

PRESS RELEASE

First Conference on Inclusive Education at the European Parliament addressed the current status and main future priorities regarding students with disabilities

Brussels, 9 April 2014

Disability Intergroup member MEP Rosa Estaràs Ferragut and the European Network on Inclusive Education and Disability, includ-ed, co-hosted the first Conference on Inclusive Education and Disability in Europe at the European Parliament in Brussels, on Wednesday 9 April 2014. The includ-ed Network is led by Fundación ONCE and co-funded by the European Social Fund.

With over 100 attendees present at this historic event, the first Conference on Inclusive Education and Disability gathered different key stakeholders representing European institutions and organisations: representatives of the European Parliament and the European Commission, permanent representations, experts and civil society organisations such as the European Disability Forum.

The Conference offered an overview of inclusive education systems being implemented in Europe and opened a space for dialogue among different institutions and organisations. It shared the main actions carried out as well as the most important future challenges, especially for the coming European Parliament legislature period and the future European Commission. The includ-ed network also shared a "statement" pointing out key aspects to focus on regards inclusive education and disability, which Ms Estaràs plans to consider for the new parliamentary legislature.



MEP Ádám Kósa (President of Disability Intergroup), MEP Rosa Estaràs Ferragut (Member of Disability Intergroup and co-organiser of the Conference) and Miguel Ángel Cabra de Luna (Fundación ONCE, leader of the includ-ed Network).

MEP Rosa Estaràs Ferragut, who opened the event, outlined the commitment and interest of the European Parliament and the Disability Intergroup on the issue of inclusive education: *"It's the first time that the EP opens a space for a multi-stakeholder dialogue on this topic and I am proud to promote it and to be here today. The participation of so many different stakeholders reflects the collaborative nature of successful initiatives in the field of inclusive education."*

MEP Ádám Kósa, President of the Disability Intergroup at the European Parliament, followed Ms Estaràs in the opening. Referring to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), particularly Article No. 24 on Education, he underlined: *"Inclusive education systems need to be promoted by the European institutions and the EU Member States. Inclusive education is not only a right, it is a key factor for labour and social inclusion and therefore crucial to achieve the EU2020 strategic objectives."*

Miguel Ángel Cabra de Luna, representing Fundación ONCE as leader of the incluD-ed network, and also a member of the European Economic and Social Committee on behalf of the Spanish Business Confederation of the Social Economy, thanked Ms Rosa Estaràs as well as Mr Kósa for making such an important event possible and for the implication of the European Parliament. He presented the incluD-ed network and the founding partners, whose participation is at the very core of the initiative: Association des Paralysés (France), Rytmus (Czech Republic) and Kynnys ry (Finland). Mr Cabra de Luna highlighted the importance of the European Social Fund, which is co-funding the network, for contributing to community added value in the EU, through transnational cooperation projects such as this one and emphasized that *"Inclusive education is of crucial importance not only for people with disabilities, but for European society as a whole and even in hard times it should not be left aside in the EU and national agendas. It is a social investment for the future"*.

Professor Serge Ebersold, of *INSHEA*, delivered a powerful keynote speech clarifying main notions of inclusive education and the differing approaches of inclusive education systems in Europe. Using current statistics and examples of best practices, he drew a picture of the current situation of inclusive education throughout Europe and underlined that EU Member States have already experienced positive results from implementing inclusive education for students with special educational needs.

Afterwards, the session **'Dialogue on Inclusive Education and Disability'** took place, giving voice to other relevant organisation representatives. It focused on sharing the main actions in the field of inclusive education undertaken, and highlighted future challenges in practice as well as for public policy making.

In this session, **MEP Doris Pack**, Chair of Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament, underlined that *"it is important that people with disabilities can access and persist in the education system to ensure equal opportunities for all. In the new Erasmus+ programme we also tried to support inclusive education and mobility of students with disabilities through offering special*

funding opportunities. I believe that by improving equal opportunities for people with disability in Europe, we improve and promote a society for all”.

In addition to Ms Pack, **Ms Victoria Soriano**, Assistant Director, *European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education*; **Ms Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot**, Head of Unit, Education and Training in Europe 2020 Governance, *European Commission*, DG Education and Culture; and **Ms Simona Giarratano**, Social Policy Officer, *European Disability Forum* participated in the dialogue.

As part of the closing of the event, Miguel Ángel Cabra de Luna, as leader of the incluD-ed network, shared *[incluD-ed's statement on promoting inclusive education systems in Europe](#)* with a view to the upcoming EU Parliament's elections in May 2014, as well as recommendations for EU institutions to promote the development of inclusive education systems. MEP Rosa Estaràs Ferragut thanked the European Network on Inclusive Education, incluD-ed, for this important statement, saying that *“the role of the European Parliament as well as the Commission is to support Member States in their efforts to modernise and improve their education systems and to advance towards inclusive education systems. For this reason, I will support this statement which could be the basis of a Written Declaration at the European Parliament that I intend to support during the European Parliament's new legislative period.”*

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