Good practices guide:

Promoting the employability of people with Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities through supported employment and digital empowerment

LEAD YOUR WAY >

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Why this guide?

This publication is part of the Lead Your Way project, a European initiative co-funded by Erasmus+ that promotes the employability of people with Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities by strengthening **supported employment methodologies** and introducing **digital innovation** into training and job-coaching processes. The guide complements the project's broader activities–including research, training resources, and digital tools– by documenting and disseminating good practices across Europe. In doing so, it provides inspiration and practical guidance to organisations, employers, and policymakers working towards more inclusive labour markets.

What can be found in this guide?

This guide brings together a selection of outstanding national and European initiatives that demonstrate how supported employment and digital skills can empower people with Down syndrome (DS) and intellectual disabilities (ID) to access meaningful jobs in the open labour market.

Through a structured research process, the partnership has identified and analysed initiatives that stand out for their innovation, impact, and transferability. Each case study has been broken down to highlight the context, methodology, success factors, and lessons learned, with a particular emphasis on the elements that can be replicated in other countries and organisations.

The guide pursues three main objectives:

■ Showcasing effective projects and initiatives (public or private) that promote the employability of people with DS/ID through supported employment and digital skills empowerment.

■ Highlighting success factors that explain why these practices work and what makes them sustainable.

■ Providing recommendations for replicability, so that organisations across Europe can adapt these models to their own contexts.

To ensure quality and consistency, each identified initiative had to meet the following criteria:

■ It must actively promote labour market inclusion in ordinary companies for people with DS/ID. Initiatives targeting sheltered employment or special facilities are not considered.

■ The exclusive target group must be people with intellectual disabilities.

■ The practice must be linked to the supported employment methodology and/or have a strong digital component (e.g. e-learning platforms, assistive technologies, reducing the digital skills gap), always with a direct connection to employment.

■ The practice must be relevant due to its innovative component or measurable impact on employability and inclusion.

Research Methodology

The identification of good practices was based on a twofold methodology:

1. Desk Research

    ■ Review of academic literature, reports, policy documents, and organisational materials at national and European levels.

    ■ Systematic analysis of initiatives according to the selection criteria outlined above.

2. Expert Consultation

    ■ Interviews and consultations with practitioners and experts in supported employment across Europe.

    ■ Experts recommended projects and initiatives based on their experience and knowledge of promising practices.

By combining desk-based analysis with expert-driven insights, the partnership ensured that the practices selected not only reflect current trends but also represent authentic, high-impact solutions valued by professionals in the field. This methodology guarantees that the guide showcases initiatives that are both evidence-based and directly relevant to the future of inclusive employment in Europe.

GOOD PRACTICE 1

Name of the Project: **Ayho**

Country: **Spain**

Name of the promoting organization:
Fundación ONCE

Link: https://ayho.fundaciononce.es

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Practice description

AYHO! (Assistant and Employment Orientation Tool) is a digital platform designed to improve the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market within the framework of the supported employment methodology.

Developed by Fundación ONCE in collaboration with Samsung and AESE (Spanish Association of Supported Employment), the tool is intended for use by job coaches, workers with disabilities, and the companies that employ them.

For job coaches, AYHO! enables the creation of personalised profiles for each worker, scheduling of tasks and reminders, sending of tailored instructions (in text, image, or video format), and continuous monitoring of progress through check-ins and evaluation forms. This functionality allows for more effective and documented interventions, reducing the need for constant physical presence of the coach.

For workers with disabilities, AYHO! offers an intuitive and accessible environment where they can independently consult their daily tasks, receive personalised alerts, follow step-by-step guides, record satisfaction levels, and communicate easily with their support professionals. It also helps them build organisational skills, responsibility, and self-management.

Employers who hire people with disabilities benefit from a tool that facilitates job adaptation, improves communication with support staff, and enhances employee performance. Overall, AYHO! is an innovative and scalable solution that digitises and strengthens the effectiveness of the supported employment model, promoting job autonomy and sustainable inclusion in the workplace.

Objectives of the project

1. **Accessible Pre-Employment Training:** AYHO offers interactive content designed to prepare people with disabilities for various job tasks before they enter the workplace.

2. **Step-by-Step On-the-Job Guidance:** Through instructions in text, images, or videos, the app helps users carry out daily tasks, with built-in calendars, alerts, and progress tracking.

3. **Coordination for Job Coaches and "Natural Supports":** Professionals can create individual user profiles, plan tasks, set up reminders, collect data via questionnaires, and communicate in real time with workers.

4. **Continuous Monitoring and Feedback:** The app tracks user satisfaction and performance, enabling real-time adjustments tailored to each individual's needs.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

- **It combines technology and rights:** it promotes reasonable accommodations by ensuring that technology serves as a foundation for full participation.

- **It empowers multiple stakeholders:** users, job coaches, and employers interact and learn together, fostering autonomy and coordinated support.

- **It supports the professional community:** it strengthens support networks, reduces the workload of job coaches, and optimises resources.

- **It has potential for European expansion:** the model is adaptable to other countries and contexts, and aligns with employment inclusion and accessibility policies.

