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## **Final Conference Report**

### **Date and Place**

- 22-23 March 2012
- Scandic Simonkenttää, Helsinki, Finland

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The final conference provided project partners of “Creating a Level Playing Field” as well as decision-makers and employees from Finnish sports organizations with the final results of the initiative.

## **II. SUMMARY**

In an “open market” conducted as part of the conference programme on the first day, partners could learn more about the initiatives from organizations involved in the project. Little stands provided each partner with the opportunity to present initiatives with the help of movies, posters or flyers. Conference participants could circulate from stand to stand to gather concrete information about the practical examples they were interested in.

In addition, the CLPF analysis team presented the results of the “Creating a Level Playing Field” booklet. As a central product of the initiative, it addresses sports organizations in Europe as a practical guide on how to establish or better implement social inclusion in sports. It contains a large variety of project examples and their so called “good practices” of partner organizations as well as of well-known examples in Europe. In this frame, key recommendations of the CLPF initiative to European, national, regional and local level decision-makers have been discussed and adopted.

In the second section of the final conference, a panel discussion involving participants from local, national and European level has been conducted by Gitta Axmann (German Olympic Sports Confederation).

The panelists included Bart Oijen (European Commission), Satu Heikkinen (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture), Birgitta Kervinen (ENGSO), Kalina Varbanova (Ministry of Bulgaria) and Thomas Jaeger (Caritas Styria). Thus, it involved a mix of individuals from European, national, regional and local levels and was conducted as a fish-bowl discussion to invite all participants for a lively discussion.

The following summary shall provide an overview of the central topics of discussion:

With regards to the definition of social inclusion, Bart Oijen stressed that there are different definitions in each Member State. Starting from the viewpoint of “no exclusion”, the EU Member States still aim for not excluding any member out of society without relying on a central definition of social inclusion.

Satu Heikkinen contributed about the current status and common attitude of social inclusion in sports in Finland. With the Finnish society sharing a long tradition in underlining equality in society, the phenomena of social inclusion is still fairly new. Finland has established a programme in the Ministry to enhance inclusion in and through sport and European projects are extremely important to showcase examples where the development of such initiatives has already gone further. In Finland, raising awareness on social inclusion in sports is the most important task to do in the coming years.

From the viewpoint of an Eastern European Member State, Kalina Varbanova informed that the Bulgarian city of Sofia has a municipal strategy of sports to increase access to sports activities and sports infrastructure, particularly targeting socially disadvantaged people. But, social inclusion in this country does not focus on migrants and ethnic minorities but on poor families which underlines the diversity of social inclusion definitions in the CLPF initiative and across the EU Member States.

Thomas Jaeger from the Caritas in Styria, Austria provided an insight into the daily work of social inclusion on a local level. The key elements in working with refugee children in Austria are to provide easy access free of charge and time for children and their families for getting used to doing sports.

With regards to the question of how to best raise awareness on social inclusion topics, school was brought forward as major issue. This could also include homework assistance for children with ethnic or migrant backgrounds in order to develop a better understanding of their situation.

In terms of reaching the public on regional or national level, panel discussions open for public which involve experts in the field have proven very useful in past, as stated Thomas Jaeger. This could be complemented by workshops for sports clubs and federations, specifically targeting individuals involved in this field but still lacking in-depth knowledge.

On a European level, raising awareness could include projects about the fight against stereotyping and intolerance in sports. In the EU Member States, there are positive examples which should be shared with other nations. To reach sport organizations, good practice projects should be included in guides for national levels. The EU can only supplement projects and provide guidelines to the Member States, however, it cannot implement them, explained Bart Oijen. ENGSO as a European organization could be helping national organizations to improve work on social inclusion in sports.

With regards to the question of which would be the most significant recommendations, the panelists concluded the following:

Satu Heikkinen strengthened the enhanced involvement of ethnic and migrant minorities in sports on a level where they can have influence; these individuals should be included in decision-making, planning and sports development levels in sports organizations.

Bart Oijen from the European Commission underlined that there are groups which need different attention. In all statistics, there is a lack of participation and representation in committees and boards of girls and women. This group should be of central focus. Birgitta Kervinen (ENGSO) shared this view and stressed that for all women, it is difficult to reach higher positions and ENGSO is putting efforts in place to help tackle this issue.

Thomas Jaeger explains that on grassroots level, the issue of time is extremely important. Therefore, grants should not imply time-consuming administration but rather be composed

of simplified regulations. Additionally, longer periods of funding would give grassroots organizations the possibility to develop initiatives during an extended timeframe.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

The final conference of CLPF presented the findings of the project and focused on concrete recommendations to decision-makers in order to encourage social inclusion of migrants and ethnic minorities in sports.

On all levels, social inclusion is an issue and these levels have to collaborate in order to bring initiatives further. Therefore, the final conference was considered as an important element to discuss findings, in particular involving decision-makers who can address and support topics from a top level to reach local or grassroots level at a later stage.

In addition, the creation of a European network that could showcase examples of social inclusion and animate other nations to develop their initiatives was especially valued. Reflections on continuing a common project are already underway as a future next step.

The CLPF booklet illustrating good practice examples and key elements will be disseminated among partner organizations and their networks. In addition, ENGSO will provide key recommendations to its member organizations. They will also form a central part of the final report to be addressed to the EU.

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