1.04/2.1.01/74.00069

Recipient: Euroface Consulting s.r.o.

The objective of the project is to support 50 representatives of the target group in the Zlín region, using a comprehensive set of activities. The main output of the project is the creation of new jobs for graduates and parents of young children. In accordance with the plan, 25 new jobs have been created in the territory of the Zlín region since 25 July 2012. Jobs have been provided by employers of different specializations and sizes, and their sustainability reaches 100 %. To find satisfactory employment, the supported persons also use retraining options and choose courses in various fields.

Petr Paulus

Even a handwriting analysis helped me find a job



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Petr Paulus has been attracted to work with CNC machines, namely with computer controlled lathes, since his student days. Their operation and adjustment is his work passion. Thanks to the “Targeted Measures in the Labour Market in the Zlín Region II – Focus on Graduates” project, supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, he can now do it full time.

Carefree student years and the reality of normal working days, these are two different periods of every human life. Twenty-year-old Petr Paulus, who completed Secondary Engineering School in Uherské Hradiště a year ago, learned that too. He found employment, but his first job wasn’t a success. He worked for the company for only a few months. *“They used a very complex system, so the work was unpleasant. I wanted something else – I wasn’t satisfied,”* says Petr Paulus.

He decided to look elsewhere. On the Internet he found useful information and contacted Euroface Consulting s.r.o., a recruitment agency that placed him in the “Targeted Measures in the Labour Market in the Zlín Region II – Focus on Graduates” project. This project is used by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic to co-create jobs in the Zlín region.

“The agency only wanted to see my CV, and then I wrote a text for a handwriting analysis. Later they called me, saying that they had a job for me,” says Petr Paulus, praising the simplicity of the procedure.

He was employed by a company from Staré Město, a producer of parts for most industries. *“It is precise work in small batch production. I have to do a lot of adjustments, because we have a lot of orders, so I enjoy the work. I’m much happier than before. If I had a friend who was in a similar situation like I was a few months ago, I would recommend the same procedure to him,”* concludes Petr Paulus.

Stanislava Vaculíková

I was happy to swap the post office for an engineering plant



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Work behind the post office counter took time away from Stanislava Vaculíková that she wanted to spend with her two teenage daughters. The “Targeted Measures in the Labour Market in the Zlín Region II – Focus on Graduates” project, supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, allowed her not only to find a job in her field, but also to be with her daughters.

Forty-eight-year-old Stanislava Vaculíková from Polešovice in Moravian Slovakia is experiencing a professional comeback. Although one of her secondary school leaving examinations focused on metal machining technology, she left her field after some time and did different jobs. Her last job was as a postal clerk.

When searching for a possible new job on the Internet, she found a project offered by Euroface Consulting s.r.o., supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, and this helped her eventually find a job she wanted. Within the project, she completed a diagnosis and counselling course, and obtained a newly created job at a mechanical parts manufacturer based in Staré Město, in the Uherské Hradiště region.

Mrs Vaculíková was helped by expert staff, who taught her how to work with modern tools. The project significantly eased her adaptation to the new job as a mechanic. *“I finish products to be not only functional, but also beautiful and nice to look at. I do mostly finishing treatments, like removing sharp edges after pressing,”* she describes her work with interest. Her employer is satisfied as well, which is evidenced by the fact that Stanislava Vaculíková continues to work in the same position, even after the end of the mandatory six-month period.

She also appreciates that her employer allows her to work exclusively on the morning shift, so she stays in the company from six in the morning to a quarter to three in the afternoon. Then she can be with her daughters.



Support of Social Integration and Social Services



Vladimír Mazanec

He lost his job after a year in hospital, but he’s “back”



A springboard. This is how forty-seven-year-old Vladimír Mazanec from Zákupy sees his new job in ELEKCE s.r.o., a social enterprise based in Česká Lípa. He is one of eight people who once again receive pay after a long time out of work. The credit goes to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, which financially supported the “SoFi – Social Enterprise” project.

“I had a good job in Zákupy, but then I was ill for almost a year. When I returned, I was fired,” says Vladimír, who spent a year looking for a job, even with the help of the Labour Office – to no avail. But one day he was lucky. The social enterprise presented its activities at the Zákupy Municipal Office. There they heard his story, and Vladimír was then contacted by the main leader of the social enterprise, and was offered a job.