- **It introduces digitalization in supported employment services to improve efficiency and autonomy.**

GOOD PRACTICE 2

Name of the Project: **"Paso Adelante"(Step Forward): Preparing for employment with Virtual Reality**

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Country: **Spain**

Name of the promoting organization: **Fundación VASS and DOWN ESPAÑA**

Link: https://www.meta.com/es-es/experiences/paso-adelante/7455916171200020/ *(Only available in Spanish for now)*

Practice description

"Paso Adelante" is an innovative initiative led by DOWN ESPAÑA in collaboration with Fundación VASS. It harnesses Virtual Reality (VR) to promote personal autonomy and strengthen digital competences of people with Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities, focusing on their social and professional inclusion.

The project has developed a free application, already available in the Meta Store, offering immersive and interactive training scenarios. It is designed to help users acquire key daily routines and independent living skills through safe and engaging virtual environments. The app currently includes two main modules:

- **Work preparation:** users practice essential routines before going to work, such as personal hygiene and choosing appropriate clothing.

- **Using the bus:** users learn step by step how to use public transport, from leaving home to arriving at their destination.

Both modules are based on interactive 360º videos featuring young people with Down syndrome as role models, making the learning process relatable, motivating, and effective. By combining digital innovation and social impact, "Paso Adelante" demonstrates how technology can serve as a driver of inclusion, empowering people with disabilities to take meaningful steps towards employment and independence.

Objectives of the project

- Strengthen autonomy and independence of people with Down syndrome through immersive digital training.

- Facilitate the acquisition of practical skills for daily routines and work preparation.

- Improve confidence and safety in using public transport.

- Provide professionals and trainers with innovative tools to enhance employability support programmes.

- Contribute to equal opportunities in access to employment by reducing barriers related to daily living skills.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

- Introduces **Virtual Reality (VR)** into the field of social and labour inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities, where immersive technologies are rarely applied.

- Provides **experiential learning** in realistic and safe environments, allowing users to:
  - repeat tasks as many times as needed,
  - practice decision-making,
  - receive immediate feedback,
  - and build confidence without real-world risks.

- Ensures **accessibility and scalability** by offering the application as a free download in the Meta Store, compatible with widely available Meta Quest devices.

- Involves **people with Down syndrome as protagonists** of the content, which guarantees authenticity, relatability, and the benefits of peer-to-peer learning.

- Demonstrates **measurable impact** on autonomy, daily living skills, and employability, directly contributing to greater independence.

- Creates **replicable and adaptable training resources** that can be scaled to different contexts, sectors, or countries.

- Bridges **digital innovation and social inclusion,** serving as a benchmark for inclusive employment strategies in Europe.

GOOD PRACTICE 3

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Name of the Project: **"Rompiendo códigos" (Breaking codes): Exploring digital vocations for people with intellectual disabilities**

Country: **Spain**

Name of the promoting organization: **Fundación Somos F5**

Link: https://www.somosf5.org/rompemosloscodigos#talleres

Practice description

People with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, face a persistent **digital skills gap** due to the lack of adapted learning opportunities. As a consequence, they are often confined to **manual or low value-added jobs,** reinforcing stereotypes and limiting their career prospects. In today's labour market, where digital competences are essential for almost every role, this exclusion deepens inequality and prevents full participation.

The project developed by Fundación Somos F5 aims to foster digital competences and vocational discovery among people with Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities, enhancing their employability and participation in the digital economy.

The initiative combines **interactive discovery workshops, introductory training modules, and practical sessions** that bring participants closer to the world of programming, digital technologies, and artificial intelligence. Participants engage in:

- **Introductory coding and design:** prototyping with Figma, learning HTML, CSS, and JavaScript basics.
- **Digital discovery workshops:** cybersecurity, cloud computing, and simple 2D videogame creation.
- **Exploring emerging technologies:** understanding artificial intelligence, experimenting with generative AI, and experiencing the metaverse.
- **Employability-focused activities:** using AI tools to improve CVs and practice job interviews in immersive environments.

The programme follows a **learner-centered methodology** based on:

- Active pedagogy and collaborative learning.
- Project-based approaches that allow participants to create and showcase their own digital projects.

Through this approach, the project not only builds digital skills but also **challenges stereotypes, opens new career horizons, and demonstrates that digital vocation can be inclusive, inspiring, and transformative.**

Objectives of the project

- Introduce people with Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities to the world of programming and digital technologies.
- Develop foundational digital competences through playful, interactive, and hands-on workshops.
- Explore vocational interests and career opportunities in the technology sector.
- Improve employability by using generative AI tools for CV writing and job interview preparation.
- Break down stereotypes and prejudices that hinder the inclusion of people with disabilities in the digital labour market.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

- Uses **cutting-edge methodologies** such as project-based learning, agile frameworks, and experiential workshops adapted for people with intellectual disabilities.
- Combines **digital discovery workshops** (coding, AI, cybersecurity, videogames, cloud, metaverse) with practical employability tools (CV and interview preparation with generative AI).
- Provides **accessibility and inclusion** by supplying all necessary equipment and adapting content to specific learning needs.
- Introduces participants to **emerging digital fields** (AI, cloud, metaverse), areas usually perceived as inaccessible, thus opening new vocational horizons.
- Actively **breaks stereotypes** by positioning people with disabilities as digital talent, capable of thriving in the tech sector.

GOOD PRACTICE 4

Name of the Project: **Digital skill development for improved employability**

Country: **Spain**

Name of the promoting organization: **Fundación Somos F5**

Link: https://www.somosf5.org/rompemosloscodigos#talleres

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Practice description

Training programme designed to strengthen the technological competences and employability of people who face social challenges. Developed by Fundación Somos F5, the course provides a fast and practical introduction to the digital tools most valued in the job market.

