

In February 2012 an application was made to Leargas under the Vocational and Training Professionals (VETPRO) category by Congress Centres Network to travel to Greece and visit training facilities and projects that facilitate unemployed learners similar to CCN unemployment centres. In June 2013 the funding was secured to take a group of 13 coordinators and tutors from the CCN to Greece and the University of Patras kindly offered to be a partner and host the visit. We arrived in time to celebrate the 50th birthday of the University of Patras. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions had developed a relationship with Sofia Kasola during a Leonardo da Vinci Transfer of Innovation Project 'REVOW' in 2010-2011. Sofia Kasola works as an International Coordinator and researcher with University of Patras. Sofia and her colleagues Professor Yannis and Professor Professor Hatitantis worked on the REVOW project that focused on Recognition of Work Place Learning and creating a mechanism to capture the skill set of workers without formal qualifications. The initial idea was to go to Greece and to observe and learn to about their systems of education, childcare, grassroots organisations and innovative techniques when working with the unemployed. Exchanging information and bringing ideas back to Ireland and using new techniques to improve aspects of our training provision. One objective of the trip was to exchange ideas and experiences in relation to vocational education and training provision. The aim of the project is to identify possible innovations in the area of service provision and delivery in the community services relevant to unemployed people in Ireland.



Everyone on the trip got on well and enjoyed the experience. All participants felt it was fantastic to see how another country operates the positive interventions for the unemployed and different pedagogies applied in the area of childcare. This exchange also gave the participants the time to reflect and appreciate the good services we are offering within the local community throughout Ireland. How to ensure we stay abreast of new research and implement proven techniques into our practice. The Congress Centres Network together with the host University of Patras organised and devised a five day

programme for the group in Greece. The programme comprised of visits to the unemployment centres, Euroteam offices that design and develop current programmes and vocational training centres that deliver skills based learning. We also attended workshops on topics including the Barriers to Education for adults, European Qualification Framework and the Greek social welfare system and the Trade Union Movement response to assisting the unemployed by offering basic education. The group learned that unemployed people can receive up to €400 per month with over 3 million not in receipt of any financial support. Teachers spoke to us about the difficulties they encounter motivating students to persevere with education and keep hope that the employment opportunities will improve. The main concern is that all people learn to engage with society in a positive way from a young age and solutions are found to assist Greece create employment and have a bright future for all their citizens. It was a brilliant learning curve and the groups were overall extremely impressed with the Greek way of offering free education as is protected in their constitution. The Trade Union movement has got involved in offering supports to the unemployed by means of providing free education and second language classes. There was also a visit to the Greek Confederation of Workers to discuss vocational education & training for the unemployed. There was no hiding the significant challenges being encountered by the Greek people, face with up to 40% cuts to salary, long hours and low pay in a stagnated economy, Greece has one of the highest unemployment rates throughout Europe. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions will sustain the relationship established with our Greek fellow European citizens and hope to work together in the future. This trip took place in May 2014 and all participants completed two FETAC Level 5 minor awards and will also receive a Europass Mobility Document. The Congress Centres Network strives to encourage the continuous professional development of all the members of the network while building relationships and networking with similar organisations internationally. The project overall was hugely successful and the Congress Centres Network hopes to run one again in the future.