Vladimír considers the social enterprise as a great chance for people who can’t find a job for a long time, although they really want to work. *“It’s still better to work than stay at home staring at the walls. I view it as a springboard to a new opportunity. It’s necessary to earn a living. The project helped me, and if I find a job, I can be replaced by another person who needs help,”* says Vladimír.

Type of project: Grant project 3.1

Project title: SoFi – Social Enterprise

Project number: CZ.1.04/3.1.06/30.00266

Recipient: ELEKCE s.r.o.

ELEKCE s.r.o. was established in 2011, and currently it is implementing the “SoFi – Social Enterprise” project. The target group of the project consists of people registered for a long time with the Labour Office, the homeless, the socially excluded, and those who use social services. The main objective of the project is to build a viable and thriving social enterprise that will operate as a standard competitive company. The project employs 8 people from the target group. The jobs were newly created. Active and regular participation in the working process reduces the risk of crime, and forms a positive example for other citizens; the target group ceases to be dependent on the welfare system, and by regular job performance, it also supports its physical potential. The project is still in the implementation phase; the activities will be completed in January 2014.

Zuzana Vrabcová

She didn’t have any work experience, but she was saved by her reliability



A vocational certificate and no work experience, that wasn’t a good starting position for thirty-one-year-old Zuzana Vrabcová from Dobranov when she was looking for a job after returning from maternity leave. The Česká Lípa area is in the dubious first place for the number of unemployed in the Liberec region. However, everything changed when Zuzana was recruited by ELEKCE s.r.o., a social enterprise based in Česká Lípa, thanks to her reliable work in public service.

Zero work experience was also a limiting factor for Zuzana Vrabcová. *“I attended a family school with a focus on the operation of services. Before maternity leave, I worked as a shop assistant, but after that I wasn’t able to find a job again. I tried, I was even willing to do odd jobs, but they wanted experience, which I didn’t have,”* says Zuzana. She wasn’t able to find a job even during the three and a half years when she was registered with the Labour Office.

Thanks to the public service she did, she was employed by the social enterprise in August 2012. *“It’s nice after all those years, when you can’t find a job. I want to stay here as long as possible,”* adds Zuzana.

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Jana Češková

She lost her job, but she didn't give up

Jana Češková wanted to return to work after maternity leave, but her employer closed the business in the automotive industry due to the impact of the economic crisis. Finding a new job in the Česká Lípa region, which still has the highest unemployment rate in the Liberec region, was almost impossible. Finally, she was helped by a project funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Thirty-nine-year-old Jana Češková was registered at the Labour Office for a year. Thanks to her public service and reliability, she was employed by ELEKCE s.r.o., a social enterprise operating under the auspices of the Česká Lípa Parish Charity, where Jana received professional social assistance. *"I've been working for the social enterprise since January 2013, and I'm happy. We work outside from spring until the first snow. We prune trees, mow grass, and renovate rock gardens. We have contracts for complete renovations of private gardens, and we also work in the forest. I actually returned to my gardening profession, which is what I was trained for,"* explains Jana.

Thanks to integration in the job market, Jana is slowly becoming independent of the social care system.

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Varvara Golovatina

A Russian journalist fell in love with Bohemia, and teaches here



Thirty-one-year-old Varvara Golovatina came to the Czech Republic from Russia as a tourist in 2009. She found that she liked the country, and wanted to stay, work, and do business here. She succeeded, thanks to the “You Have a Chance to Get Involved” project, supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

“I was enchanted by the local people, and also by the culture, weather, and food. I decided to try to find a job and stay for at least a year. But everything was new to me, and I just didn’t know how to handle it. Thanks to the ‘You Have a Chance to Get Involved’ project, everything was easier,” says Varvara, who worked at the university, and as a journalist wrote for magazine in Yekaterinburg.

While teaching Russian at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, she heard about the European Contact Group from a friend. *“I found the offered courses interesting, and I gained not only valuable information, but also self-confidence, so I got a trade licence,”* says the mother of a seven-month-old child. She became independent, and now gives private lessons in Russian language, does translations too. *“I pursue teaching Russian. Although I am on maternity leave, I try my best, and I already have quite a lot of clients. Translation and teaching Russian is good support for me on maternity leave,”* says Varvara Golovatina.