Over just **8 hours,** participants discover how to improve communication, strengthen teamwork, and enhance their professional profile, bringing them closer to their desired employment. The programme introduces accessible, high-impact tools and strategies, including:

- **Professional communication platforms** to collaborate effectively in virtual environments.
- **Generative AI tools** to identify job opportunities.
- **AI applications** for designing CVs, writing cover letters, and simulating interviews.

- **Personal branding techniques** to stand out on employment platforms and social networks.

The training is inclusive, interactive, and tailored to the needs of participants, ensuring that digital skills are not only learned but directly applied to their job search.

Objectives of the project

- Provide participants with key digital competences for employability.
- Support jobseekers in creating professional CVs and cover letters with AI tools.
- Strengthen communication and teamwork in digital environments.
- Improve visibility and personal branding in online platforms and social media.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

- Integrates **generative AI** into employability training, making cutting-edge technology accessible.
- Offers a **compact, high-impact format** (8 hours) that is easy to implement and scale. Addresses both **technical skills and soft skills** (communication, teamwork, branding).
- Provides **immediate practical outcomes:** improved CVs, interview preparation, and enhanced online presence.

GOOD PRACTICE 5

Name of the Project: **VET Specialization Course in AI for people with intellectual disabilities**

Country: **Spain**

Name of the promoting organization:
Colegio El Molino (Pamplona, Spain)

Link: https://www.centroselmolino.org/curso-de-especializacion-en-inteligencia-artificial/

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Practice description

The *Specialization Course in Artificial Intelligence for People with Intellectual Disabilities (PcDI)*, developed by Colegio de Educación Especial El Molino (Pamplona) with the support of Fundación Ciganda Ferrer, Tasubinsa, Fundación TeReSa (Technology Research for Social Advancement), and the Department of Education of Navarra, is an innovative pathway to foster digital inclusion and employability in the emerging field of Artificial Intelligence.

The project began in 2021 with a curriculum redesign to integrate digital competences, computational thinking, and machine learning tasks into the Special Vocational Training Cycle. Building on this foundation, the programme evolved into a specialized course that equips participants with both technical and socio-labour skills.

Over one academic year, participants acquire competences in:

■ Data tagging and annotation for machine learning.

■ Data review and validation processes.

■ Digitalisation of documents, incident management, and cybersecurity basics.

■ Communication, teamwork, and employability skills.

Training is complemented by workplace practice in Tasubinsa's New Technologies unit (sheltered employment centre), where learners contribute to real projects such as data tagging for the University of Navarra. Small group sizes and individualized tutoring ensure that learning is adapted to personal strengths and needs.

This initiative not only builds technical capacity but also challenges stereotypes, demonstrating that people with intellectual disabilities can actively contribute to advanced technological sectors.

Objectives of the project

■ Provide lifelong learning opportunities to expand professional competences of people with intellectual disabilities.

■ Explore the technological sector as a new source of employment of people with intellectual disabilities.

■ Promote an active role of people with intellectual disabilities in digital transition of the labour market.

■ Combine technical training with socio-labour skills to improve employability of people with intellectual disabilities.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

■ Introduces AI and machine learning tasks (data tagging, validation) as new and realistic employment opportunities for PcDI.

■ It is based on a co-created curriculum aligned with national education standards (LOMLOE) and tailored to cognitive accessibility.

■ Provides hands-on practice in real companies (Tasubsinsa, University of Navarra), bridging training and job opportunities.

■ Achieves visibility and recognition: awards in innovation competitions (1st Prize Innovactoras - 2023), participation in scientific conferences (XII Jornadas Científicas Internacionales sobre Personas con Discapacidad- INICO, Universidad de Salamanca) and integration in educational networks.

GOOD PRACTICE 6

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Name of the Project: **Sefora Social Enterprise - Creating job opportunities for people with ID in the ICT sector**

Country: **Italy**

Name of the promoting organization: **Séfora Impresa Sociale**

Link: https://seforaimpresasociale.it/

Practice description

Séfora is a social enterprise based in Parma, Italy, that bridges technology and inclusion by supporting people with intellectual disabilities and neurodivergence to access meaningful jobs in the ICT sector. Founded with a dual mission-delivering high-quality IT services while generating social value-Séfora combines employment, training, and consulting to ensure that people are not left behind in the digital economy.

For jobseekers, Séfora offers a **comprehensive supported employment** pathway that includes:

- **Assessment** of skills, needs, and goals.
- **Orientation** to identify suitable roles.
- **Planning** training, CV preparation, and interview practice.
- **Job coaching** during internships and employment.

For businesses, Séfora provides services that make inclusion possible:

- Workplace assessment and consulting on legal and financial supports.
- Training to foster inclusive teams.
- Accessibility services (easy-to-read documents, web accessibility).
- IT development (websites, apps) and AI solutions for social impact.

In 2024, 45 people with disabilities were involved, 28 completed internships with job coaching, and 10 secured employment or pursued higher education. By addressing the needs of both workers and employers, Séfora demonstrates how technology can become a powerful tool for social inclusion.

Objectives of the project

- Support people with intellectual disabilities and neurodivergence to access quality jobs in the ICT sector.
- Provide tailored training, coaching, and career planning to enhance employability.
- Help businesses adopt inclusive practices and accessible digital solutions.
- Demonstrate that technology can create equal opportunities and drive social innovation.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

- Offers a holistic model that supports both jobseekers and employers.
- Embeds supported employment principles into the fast-growing ICT sector.
- Goes beyond placement by providing long-term job coaching and career development.
- Combines social impact and business services, showing that inclusion and competitiveness can go hand in hand.
- Provides accessibility and IT/AI services that both sustain the enterprise and reinforce its mission.

