



Best Practice for Inclusive Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Greece

Title of the Best Practice: Hands-On Inclusion – Collaborative Model between VET Providers and Disability Support Structures in Greece

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In Greece, Vocational Education and Training (VET) is regulated by the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports, within the broader legal framework governing education and special education (notably Law 3699/2008 on Special Education and subsequent amendments).

Inclusive education is a core principle of the Greek educational system, ensuring:

- Individualised Education Plans (IEPs)
- Parallel support and specialised services
- Adaptations in teaching methods and assessment

VET is delivered through:

- Vocational Upper Secondary Schools (EPAL)
- Schools of Higher Vocational Training (SAEK – former IEK)
- Special Vocational Education and Training Workshops (EEEEK)
- Centres for Daily Care and Support of Persons with Disabilities (KDIF)
- Creative Activity Centres for Persons with Disabilities (KDAP-MEA)

The effective implementation of inclusion depends largely on:



- collaboration between educational institutions and social care structures
- availability of support services
- institutional commitment to inclusive practices

Context

The practice is implemented within KEEPEA Orizontes, which is a publicly supported Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Lifelong Learning centre, located in Athens. It operates within the Greek educational and training framework and focuses on inclusive education, environmental awareness, and social integration initiatives. The centre collaborates with local authorities, social services, and educational institutions to provide interdisciplinary learning opportunities and promote active citizenship.

The centre offers a range of non-formal and complementary vocational training programmes, as well as project-based learning initiatives aligned with European frameworks (EQF levels 2–5 equivalent), including:

- ◆ **Introductory VET / Skills Development (EQF 2–3 equivalent):**
Basic life skills, environmental education, and introductory vocational orientation (e.g. eco-activities, personal care, and creative workshops).
- ◆ **Intermediate Training (EQF 4 equivalent):**
Programmes related to social care, community support, cultural activities, and applied environmental practices.
- ◆ **Advanced Training / Specialisation (EQF 5 equivalent):**
Social inclusion, community development, environmental education facilitation, and animation of socio-cultural activities.

Local Context and Learner Profile

The centre serves a diverse learner population from Athens and surrounding municipalities. Participants include:



- Young learners in transition from compulsory education
- Adult learners engaged in lifelong learning
- Individuals from socially vulnerable groups
- Learners with intellectual disabilities, autism and/or developmental disorders

Each academic year, the centre engages approximately 250–300 participants in its activities. A significant proportion (around 15–20%) consists of learners requiring additional educational support, including cognitive, social, or emotional assistance.

Within the context of structures such as KEEPEA Horizontes and other Centres for Daily Care (KDIF) and Creative Activity Centres for Persons with Disabilities (KDAP-MEA), individuals with intellectual disabilities present different levels of functioning, commonly categorized as low, medium, and high functioning.

More specifically:

- **Low-functioning individuals:**
They require a high level of support in their daily lives. They can participate in simple activities such as basic sensory exercises, guided crafts, and self-care activities with assistance.
- **Medium-functioning individuals:**
They demonstrate a higher level of autonomy and can engage in structured activities, such as creative workshops, basic social interactions, and simple vocational skills with support.
- **High-functioning individuals:**
They have a greater degree of independence. They can participate in more complex activities such as group projects, vocational training, development of social skills, and in some cases, supported employment.

These centres aim to develop skills, promote social inclusion, and improve the quality of life of individuals, by adapting activities according to each person's level of functioning and individual needs.



Problem and Motivation

A key challenge in the Greek VET system is that:

- standard teaching approaches do not sufficiently address learner diversity
- there is limited structured collaboration between VET and disability services
- many learners face low motivation, disengagement, or learning barriers

The need emerged to:

- ensure equal learning opportunities for all
- adopt flexible and personalised teaching approaches
- connect learning with real-life social and professional environments

Description of the Practical Approach

The core methodology is the “**Hands-On Inclusion**” model, adapted to the Greek context and aligned with inclusive education principles.

Teaching is organised around:

- learning by doing (workshops, field activities, real-life tasks)
- personalised support and mentoring
- peer and cooperative learning
- development of social and professional skills

Implementation Phases

1: Outreach & Initial Assessment



At this stage, potential participants are identified through the services of KEEPEA Orizontes or partner organisations.

- Initial profiling of the individual
- Identification of abilities, interests, and support needs
- Basic assessment of communication and social skills
- Family/caregiver consultation (where relevant)

2: Preparation & Pre-Vocational Training

Participants receive structured preparation before entering the workplace.