The project is implemented in the Pilsen region. Its objective is to provide migrants with sufficient knowledge and skills to strengthen their economic independence, self-sufficiency, independent problem-solving skills, and the use of available services related to the integration into the labour market. The participants are educated in three levels. The first two are low-threshold levels, i.e. open to all persons, regardless of whether they have been living in the Czech Republic for many years or whether they arrived a week ago. The third level focuses on migrants with specific needs, such as parents of young children. The project is still in the implementation phase; the activities will be completed in January 2014.

Type of project: Grant project 3.1

Project title: You Have a Chance to Get Involved

Project number: CZ.1.04/3.1.02/67.00046

Recipient: European Contact Group

Marija Kaňovská

She left Belarus, and helped foreigners in the Czech Republic



In Minsk, Belarus, she studied at university, but after three years she went to the Czech Republic. She stayed in Pilsen and graduated from the University of West Bohemia in both Czech and social work.

“I attended the ‘Chance – Job – Integration!’ project supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic that was implemented in the spring of 2009. That gave me a lot. We discussed topics such as social security, health insurance, tax returns, starting a business, and the rights and obligations of employees and employers. So the kind of things that I then needed at work, where I helped foreigners deal with visas, get trade licences, or defend their rights when dealing with their employers,” says Marija Kaňovská.

After graduation, she worked as a social worker in a civic association focused on the help to foreigners. *“I first heard about the European Contact Group at work. Later, I enrolled on a personal development course within the ‘You Have a Chance to Get Involved’ project. It was about getting to know what you’re good at, using your best characteristics at work, and finding your role in the team, as well as your strengths and weaknesses. The course was focused more on people and their personalities,”* explains the woman from Belarus, currently on parental leave.

“The courses, including the ‘You Have a Chance to Get Involved’ project, gave me a lot of practical information, which I then used every day at work,” says Marija Kaňovská. She also appreciates the attractive and interactive form of the courses.

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Type of project: Grant project 3.1

Project title: You Have a Chance to Get Involved

Project number: CZ.1.04/3.1.02/67.00046

Recipient: European Contact Group

Olena Korol

I wanted to communicate with the authorities and in shops



Type of project: Grant project 3.1

Project title: You Have a Chance to Get Involved

Project number: CZ.1.04/3.1.02/67.00046

Recipient: European Contact Group

In August 2013, twenty-eight-year-old Olena Korol had been in the Czech Republic for a year, having arrived from Ukraine. “I had come to see my husband, and I have stayed ever since,” says Olena, who worked as the director of a pharmacy in her country.

She needed to overcome the language barrier. “I didn’t speak Czech, and I was looking for a Czech language course. I wanted to live here, have fun with the Czechs, and communicate with the authorities and in shops. I called the European Contact Group, and then completed the course for immigrants, combining content and language. The course also covered socio-cultural and labour issues,” says Olena Korol. The course helped her understand the behaviour of Czechs and the Czech culture. “Before the course, I just couldn’t identify cultural differences, and everything seemed the same to me,” she adds.

She learned about the project from a leaflet at the Foreign Police. Thanks to the “You Have a Chance to Get Involved” project, funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, Olena Korol finds it easier to get used to Czech society and to look for a job.

She completed a personal development course, and together with her husband, she also attended a course focused on finding a job in the labour market and on doing business. “I got information about filling in a tax return, claiming tax relief, and a lot of other interesting advice,” says Olena Korol. She is satisfied with the courses and seminars. “My friends also have positive experience. We can actively participate in learning through play, so we don’t just sit and listen to teachers.”

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Elena Zotova

She only returned to Russia to sit for the state exams, and then off to Bohemia again

Elena Zotova previously worked in a joint company with her boyfriend. After breaking up with him, she had to look for a new job – she found it, thanks to the “You Have a Chance to Get Involved” project, supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Thirty-two-year-old Elena Zotova has lived in Bohemia for almost ten years. She came from Russia to Cheb, and six years ago she moved to Pilsen. In Chelyabinsk, where she was born, she taught Russian at the University. “I went to Bohemia to practise-teach, and I also contributed to a Russian magazine. I only returned to Chelyabinsk to sit for the state exams,” Elena Zotova describes her beginnings in the Czech Republic.

After returning to Bohemia, she worked for a foreign company in Cheb. “Then my boyfriend and I founded a construction company, and I moved to Pilsen. But we broke up, and I had to look for a new job,” says Elena. Then she met a co-ordinator of the European Contact Group, a non-profit organisation. “I enrolled on a personal development course. We discussed how to develop strengths and competencies that people often don’t even realize they have. We tried to advertise ourselves. You identify the skills that help you cope with crucial situations and major changes in life. Open competitions are not popular in Russia, and Russians can’t praise themselves. I found it difficult to say that I am good at something, and that I must prove it. Later, I applied the knowledge from the course in the labour market. It was great preparation for job interviews,” says Elena, adding that the personal development course helped her learn a lot about herself.