GOOD PRACTICE 7

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Name of the Project: **Theotokos Supported Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation Program**

Country: **Greece**

Name of the promoting organization: **Theotokos Foundation (supported by the association "Friends of Theotokos")**

Link: https://filoitoutheotokos.gr
https://theotokos.gr

Practice description

Theotokos Foundation operates as a Center for Evaluation, Training, and Rehabilitation for young people with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Founded in 1963, it has supported over 5,000 beneficiaries through personalized education, vocational training, and pathways to inclusion.

Its Supported Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation Program prepares people with intellectual and neurodevelopmental disabilities for employment in ordinary companies, not sheltered workshops.

Participants receive skills training, internships, and apprenticeships both within and outside the foundation. The program emphasizes transition to independent, paid employment, and offers continuous job coaching and family counseling. Employers are trained and guided to adapt roles and workplaces, while job coaches support both sides before, during, and after hiring.

Recent initiatives include collaborations with businesses in hospitality, retail, and manufacturing, resulting in sustainable placements. Around 120 people with disabilities are currently in the open labour market through Theotokos' supported employment service.

Objectives of the project

- Prepare individuals with intellectual disabilities for active participation in the labour market.

- Provide supported employment pathways with individualized training and coaching.

- Facilitate inclusive recruitment by engaging employers and promoting awareness.

- Enhance beneficiaries' social inclusion, self-reliance, and quality of life through paid employment.

- Strengthen partnerships between training institutions and private companies for sustainable inclusion.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

- **Holistic model:** Integrates evaluation, vocational training, and real-world employment under one framework.

- **Long-standing expertise:** Over 60 years of continuous work in disability inclusion and vocational rehabilitation.

- **Employer engagement:** Builds lasting partnerships with private companies, making inclusion practical and replicable.

- **Impact:** More than a hundred individuals placed in real jobs, supported by coaches and specialized educators.

GOOD PRACTICE 8

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Name of the Project: **ΑξίΖΩ PRIVATE COMPANY - Inclusive Social Enterprise for Persons with Disabilities**

Country: **Greece**

Name of the promoting organization: **Association "ΑξίΖΩ" - Welfare Association for Persons with Disabilities of Rodopi, via its enterprise ΑξίΖΩ PRIVATE COMPANY**

Link: https://www.axi-zw.gr/index.php

Practice description

ΑξίΖΩ PRIVATE COMPANY is an enterprise created in 2021 to support the mission of the ΑξίΖΩ association (a welfare organization in the Rodopi region working with people with intellectual disabilities).

The enterprise produces handmade food products (jams, handmade pasta, traditional sweets, sauces) and art/craft items. According to the company, it aims to employ persons with disabilities, including those with intellectual disability, alongside employees with typical intelligence. The enterprise also integrates outputs from art workshops (clay, painting) run by beneficiaries into the production line or sales portfolio.

The business functions as a marketplace for products made by beneficiaries, offering a real work environment with production, packaging, sales, and logistics roles.

The sales network includes local stores and online orders via their website. The enterprise states that the original purpose of

ΑξίΖΩ PRIVATE COMPANY was to advance the inclusion and recognition of persons with disabilities in the workforce by providing paid roles in a real business setting.

Objectives of the project

- **To create employment opportunities for persons with intellectual disabilities** within an enterprise model rather than a sheltered workshop.

- **To break stereotypes and promote social inclusion** by having persons with disabilities visible in regular employment roles.

- **To ensure sustainability by generating revenue** from sales of products, embedding social objectives into a functioning business model.

- **To leverage artistic workshops** (clay, painting) and integrate them into income-generating activities, thus blending creativity and employability.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

- **Inclusive employment in ordinary enterprise:** Unlike sheltered models, ΑξίΖΩ PRIVATE COMPANY emphasizes employing persons with disabilities within a competitive business structure (food manufacturing, crafts) alongside non-disabled workers.

- **Social enterprise approach:** By combining revenue generation and social inclusion, the model is more sustainable and scalable than pure subsidy programs.

- **Use of creative/digital content:** The enterprise also leverages craft production (clay, painting) and digital marketing (online sales) to increase reach and integrate multiple skills.

GOOD PRACTICE 9

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Name of the Project: **INCLUWORK**

Country: **Spain**

Name of the promoting organization:
Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

Link: https://incluwork.uoc.edu/

Practice description

INCLUWORK is a digital tool created by UOC's Chair in Disability, Employment and Innovation (in partnership with the Fundación Randstad) to help companies assess how inclusive they are towards people with disabilities. The tool invites organisations to answer a structured questionnaire covering several dimensions of inclusion - for example, awareness-raising, recruitment processes, job adaptation, communication and culture. At the end of the process, companies receive a diagnostic profile showing their current position, strengths and improvement areas. By offering a clear, self-assessment pathway, INCLUWORK enables firms to reflect on their practices, set measurable goals and monitor progress on employment inclusion for persons with disabilities.

Objectives of the project

■ Provide companies with a practical instrument to evaluate and visualise their level of disability inclusion and guide improvement.

■ Facilitate the adaptation of workplaces and recruitment/job-design processes so that persons with disabilities have fairer access to employment.

