

## LOCAL ACTION AGAINST SOCIAL EXCLUSION

***To improve life for ethnic minority groups, and Roma communities in particular, the Czech project Polis has built up a network of local actors and teaches children intercultural awareness in order to facilitate the integration of families living on the margins of society.***

In the Czech Republic, a recent member of the European Union having joined in 2004, in excess of 250,000 immigrants are struggling to integrate, unable to secure legal and adequately paid work and decent housing. Currently migrants (the majority of whom are Polish, German, Hungarian and Roma) represent 3% of the working population, but the number of migrants continues to increase.

*“The situation of the 250,000 Czech Roma in particular is a grave cause for concern,” stresses Zuzana Ramajzlova of NGO ‘People in Need’, which initiated and manages Equal project POLIS. “The previous generation of Roma were used to working, but since the fall of the wall, the Roma can no longer find work: their qualifications are insufficient and they face considerable discrimination on the labour market as well as in schools. As a result, 80% of Roma are long-term unemployed and most have become dependent on the social system and live on the margins of society. Because of this some Roma turn to crime, prostitution and drugs. Crippled with debt and victims of the privatisation of public sector housing in the 1990s, tens of thousands of Roma are currently living in the Czech Republic in over 330 ghettos.”*

POLIS works to tackle social exclusion and improve access to jobs, housing and education. The project is responsible for the creation of a network of local actors, designed to educate them with regard to the mechanisms and reality of social exclusion.

*“We do not focus our efforts purely on excluded individuals such as those living in ghettos; we also work with councils, schools, recruitment agencies and employers. All of these institutions can act as a bridge to the reintegration of excluded individuals into society. The most important thing is that we work together with all of these parties to tackle discrimination locally, as excluded individuals are nonetheless residents of the city,” explains Zuzana Ramajzlova.*

Teams of six to ten people run seminars and workshops in the three Czech cities where the NGO ‘People in Need’ has branch offices: Plzeň, Ústí nad Labem and Bílina.

POLIS has developed programmes that offer Roma children a better education. Since the programme was launched in July 2005, Zuzana Ramajzlova has been able to measure the success of the initiative: *“When parents see that their children are getting better marks at school, that they have access to higher education or that they are landing jobs, they begin to co-operate more fully with the recruitment agents and social workers. Through the children, we aim to help the whole family. Because when they witness the social progress made by their children, they’re more motivated to take action themselves.”*

In its efforts to integrate minority groups like the Roms, POLIS encounters difficulties not so much with language but with what Zuzana Ramajzlova refers to as ‘social skills’: *“We often work with long-term unemployed adults who are dependent on the welfare system and who have no vocational experience. Even in the event they find a job, they will often quit after a few weeks as they’re no longer accustomed to getting up every day for work,” she stresses.*

POLIS will run until 2008. The project promoters do not yet have conclusive results, but they are confident of success. With their wealth of experience (50 seminars and 4,000 hours of tutoring children from the ghettos), the ‘People in need’ teams are advancing their project as a model. According to Zuzana Ramajzlova, the best way to tackle ethnic discrimination is to share success stories: *“Having overcome strong opposition to our work, we are now meeting more and more people who will co-operate with us to find work and proper housing. Those who agree to their children receiving a better education are on the path to integration. They will certainly be able to leave the ghettos and find their place within society,” she says.*

[Extract from the [Portraits of Experience](#) that were provided as resource material for the EQUAL conference on [Acting against Ethnic Discrimination in Employment](#), in November 2007.]

See also: [Polis](#) Presentation at the EQUAL conference on [Acting against Ethnic Discrimination in Employment](#), in November 2007.

## Contact

Zuzana Ramajzlova

Email: [Zuzana.Ramajzlova@seznam.cz](mailto:Zuzana.Ramajzlova@seznam.cz)

<http://epolis.cz/indexen.php>

Link to [EQUAL database description](#)

Transnational Partnership: [Roma Employment Challenges Network for the Roma](#)