The personal development course also helped Elena to find a job. “I was recruited by the European Contact Group as a contact officer. I have been working here on a “three-quarters time” basis since April 2012. I don’t think that I found the job – the job found me,” says Elena, smiling.

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Type of project: Grant project 3.1

Project title: You Have a Chance to Get Involved

Project number: CZ.1.04/3.1.02/67.00046

Recipient: European Contact Group



Support of Social Integration of Members of Roma Localities



Věra Mitalová

The debts grew, and we just couldn't handle it



Type of project: Grant project 3.2

Project title: Support for the Integration of Roma in Nový Bydžov

Project number: CZ.1.04/3.2.01/19.00292

Recipient: Town of Nový Bydžov

In January 2013, Věra Mitalová and her partner were finally relieved. A field social worker for the Roma community, Hana Holková, working for the Nový Bydžov Municipal Office, helped them with their personal bankruptcy. This is a result of the "Support for the Integration of Roma in Nový Bydžov" project, implemented with the support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

"It started just like in other families. We've got three kids, and sometimes we borrowed money for the things that we badly needed. But the debts grew and grew, and we just couldn't handle it. We mostly paid off interest, and it went over and over. And the repayments weren't lower – they were just the opposite," says Věra.

Her partner was out of work, and they didn't have enough money. *"They at least tried to handle their debts and change their life. The insolvency is related to the debt of Věra's partner, who has managed to find a permanent job. She is on maternity leave, so she couldn't apply for insolvency for her own debts. Věra at least sends monthly payments to repay her debts – the payments are small, but regular, which stopped home visits concerning the recovery of payments,"* says Hana Holková. The handling of her partner's insolvency took six months.

"It was the first case, and although we were partially helped by the Citizens Advice Bureau, most of the work, especially paperwork, was up to me. We had to list all his creditors, and fill in all the documents for court," explains Hana Holková, adding: *"Now they follow the repayment schedule, and if they comply with all insolvency conditions, their battle will be over in five years. It's not a rule that if you file an application for insolvency with the court, they will automatically approve it. It was their effort to get rid of the debt that played the biggest role."* According to Hana Holková, it also helped that not all of Věra's partner's creditors claimed their money.

The objective of the project is to provide services and activities leading to the integration of Roma, increasing their ability to succeed in the labour market, and setting up co-operation between the majority and the minority. The project funding covers 2 field social workers, the operation of a low-threshold centre, 2 crime prevention assistants, and 2 training courses: Financial Literacy Programme and "I'll Get Trained, I'll Graduate" Programme. The crime prevention assistants come from the Roma community; they patrol the streets together with the police, and supervise public order near schools and sports venues. The "I'll Get Trained, I'll Graduate" Programme encourages children leaving primary school to continue and choose an apprenticeship (or a secondary school), and works with schools and families to create an environment that allows the individuals to complete the selected apprenticeship or school education. An important achievement of the project is the setting up of repayment plans with debtors of the town. The field social workers managed to set 44 repayment plans, and collect almost CZK 70,000 of the outstanding fees in the community. The project is still in the implementation phase; the activities will be completed in January 2015.

Hana Holková

Thanks to the MoLSA's project Dušan has been taken care of

Life can sometimes be very hard. As in the case of fifty-three-year-old Dušan. He had a severe car accident that resulted in permanent injury. He was even deprived of his legal capacity, and placed under the guardianship of his wife. And therein lay the rub. He only received effective assistance with the "Promoting the Integration of Roma in Nový Bydžov" project, implemented with the support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

"I couldn't believe my eyes. The place where his family put him was more of a storeroom than a normal room like we're used to. He was dirty, he didn't get hot meals, and he could only dream of getting changed or having clean sheets on the bed. But he couldn't take care of himself. He can't walk, he is paralyzed, and he doesn't speak very well," says Hana Holková, a social worker from the Nový Bydžov Municipal Office. Dušan's family was primarily interested in his money. They were given not only his pension, but also his attendance allowance.