■ Support the creation of an inclusive corporate culture that values diversity, fosters equal opportunities and embeds disability inclusion as part of business practice.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

INCLUWORK stands out as a good practice because it translates the often-abstract concept of "inclusive employment" into a concrete, actionable self-assessment tool for companies. Unlike initiatives that only work one-on-one with job-seekers, this tool addresses the employer side directly - it helps an entire organisation identify where barriers remain and track change over time. The digital questionnaire allows scalability and repeat usage, enabling companies of different sizes to engage and compare progress.

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GOOD PRACTICE 10

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Name of the Project: **MEDICI project - Digital Inclusion Community**

Country: **Europe**

Name of the promoting organization:
MEDICI consortium: UNIR (Spain), Diesis Network (Belgium), Smart Bananas (Italy), Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (United Kingdom), Universidade Catolica Portuguesa (Portugal) & Kethea (Greece)

Link: https://digitalinclusion.eu/

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Practice description

The MEDICI Project was a European initiative designed to make the digital world more inclusive for everyone. It focused especially on people and communities who face barriers in accessing or using technology - for example, because of their age, income, education, or where they live. The project brought together organizations and experts from different countries to collect and share examples of what works best to reduce the digital divide.

Through an online platform, MEDICI offered a catalogue of real experiences, an interactive map to explore them, and a virtual community where professionals could learn from each other. Its goal was to help governments, NGOs, and other actors design better digital inclusion policies and actions based on existing good practices.

Objectives of the project

- To identify and describe successful projects that promote digital inclusion in Europe.

- To make this information accessible through an online platform with clear, visual tools.

- To connect professionals and organizations working in digital inclusion, helping them share knowledge and experiences.

- To highlight areas where more action is needed to reduce digital inequality.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

- MEDICI stands out because it does more than collect data - it turns knowledge into action. By combining a public database, interactive maps, and a community for peer learning, it creates a living network that keeps growing over time. It also categorizes each digital inclusion initiative by target group: elderly, marginalized young people and children, people with disabilities, migrants and unemployed people.

- It makes complex information about digital inclusion easy to understand and use, helping decision-makers and practitioners find inspiration and collaborate. MEDICI is a model of how technology can support social change by connecting people, ideas, and good practices across Europe.

GOOD PRACTICE 11

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Name of the Project: **LightGuide - Smart Assistive Augmented Reality work and training stations**

Country: **Belgium**

Name of the promoting organization: **Lichtwerk**

Link: https://www.lightguidesys.com/

Practice description

Lichtwerk is a Belgian company that uses technology to make the workplace more inclusive. Its goal is to ensure that people with disabilities and others who face barriers to employment can access meaningful and paid jobs. To achieve this, they have developed the LightGuide technology which implements smart work and training stations that use **Augmented Reality (AR)** to guide workers step by step through different tasks. The system projects visual instructions directly onto the work surface, helping people learn and perform complex tasks more easily and safely. These stations are already being used in factories, schools, and training centres. The technology not only supports people with cognitive or physical limitations but also helps non-native speakers and people returning to work after illness gain confidence and autonomy in their jobs.

Objectives of the project

- To make workplaces more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities.

- To provide visual, easy-to-follow instructions that replace complex written or spoken directions.

- To help workers learn new skills and adapt to changing production needs.

- To support schools and training centres in preparing students for real work environments.

- To promote independence and well-being among workers through assistive technology.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

Lichtwerk's approach is innovative because it combines **digital technology and human inclusion** in a practical, everyday setting. Instead of creating separate jobs for people with disabilities, it adapts existing workplaces to be accessible for all. The use of **Augmented Reality** as a cognitive support tool makes complex tasks understandable through images, colours, and movements — reducing stress and increasing confidence. The system is flexible, easy to update, and can be used both for training and ongoing support. By bridging the gap between education, social enterprises, and the open labour market, Lichtwerk offers a model of **future-oriented inclusion,** showing how technology can empower people and create equal opportunities in the world of work.

GOOD PRACTICE 12

Name of the Project: **ERGASIA MOU DIGITAL PLATFORM**

Country: **Greece**

Name of the promoting organization: **Margarita Vocational Training Center**

Link: https://ergasiamou.gr/en

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Practice description

"Ergasia Mou" ("My Work") is the first Greek digital platform designed to connect job seekers with intellectual and neurodevelopmental disabilities with inclusive employers in the open labour market. Developed by Margarita Vocational Training Center, a pioneer in supported employment since 1979, the platform was co-designed with 12 people with intellectual disabilities to ensure accessibility, clarity, and ease of use.

Through Ergasia Mou, individuals can create personal profiles and submit requests to find jobs that match their skills and interests. Employers can post opportunities and request candidates who are motivated and capable of working. Margarita acts as an intermediary, providing professional job matching and ongoing support before, during, and after recruitment for both job seekers and employers.

The platform is user-friendly, features Easy-to-Read content, and includes visual guides and videos that explain how to navigate it. It has already facilitated successful job placements across various sectors, such as hospitality, retail, shipping, and pharmaceuticals. A notable example is Eva, a graduate of Margarita's 5-month training course, who is now employed as a customer assistant at Marks & Spencer - a collaboration initiated through the platform.