- Introduction to workplace rules and routines
- Basic hygiene and safety training (food handling, cleanliness)
- Development of communication and interaction skills
- Familiarisation with café environment and roles

3: Guided Workplace Introduction (Shadowing)

Participants are gradually introduced to the café environment under close supervision.

- Observation of daily operations
- Shadowing staff and trainers
- Initial participation in simple tasks
- Building confidence in a real setting

4: Supported Task Engagement



Participants begin to actively perform tasks with continuous support.

- Assignment of simple, structured tasks (e.g. serving, cleaning, basic preparation)
- One-to-one or small-group support from staff
- Use of repetition and routine
- Immediate feedback and encouragement

5: Skill Development & Role Expansion

Participants progressively take on more responsibilities based on their abilities.

- Expansion of task complexity
- Improvement of customer interaction skills
- Development of teamwork and responsibility
- Gradual reduction of support intensity

6: Supported Employment in Real Conditions

Participants operate as active members of the café workforce.

- Participation in daily operations
- Interaction with real customers
- Responsibility for specific roles/tasks
- Ongoing but less intensive supervision

7: Continuous Monitoring & Personal Development

Support continues through structured follow-up and evaluation.

- Regular assessment of progress
- Adaptation of tasks based on performance



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- Emotional and social support
- Reinforcement of strengths

Accessibility

Accessibility within the social café “**To Pareaki**” is addressed through a holistic and person-centred approach, ensuring that all employees with disabilities can participate meaningfully and safely in real working conditions.

The approach integrates **physical, organisational, and pedagogical accessibility**, adapted to the needs of each individual.

1. Physical Accessibility

The café environment is designed to ensure safe and independent movement for all employees.

- Step-free access to the premises (where applicable)
- Clear and simple spatial layout to support orientation
- Adapted workstations depending on individual needs
- Accessible restroom facilities (where available)
- Use of visual cues and signage to support navigation

2. Organisational Accessibility

Work processes are structured to ensure that tasks are understandable, predictable, and achievable.

- Clear daily routines and structured schedules
- Task allocation based on individual abilities
- Flexible pacing and workload adjustment
- Use of repetition and consistency in task execution



- Supportive supervision by trained staff

3. Pedagogical Accessibility

Learning and skill development are adapted to different cognitive and learning profiles.

- “Learning by doing” methodology
- Step-by-step instructions
- Use of simple and clear language
- Demonstration and modelling of tasks
- Continuous feedback and positive reinforcement

4. Social Accessibility

The café actively promotes inclusion through real interaction with the community.

- Direct engagement with customers
- Encouragement of communication and social participation
- Promotion of respect and awareness among visitors
- Creation of an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere

5. Emotional & Psychological Accessibility

Special attention is given to the emotional wellbeing of employees.

- Supportive and non-judgmental environment
- Gradual exposure to responsibilities
- Encouragement and confidence-building
- Availability of support staff when needed

6. Digital Accessibility (where applicable)



Basic digital tools are adapted when used in the café environment.

- Simple and user-friendly interfaces
- Visual supports (icons, images)
- Guidance in the use of digital tools (e.g. ordering systems, POS)

Results

The implementation leads to:

- increased learner engagement and motivation
- improved social and communication skills
- enhanced empathy and inclusion awareness
- better preparation for employment

Work-Based Learning and Transition to Employment

The practice strengthens:

- links between VET and the labour market
- development of employability skills
- cooperation with local employers and organisations

It supports a smoother transition from education to employment, especially for learners with additional support needs.

Outcome Indicators

- participation and attendance rates
- improvement of individual skills
- progression in education pathways



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- integration into work environments

Sustainability

The practice is sustainable as it:

- relies on existing institutional structures
- integrates into regular educational processes
- builds on long-term collaborations

Transferability

The model can be applied across Greece in:

- EPAL
- SAEK
- EEEEEK
- disability support centres

Key requirements:

- commitment to inclusion
- flexible teaching approaches
- structured collaboration with external partners

Cost Efficiency

The practice is cost-effective, as it is based on:

- existing human resources

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- available infrastructure
- low-cost digital tools

It mainly requires:

- time investment
- coordination among staff
- continuous monitoring

Success Factors

- strong institutional commitment to inclusion
- experienced teaching and support staff
- continuous individual monitoring of learners
- collaboration between education and social services
- focus on abilities rather than limitations

Challenges and Solutions

The main challenge is not the disability itself, but:

- stereotypes and social prejudices

These are addressed through:

- direct interaction
- shared activities
- experiential learning

Conclusion

The **“Hands-On Inclusion” model** represents a practical and transferable approach to inclusive VET in Greece. It:

- connects education with real-life contexts



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- promotes social inclusion of persons with disabilities
- enhances equal opportunities in education and employment

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