"First we arranged day care for him, to make sure his basic needs were taken care of. Then we arranged with the town to become his guardian," adds Hana Holková. The court soon ordered a change of guardianship: there was no certainty that Dušan's family might ever take care of him.

"Fortunately, we found support at the Long-Stay Hospital, and then also at the Hořice Centre for the Disabled. Currently, Dušan receives comprehensive and professional care," Hana Holková describes the happy end to his misery.

"His treatment is very expensive. But we give him some pocket money from what he receives. The money that is left over is used for other necessary items, such as new bed-clothes and sheets, which he really needs a large amount of. The good news is that one of his daughters expressed interest in him. "This is a nice little piece of encouragement," Hana Holková adds optimistically.

She concludes that without this necessary optimism, she couldn't do her job. *"Every little detail makes me happy. For me it is important that Dušan is taken care of, and that he doesn't have to wait for help anywhere,"* says Hana Holková.



Type of project: Grant project 3.2

Project title: Support for the Integration of Roma in Nový Bydžov

Project number: CZ.1.04/3.2.01/19.00292

Recipient: Town of Nový Bydžov

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Hana Řeháčková

Every little achievement makes me happy

Hana Řeháčková works for the town of Nový Bydžov as a field social worker. Many a strong man would perhaps be afraid to participate in the “Support for the Integration of Roma in Nový Bydžov” project, supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic – but not this young woman.

Especially Roma families owed the town a lot of money, for example, CZK 20,000 for waste collection. Therefore, the field social workers from the Municipal Office went to the debtors in their district and set up with them a repayment schedule. *“We agreed that it would be better to collect small amounts, but regularly, because these families wouldn’t be able to pay more money anyway. And their debts would just grow and grow,”* explains Hana Řeháčková, one of the field workers. Every little achievement makes her happy. For example, they have managed to persuade most debtors to comply with the payment schedule. And three of her clients have paid off their debts completely.

“There are also problems with the payment of rent in flats owned by the town. In this case, we work with the management of the property, and again we try to reach an agreement about payments,” says Hana Řeháčková, who, for example, had to solve the long-standing mess in the yard of a private owner, caused by the previous tenants. *“After many years, it was really unbearable, so especially the guys from the house cleaned it up. They were helped by crime prevention Roma assistants who work for the town police. Moreover, the owner paid each family five hundred crowns to make sure that there are finally dustbins, and the place stays clean. Where there is a will, there is a way. This is evident from this case,”* says Hana Řeháčková.

Type of project: Grant project 3.2

Project title: Support for the Integration of Roma in Nový Bydžov

Project number: CZ.1.04/3.2.01/19.00292

Recipient: Town of Nový Bydžov

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Helena Půžová and Roman Olah

They hit rock bottom

In their opinion, Roman Olah and Helena Půžová ended up near the end of the social scale, but they didn't stay there. They especially have to thank a project supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, implemented by the Czech West, in the Teplá region and in the Toužim region.

Thirty-two-year-old Helena and her five years younger life partner, Roman, live in Služetín, a small village located in the Teplá region. Their home is a flat in an old block of flats, built many years ago by a co-operative farm for its employees. Their household equipment is modest. Yet they look happy. *"We hit rock bottom, but we climbed back up. Thanks to Annie,"* say both, smiling and looking at Anna Dunčková, a community and field social worker who operates in nearby Dobrá Voda. She is viewed as a member of the household, and she regularly visits the family.

Helena has been in Služetín since the summer of 2013. *"I've got used to living here, and I like it here,"* says the young woman. *"We had absolutely nothing in the flat, it was terrible, we started from scratch,"* Roman recalls recent times, adding: *"I approached Annie on the stairs, and she immediately arranged all we needed. That was in early 2013, and we have been in contact ever since. They've helped us a lot, and we've managed to get out of the worst. They help us in handling money and documents."*

Roman and Helena won't hear a word against the field worker, and they praise her everywhere: *"The main plus for us is that we have integrated into normal life, and have a greater ability to take care of our ill daughter, take her to rehabilitation, and things like that. We just couldn't do that before, because our financial situation was so bad."*

Both partners say: *"We recommend the same help to all people in similar situations."*

Type of project: Grant project 3.2

Project title: Local and Professional
Development of Czech West

Project number: CZ.1.04/3.2.01/19.00230

Recipient: Czech West o.s.