Objectives of the project

- To bridge the gap between job seekers with intellectual or neurodevelopmental disabilities and employers in the open labour market.
- To increase access to supported employment, promoting inclusion and independence through real jobs in ordinary companies.
- To empower job seekers by providing pre-employment training, job coaching, and lifelong learning opportunities.
- To support employers in creating inclusive workplaces through awareness-raising, disability training, and post-placement follow-up.
- To enhance visibility of the talents and abilities of people with intellectual disabilities, encouraging a shift in public and corporate perceptions.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

- **First of its kind in Greece:** It is the first national e-platform that directly connects employers with people with intellectual and neurodevelopmental disabilities for open employment.
- **Co-designed and user-centred:** The platform was co-created with beneficiaries, ensuring accessibility, inclusivity, and genuine usability for its primary audience.
- **Technology meets supported employment:** Combines digital innovation with the supported employment model, providing continuous coaching and mediation before, during, and after hiring.
- **Proven positive impact:** Both job seekers and employers report increased confidence, independence, and productivity. Companies benefit from diverse talent, stronger team morale, and an enhanced social image.
- **Replicable and scalable:** The model can be easily adapted to other countries and has the potential to integrate AI-based job matching and links with national employment services.

GOOD PRACTICE 13

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Name of the Project: **LEAD**

Country: **Romania, Lithuania, UK and Portugal**

Name of the promoting organization:
HAO Romania Foundation and international partners

Link: https://www.lead-project.eu/

Practice description

The **LEAD Project** ("Labour market Employment for young Adults with a Disability") promotes the social and professional inclusion of young people with disabilities aged 15-29 by transferring and adapting a successful **supported employment model** from the United Kingdom to Romania, Lithuania, and Portugal.

The project builds a **sustainable ecosystem for supported employment,** involving young people with disabilities, families, employers, and service providers. It focuses on enabling real labour-market inclusion through personalised employment pathways, workplace support, and collaboration among stakeholders.

Key activities include:

- **Training Courses in Supported Employment** for professionals, families, and employers, building their capacity to guide and accompany young people with disabilities.

- **Delivery of Supported Employment Services** to help participants find, secure, and maintain meaningful jobs in the open labour market.

- **Organisation of Exchange of Experience Meetings** among partner countries to share best practices and adapt methodologies across contexts.

- **Setting up of Self-Help Groups** for families and young people with disabilities, encouraging mutual support and peer learning.

- **Creation of National Networks of Supported Employment Providers** to ensure long-term collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and sustainability.

Objectives of the project

- To **adapt and transfer** the supported employment model in partner countries.

- To **involve families and professionals** in supporting sustainable employment for young adults with disabilities.

- To **promote cooperation and networking** between supported employment providers at national and European levels.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

LEAD is innovative because it introduces a **proven, evidence-based supported employment model** into new European contexts through a co-adaptive process. It moves beyond training by creating an entire **support ecosystem** that connects job-seekers, families, employers, and service providers.

LEAD YOUR WAY >

GOOD PRACTICE 14

14

Name of the Project: **Iċ-Ċavetta**

Country: **Malta**

Name of the promoting organization:
Paulo Freire Institute

Link: https://cavetta.org.mt/

Practice description

Iċ-Ċavetta ("The Key") is an adult-literacy initiative which aims to promote social inclusion by tackling basic educational deficiencies that hinder disadvantaged groups from accessing the labour market.

The programme provides a bespoke teaching toolkit that teaches Maltese literacy skills from the ground up-letter recognition, phonics, reading and writing in Maltese-and also includes computer-orientation skills and work values.

It is designed for adults and youths aged approximately 16 to 60 who face social exclusion, low literacy levels or barriers to employment. Trainers are also supported with resources to help learners succeed. The toolkit is interactive and easy to use, both in class and online, making learning possible for everyone, even those who struggled in school.

Objectives of the project

- **Enhance employability**
  To help vulnerable groups with low employment rates and low literacy become contributors to the economy, increasing their chances of finding work.

- **Social inclusion**
  To improve access to education and lifelong learning for disadvantaged groups; to empower them socially, helping build social networks through training centres and employment.

- **Tailored educational tools**
  Development of a teaching toolkit specifically designed for adult learners with low literacy, which includes Maltese literacy, phonics (starting from letter recognition), work values, and computer orientation.

- **Capacitating trainers/educators**
  Ensuring adult training is provided by adequately trained and equipped personnel, especially those working with vulnerable groups.

- **Accessibility of learning materials**
  To make the toolkit accessible (interactive, visual, intuitive) across different platforms (offline, online, mobile), and suitable both for adults and young people who find the formal system difficult.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

- **User-driven design** – Persons with disabilities and their families are not passive beneficiaries; they are actively involved in shaping the project.

- **Holistic approach** – It combines different dimensions (education, training, empowerment, technology, support systems) instead of working in silos.

- **Use of accessible tools/methods** – If it uses plain language, easy-to-read materials, digital tools, or community-based approaches, this makes it stand out.

GOOD PRACTICE 15

Name of the Project: **HUMANA NOVA**

Country: **Croatia**

Name of the promoting organization:
HUMANA NOVA COOPERATIVE

Link: https://humananova.org/en/

15

Practice description

Humana Nova is a social cooperative based in Čakovec, Croatia, that tackles two major societal challenges: the exclusion from employment of people with disabilities and marginalized groups, and the environmental burden of textile waste. The cooperative collects and sorts discarded textiles, designs and produces up-cycled goods and second-hand items, and operates retail and industrial production activities. A significant part of its workforce –over half in many reports– are individuals with disabilities or other long-term unemployed or socially excluded persons. Through meaningful employment, tailored support, and participation in a value-chain aligned with circular economy principles, Humana Nova not only offers income and work experience but also contributes to sustainable consumption and local development.

