

28 May 2014

The European Network of Inclusive Education and Disability celebrated the fifth meeting of its partners in Finland, a country considered a reference European education.

The network combined this meeting with a field visit.

The fifth meeting of members of the European Network of Inclusive Education and Disability (includ-ed), led by the ONCE Foundation with co-financing from the European Social Fund (ESF), took place on 26 and 27 May 2014 in the city of Helsinki. includ-ed's main purpose is to promote, identify, exchange and disseminate good practice in the field of inclusive education for people with disabilities in Europe, and in this way influence policies and programs with the ultimate aim of improving opportunities for employability and labour inclusion. The network currently consists of four founding partners in four European countries: ONCE Foundation in Spain, the Association des paralysés de France (APF), Rytmus in the Czech Republic and Kynnys ry in Finland, which hosted the event. The network has six additional associated partners from other European countries.



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On the first day of the event includ-ed member organisations visited Etu-Töölö Secondary School, attended by young people (aged 16–19 years) and with a special focus on entrepreneurship. There, through meetings with its management team as well as students, they were able to discover some of the methods applied to address the special educational needs of students in schools across Finland. Network members next met with officials of the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE), affiliated to the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and responsible for developing educational plans at all levels. The FNBE provided a detailed report on the Finnish education system, the evolution of its

concepts and the implementation of inclusive education in the country, as well as the challenges that still exist. incluD-ed members also used this first day to meet with CIMO, an independent agency that collaborates with the Ministry of Education. CIMO's main mission is to promote international cooperation and mobility in areas such as education, training, employment, culture and youth, sharing its experience with incluD-ed and other initiatives focused on persons with disabilities.

The second and main day of the event saw incluD-ed network members convene at the headquarters of their Finnish partner Kynnys ry in Helsinki for the network members' annual meeting. They communicated the latest developments made by the network such as the success of the [Conference on Inclusive Education and Disability in Europe \(9 April 2014, Brussels\)](#), held under the joint auspices of the European Parliament and the incluD-ed network. The variety of activities that partners are performing in their respective countries were shared, and priorities from now until the initiative's current planning phase closes in December 2015 were established. These actions will be carried out with the Operational Programme to Combat Discrimination 2007–2013 and co-financed by the ESF.

The event was rated very positively by partners who emphasised the importance of field visits as good practice in inclusive education. They also indicated the value in creating spaces in which to share activities and working themes that promote the full inclusion of people with disabilities in society. In the words of Carla Bonino (ONCE Foundation representative, leader of the network at this meeting and transnational cooperation coordinator at the Department of European Programs): "*There is no better way to understand the reality and learn than to get in the field and talk with relevant stakeholders. As the network has visited Finland as a reference country in education, it has given us much to think about the challenges of inclusive education that are common in many countries*".

The people and institutions visited in Helsinki highly valued the European Network of Inclusive Education and Disability's work as a pan-European initiative that addresses a crucial subject for equal opportunities and true social cohesion.

For more information on the European Network of Inclusive Education and Disability:

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