The project aims to improve access to field counselling services in all socially excluded Roma localities in the Teplá and Toužim regions. The life situation of the target group is usually characterised by a number of long-term accumulated problems, which often include job loss, poor health, drug addiction or gambling, debt, homelessness, family breakdown, etc. Those interested in this service are offered free basic social counselling, support and assistance when dealing with the authorities, assistance in obtaining personal documents, assistance in finding employment, as well as arranging follow-up services. Over the recent period, professional assistance was offered to more than 200 clients and other people who expressed interest in such a service. The project is still in the implementation phase; the activities will be completed in June 2014.

Květoslava Siváková

She lost her flat and had to pay for hospital treatment, but she enjoys life



The saying “no good deed goes unpunished” is still true, and fifty-three-year-old Květoslava Siváková experienced that first-hand. She lost her accommodation, because she was liable for a loan, and the person in question simply stopped paying for his obligations. Then an executor came. Finally, she found help through a project funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, implemented by the Czech West, in the Teplá region and in the Toužim region.

After nearly a quarter of a century of living in Poutnov, Květoslava Siváková had to move out of her flat. Now she lives in a guest house by the church, in the centre of Teplá. And many would be envious of her small attic room, full of pictures and other decorations.

She got in touch with Anna Dunčeková, a field social worker, after another difficult life situation. “I had an operation in Pilsen, and I spent two months in hospital. I wasn’t able to pay for the treatment from my partial pension. And it was at that time that I contacted Annie,” Květoslava recalls her first meeting, adding: “I heard about her from my daughter from Dobrá Voda, where she stays. I can say that since I’ve known Annie, my life has changed. For the better, of course. Even my loved ones have noticed it.”

Anna helped her with the problem with the hospital. She arranged that Květoslava could divide the total payment into instalments. But that was not all. “She arranged electricity, and helps me with the paperwork,” Květoslava lists other activities that she can’t do any longer, adding that Anna also fills in postal orders. “I can’t see very well, and I just can’t get used to my glasses,” she explains. Květoslava now has only one wish: “I just hope I won’t need any doctors or medication. I’m like a pharmacy now. I’d like to be healthy – I’m not so old that I can’t work any longer.”

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Type of project: Grant project 3.2

Project title: Local and Professional Development of Czech West

Project number: CZ.1.04/3.2.01/19.00230

Recipient: Czech West o.s.

Karel Červeňák

I existed from day to day, and now I have a flat



After more than forty years of a relatively happy life in Pilsen, sixty-one-year-old Karel Červeňák found himself in Teplá, near Mariánské Lázně. He got into trouble, and lived on the streets. The “Local and Professional Development of Czech West” project, funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, helped him find a more decent way of life.

“Help from the people from the Czech West, which implemented this project, totally changed my life. Before that, I’d lived hand to mouth, just from what I got for scrap or odd jobs,” says Karel Červeňák, and describes how he met field social workers: “Today I live on a higher level. I got contact details for a field social worker from people she’d helped before. And they looked happy, so I was interested.”

Karel didn’t receive any benefits, and didn’t know how to deal with his situation. A worker of the project assisted him in communicating with the authorities, and in arranging for a place to live. “Among other things, she helped me get my ID card back. It was something like an A to Z service, including renting a flat,” Karel praises the field social worker and her colleague. “He is helping me now with early retirement. I’m sixty-one, and nobody’s going to employ me anymore. I pay seven thousand crowns just for rent, so I would like to find something cheaper,” says Karel Červeňák, adding: “The problem is that many people don’t know how the project and its people work, and what they can arrange and provide. I would recommend them to anybody who needs help.”

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Type of project: Grant project 3.2