Objectives of the project

■ Provide sustainable employment opportunities to people with disabilities and socially excluded groups through meaningful participation in production and services.

■ Develop a business model that supports textile waste collection, reuse, recycling and up-cycling thereby reducing waste, environmental footprint and promoting circular economy practices.

■ Create a replicable and resilient social enterprise model which reinvests its profits for growth, training, social impact and internal democracy (workers as members) rather than distributing profits externally.

■ Foster social inclusion and improve self-confidence, work habits and social skills of the employees from marginalized backgrounds, thereby improving their life quality and participation in the community.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

Humana Nova stands out as an innovative and replicable model of *inclusive circular economy.*

Its innovation lies in:

■ **Dual impact approach:** addressing both textile waste management and the employment gap for people with disabilities and marginalized groups. The cooperative demonstrates how environmental and social goals can reinforce each other within a viable market framework.

■ **Participatory governance:** employees, many of whom come from vulnerable backgrounds, are *members and decision-makers* of the cooperative, ensuring empowerment, democratic participation, and shared ownership.

■ **Local and community-based approach:** by creating jobs in local contexts and reinvesting profits into the community, the cooperative strengthens regional economies and fosters social cohesion.

GOOD PRACTICE 16

16

Name of the Project: **INCLUSIVADORA**

Country: **Spain**

Name of the promoting organization:
Catalan Foundation for Down Syndrome (FCSD)

Link: https://fcsd.org/es/la-inclusivadora/#163758
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Practice description

La Inclusivadora is an *inclusive coworking and fablab space* that promotes self-employment and entrepreneurship among people with and without intellectual disabilities.

The space combines several key components:

■ A **fablab** equipped with advanced digital manufacturing technology (3D printers, cutting plotters, tactile screens) that enables participants to explore 2D and 3D creation, make prototypes, and engage in digital fabrication.

■ A **coworking area,** offering shared workspaces, meeting rooms, and resources for individuals who wish to develop their personal or professional projects.

■ **Training and mentorship,** through courses and workshops on digital fabrication, entrepreneurship skills, and project management. Participants receive tailored guidance and individual mentoring to strengthen their business ideas and self-employment potential.

■ **A shared and inclusive environment** where people with intellectual disabilities (such as people with Down syndrome) and people without disabilities work side by side, encouraging mutual learning, creativity, and professional interaction.

They also use the pieces created by the participants with intellectual disabilities to sell as merchandising generating an extra source of revenue for the organization.

Objectives of the project

■ To promote **self-employment and entrepreneurship** among people with intellectual disabilities or other vulnerable groups by providing them with the skills, tools, and supports needed to develop viable projects.

■ To create an innovative space combining **coworking and digital fabrication (fablab)** that fosters creativity, skill-building, and technological access for inclusive innovation.

■ To encourage **social and labour inclusion** through mixed environments where people with and without disabilities share workspaces and learning experiences, building an inclusive professional community.

■ To provide **personalized mentoring and training** in entrepreneurship, business planning, and digital skills to help participants transform their ideas into sustainable initiatives.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

■ **Inclusive technology model:** La Inclusivadora merges coworking, digital fabrication (fablab), and entrepreneurship mentoring in a fully inclusive setting. This combination of technology + inclusion is unique and demonstrates how digital tools can empower people with intellectual disabilities.

■ **Empowerment and autonomy:** Instead of providing passive support, the project enables participants to take the lead in their professional lives, develop their own initiatives, and make decisions—fully aligned with the rights-based approach to inclusion and self-determination.

GOOD PRACTICE 17

17

Name of the Project: **Up with Down**

Country: **Italy**

Name of the promoting organization:
Associazione Italiana Persone Down (AIPD)

Link: https://up-with-down.it/

Practice description

Up-With-Down ("The business platform with the most geniuses") is an innovative initiative created to promote entrepreneurship among people with Down syndrome. The project encourages people with Down syndrome to transform their ideas into real businesses and, in doing so, to generate inclusive employment opportunities for themselves and others.

The project's central idea is to **overturn stereotypes:** instead of viewing people with Down syndrome merely as recipients of inclusion, AIPD envisions them as active agents of inclusion-individuals capable not only of working but also of creating jobs for others.

Up-With-Down is a **digital platform** designed to connect aspiring entrepreneurs with potential supporters, companies, and private donors willing to finance their business ideas. It provides an accessible, user-friendly interface and a structured timeline:

Objectives of the project

- To **empower people with Down syndrome** to believe in their potential and transform their ideas into real entrepreneurial projects.

- To **create a digital ecosystem** that connects aspiring entrepreneurs with businesses, investors, and individuals willing to provide funding, mentoring, or collaboration.

- To **combat stereotypes** and change public perceptions about the abilities of people with Down syndrome, highlighting creativity, determination, and leadership.

- To **foster long-term employability and independence,** creating sustainable work opportunities through self-employment and small business initiatives.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

- **A paradigm shift in inclusion:** Up-With-Down redefines the concept of inclusion in the labour market by positioning people with Down syndrome not only as employees but as entrepreneurs and job creators.

- **Digital innovation with social impact:** By using a digital crowdfunding and networking model, the initiative bridges the gap between the social and business worlds, creating real opportunities for investment and collaboration.