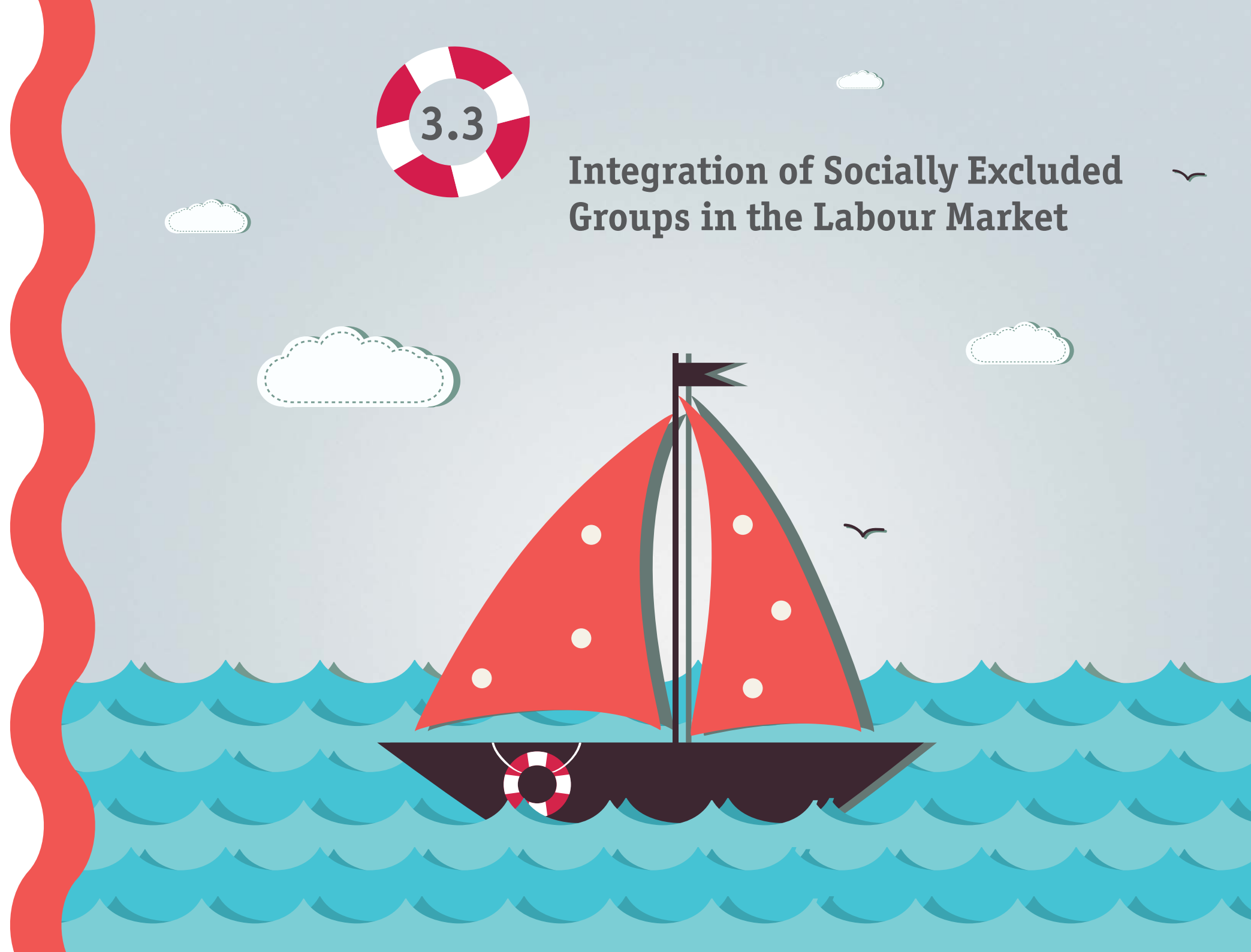
Project title: Local and Professional Development of Czech West

Project number: CZ.1.04/3.2.01/19.00230

Recipient: Czech West o.s.



Integration of Socially Excluded Groups in the Labour Market



Martin Landa

I didn't want to go to prison anymore – I enjoy the new job



Type of project: Grant project 3.3

Project title: Comprehensive Reintegration Programme for Persons Leaving the Environment of the Nové Sedlo Prison
Comprehensive Reintegration Programme for Persons Leaving the Environment of the Horní Slavkov Prison

Project number: CZ.1.04/3.3.05/68.00050
CZ.1.04/3.3.05/68.00051

Recipient: Prague Centre for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship, o.s.

Martin Landa, forty-two years old, spent almost ten years in prison. But he wanted to change his life and reintegrate into society. He was helped by the “Comprehensive Reintegration Programme for Persons Leaving the Environment of the Nové Sedlo Prison” project, supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic. Now he has a job, earns a living, and lives an ordinary life.

Martin Landa realized that although he had the same rights as anyone else after he was released from prison, the chances of ex-prisoners being reintegrated into society were worse.

“I heard about the project in prison, and it immediately caught my attention, because it guaranteed a job right after the end of the sentence,” says Martin Landa. He also recommended the project to fellow prisoners. “It was up to everyone whether to join it or not, but to me it was the best option,” he adds. Before he went to prison, he was trained as a machine fitter. “I chose a metalworking course, and that was a good decision. During the time I spent in prison, it was the first programme that really focused on helping ex-prisoners,” says Martin Landa, adding: “Most prisoners can't find a job after they're released, and some end up in prison again. I managed to start a new life with the help of the project. And I enjoy the job I've found.” In January 2012, he left prison and joined a construction and scaffolding company. “I'm the senior here. I dare say that the satisfaction is mutual,” says Martin Landa, who works with iron, welds, and makes scaffolding structures. “And thanks to the job, I feel like I've moved on,” he concludes.

Both projects are aimed at minimizing the social disadvantage of persons leaving a prison environment (Nové Sedlo, Horní Slavkov) and strengthening their starting position in the labour market. Before their release, the participants from the target group completed a vocational training programme based on retraining (welding, woodworking, and metalworking) to ensure their successful rehabilitation in the transition to standard life and working processes. The main priorities of the projects were the successful completion of the course, and the creation of new jobs for disadvantaged groups. From a total of 121 candidates, 65 persons were supported and placed in the courses of the “Comprehensive Reintegration Programme for Persons Leaving the Environment of the Horní Slavkov Prison” project. The project provided 59 newly created jobs and vacancies. From a total of 130 candidates, 75 persons were supported and placed in the courses of the “Comprehensive Reintegration Programme for Persons Leaving the Environment of the Nové Sedlo Prison” project. The project provided 52 newly created jobs and vacancies.

Ladislav Bečan

Thanks to the reintegration programme, I have a job



Type of project: Grant project 3.3

Project title: Comprehensive Reintegration Programme for Persons Leaving the Environment of the Nové Sedlo Prison
Comprehensive Reintegration Programme for Persons Leaving the Environment of the Horní Slavkov Prison

Project number: CZ.1.04/3.3.05/68.00050
CZ.1.04/3.3.05/68.00051

Recipient: Prague Centre for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship, o.s.

Ladislav Bečan is a released prisoner who wanted to change his life after serving his sentence. He was helped by the “Comprehensive Reintegration Programme for Persons Leaving the Environment of the Horní Slavkov Prison” project, which has been operating since 2011, based on the support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Twenty-four-year-old Ladislav Bečan worked as a professional welder. “I had a welding licence and a lot of orders. But, with the economic crisis, the number of orders decreased, and things went downhill with me,” says Ladislav. He turned to crime. “I did a couple of bad things, I borrowed some money from my mum, and I wasn't able to return it,” he adds. He left the Horní Slavkov prison in January 2013, after the presidential amnesty. Thanks to the reintegration programme, he found a job.

“I heard about the project in prison. They offered us various courses, like a carpentry course, or a machine fitter's course, and after their completion and release from prison, we were promised a job,” says Ladislav Bečan, who completed a machine fitter's course, and in January immediately joined a construction and scaffolding company. “We had a special machine fitter's workshop in prison. We learned the basics of metalworking, like filing and cutting metals. I already knew a lot of things from school, which helped me,” adds Ladislav Bečan. With the new profession, he could work, for example, on the construction of the scaffolding for the National Theatre. Currently, he is involved in construction work at the Václav Havel Airport in Prague. “I constructed scaffolding for four months, and I've been working in the construction division for a couple of months now. I enjoy brickwork more, and for example there is a lot of work at the airport – building toilets, hydrants and technical support.”

Ladislav Bečan appreciates the new chance he was given thanks to the project funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic. Released prisoners generally find it difficult to find a job, regardless of their own efforts. Therefore, projects enabling their rehabilitation not only help them, but also help society.

Both projects are aimed at minimizing the social disadvantage of persons leaving a prison environment (Nové Sedlo, Horní Slavkov) and strengthening their starting position in the labour market. Before their release, the participants from the target group completed a vocational training programme based on retraining (welding, woodworking, and metalworking) to ensure their successful rehabilitation in the transition to standard life and working processes. The main priorities of the projects were the successful completion of the course, and the creation of new jobs for disadvantaged groups. From a total of 121 candidates, 65 persons were supported and placed in the courses of the “Comprehensive Reintegration Programme for Persons Leaving the Environment of the Horní Slavkov Prison” project. The project provided 59 newly created jobs and vacancies. From a total of 130 candidates, 75 persons were supported and placed in the courses of the “Comprehensive Reintegration Programme for Persons Leaving the Environment of the Nové Sedlo Prison” project. The project provided 52 newly created jobs and vacancies.

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