LEAD YOUR WAY>

GOOD PRACTICE 18

18

Name of the Project: **Sustainable Service in DS**

Country: **Romania**

Name of the promoting organization:
Asociatia Down Plus Bucuresti and international partners

Link: https://sustainableserviceinds.eu/activities/

Practice description

The **Sustainable Service in DS** project empowers people with Down syndrome through direct participation in community service and sustainable development initiatives by introducing the *service-learning* approach.

Implemented by **Romania's Down Syndrome Federation** and its European partners, the project has reached **193 people with Down syndrome** in national pilot activities, involved **50 participants in transnational exchanges,** and engaged over 340 stakeholders through dissemination and multiplier events.

Through these structured activities and materials, participants gain real-world experience – collaborating on service initiatives, working with diverse groups, and building both social and work-related competencies – while communities benefit from their engagement in sustainable and civic-minded work. At the same time, they contribute visibly to their communities, challenging stereotypes and increasing public awareness of their potential.

Objectives of the project

- To **empower** people with Down syndrome through service-learning and active participation in sustainable development and community service.

- To **build employability skills** and self-confidence in beneficiaries by developing soft-skills, teamwork, responsibility and practical experience.

- To **increase visibility and acceptance** of persons with Down syndrome in communities and institutions by showcasing their contributions through structured civic and sustainable activities.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

It demonstrates how volunteering and community service can become tools for both **social participation and professional development.**

By connecting civic engagement, sustainability, and employability, **Sustainable Service in DS** redefines inclusion as an active, reciprocal process where people with Down syndrome contribute meaningfully to society while preparing for independent adult life.

GOOD PRACTICE 19

19

Name of the Project: **Angajați, NU Asistați!**

Country: **Romania**

Name of the promoting organization:
Special Olympics Romania

Link: https://angajare.specialolympics.ro/despre-proiect/

Practice description

The **"Angajați, NU Asistați!" (Employees, Not Beneficiaries!)** project is a national initiative created to promote the labour market inclusion of adults with Down syndrome. Through a combination of **training, internships, and employer engagement,** the project helps participants transition from dependency to active, valued contributors in their communities.

Adults with Down syndrome are trained to search for jobs, communicate effectively with employers, succeed in interviews, and adapt to workplace environments. They also participate in **internships and practice stages** with partner employers across **12 cities in Romania,** gaining hands-on experience and confidence in real work settings.

The project also prepares **families, professionals, and companies** for inclusion. Over **200 relatives, specialists, and employers** have taken part in local workshops and a **National Forum** to fosters dialogue and awareness about inclusive hiring.

Complementing these actions, a dedicated **online platform** provides accessible employment resources — including the **first national "Guide for Hiring People with Down Syndrome",** job-seeker profiles, and an **Easy-to-Read section** adapted to the needs of adults with intellectual disabilities.

Objectives of the project

■ **To provide job readiness training** for adults with Down syndrome, focusing on communication, interview, and workplace adaptation skills.

■ **To connect participants with employers** through internships and practical work experiences.

■ **To raise awareness among employers, families, and the public** about the employability and potential of people with Down syndrome.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

This initiative is among the **first national programmes in Romania** dedicated specifically to the employment of people with Down syndrome. It combines **skills development, practical experience, and employer training,** addressing all dimensions of inclusion. Its **replicable and sustainable model** fosters collaboration between job-seekers, families, and companies, ensuring that inclusion becomes both a social and economic reality. By shifting the focus from "assistance" to **active employment,** the project challenges stereotypes and demonstrates that people with Down syndrome can — and do — contribute meaningfully to the workforce.

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GOOD PRACTICE 20

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Name of the Project: **IncludNET – Inclusive Entrepreneurship Network**

Country: **Luxembourg**

Name of the promoting organization: **APEMH Foundation and international partners**

Link: https://co-production.eu/project-results/

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Practice description

The **IncludNet Project** aims to build a **sustainable ecosystem of inclusive entrepreneurship** for young people with intellectual disabilities. Its goal is to promote self-determination, self-awareness, and self-entrepreneurship by enabling participants to actively shape their own learning and professional paths.

One of the project's most remarkable achievements is the creation of a **co-productive training process,** where young people with disabilities participated as equal partners in the design and development of all activities. This participatory methodology ensured accessibility through easy-to-read and facilitated materials, empowering participants to express their ideas, co-create content, and take ownership of their learning experience.

The **IncludNet Training Programme,** developed in the project's second phase, translates these principles into a concrete educational tool. It includes several modules focused on entrepreneurship, self-confidence, community engagement, and employability. Each module—lasting approximately two hours—contains **trainer notes,** simplified content, and practical exercises, designed for direct use with learners with intellectual disabilities.

Objectives of the project

- **To empower participants** by involving them as equal co-creators in the design of training materials and activities.

- **To create a transferable training programme** that strengthens self-determination, self-awareness, and entrepreneurship skills.

- **To promote diversity and inclusion** in education and employment through accessible and inclusive learning methodologies.

Why is it innovative? Why it deserves to be a good practice?

IncludNet is innovative because it applies a co-production model in which young people with intellectual disabilities actively design and shape their own training, rather than just receiving it. This participatory approach strengthens self-determination and empowerment, making learners true partners in the educational process. The project also creates a replicable European methodology that links entrepreneurship, accessibility, and inclusion, showing how people with disabilities can become active agents of social and economic change.

Good practices guide