



Best practice for inclusive employment

Title of the best practice: *"Pareaki" Social Cafe – A Hub for Vocational Inclusion and Community Integration*

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Executive Summary

KEEPEA Orizontes (Athens) has established and operates **"Pareaki"**, a Social Cooperative Enterprise (**Koin.S.Ep.**) functioning as an all-day café-bar in Agios Dimitrios, located in Alexandrou Panagouli Square. The enterprise is integration-oriented, aiming to promote the employment and social inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities through their active participation in real working conditions.

"To Pareaki" is a social cafe that serves as a practical "live lab" for the vocational training and employment of individuals with intellectual disabilities and special needs, aiming to bridge the gap between training and employment through participation in real working environments. It functions as a social economy initiative, combining business activity with a strong social mission. Moving beyond traditional therapy, this practice focuses on real-world hospitality skills, providing employees with a high-performance environment where their professional contribution is the priority. The initiative bridges the "employment gap" by transitioning trainees from sheltered workshops to active, client-facing roles, proving that inclusive social enterprises are both socially impactful and operationally sustainable.

Company Context

Size: Small-to-Medium Enterprise (SME) / Non-Profit Social Entity.

Sector: Social Economy, Hospitality, and Vocational Education and Training (VET).

Key Business Units: **Pareaki Social Cafe:** A fully operational cafe open to the public.

Vocational Training Center: Specialized workshops in catering and service.

Location: Athens, Greece

Diversity Governance: KEEPEA has established a social cooperative enterprise named "Pareaki," which is run by a board consisting of parents and the employees themselves, where inclusion is the core mission rather than a peripheral policy.



Problem and Motivation

The Problem: High unemployment rates and social isolation for individuals with intellectual disabilities in Greece. Traditional vocational training often lacks a "real-world" component, leaving individuals unprepared for the demands of the open labor market.

Motivation: To maximize the professional independence and social visibility of people with special needs. By operating a public-facing cafe, the organization aims to challenge societal misconceptions and prove that employees with disabilities can provide high-quality services independently.

Governance & Ownership

Executive Leadership: Structured as a non-profit organization under Greek law, emphasizing social objectives and community benefit.

Oversight: The Board of Directors provides strategic oversight, ensuring that the cafe's commercial operations remain aligned with the rehabilitative mission.

Roles: * Management: Responsible for the cafe's commercial viability and safety standards.

Specialized Trainers: Job coaches who provide day-to-day support and transition trainees into the workforce.

Legal Framework & Anti-Discrimination

The enterprise is structured to meet both national and international legal standards regarding disability rights and social economy:

- Law 4430/2016 (Social & Solidarity Economy): This governs the operation of "Integration Enterprises" like Pareaki, allowing them to employ a high percentage of vulnerable workers while maintaining commercial activity.
- Law 4488/2017: Aligns Greek legislation with UN directives on the rights of persons with disabilities, strictly focusing on non-discrimination in the workplace.
- Law 2643/1998: Provides the cornerstone for protecting "protected categories," mandating recruitment and offering reinforced protection against dismissal.



- EU Disability Strategy 2021–2030: The initiative is aligned with European policies promoting equal access to employment and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Health, Safety, and Workplace Standards

As a public-facing hospitality business, Pareaki balances commercial safety standards with a supportive educational environment:

- **Management Oversight:** Leadership is responsible for ensuring the cafe meets all commercial viability and safety standards.
- **Supervised Environment:** The workplace is intentionally structured as a "safe but realistic" professional setting.
- **Job Coaching:** Specialized trainers (job coaches) provide day-to-day support, ensuring that workplace routines are executed safely and correctly.
- **Labor Rights:** Employees benefit from specific legal protections, including six additional days of paid annual leave.

Accessibility & Reasonable Accommodations

Accessibility is integrated into the operational DNA of the cafe through specific pedagogical and physical adjustments:

- **Ergonomic Infrastructure:** The cafe implements ergonomic workstation layouts and specialized equipment tailored to the cognitive and physical needs of the staff.
- **Technological Aids:** Simplified point-of-sale (POS) systems and visual aids for recipes are used to reduce cognitive load and empower independent work.
- **Accommodation Process:** Requests for adjustments are identified by job coaches based on individual needs and implemented rapidly to avoid delays in training or employment.
- **Public Visibility:** The location in a public square is a deliberate choice to ensure physical accessibility for the community and visibility for the employees.



Data Protection & Governance

The governance model ensures transparency and the ethical handling of social and personal data:

- *Social Enterprise Model*: Operating under Law 4430/2016, the organization ensures transparency, social impact orientation, and the reinvestment of profits for community benefit.
- *Inclusive Leadership*: The board consists of parents and the employees themselves, ensuring that those most affected by the policies have a direct voice in how their data and rights are managed.
- *Regulatory Alignment*: By following the Greek and EU frameworks for Vocational Education and Training (VET), the initiative adheres to standardized reporting and quality assurance principles.

Policy and Regulatory Compliance

The initiative is aligned with:

- The **Greek legal framework for Social and Solidarity Economy** (Law 4430/2016 on Koin.S.Ep.)
- **EU Disability Strategy 2021–2030**, promoting equal access to employment
- Principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, particularly regarding inclusion and equal opportunities
- Inclusive **Vocational Education and Training (VET)** policies linked to the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**

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Practical and Pedagogical Approach

The initiative applies a **work-based learning (WBL) and experiential learning methodology**, integrating elements of:



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- **Learning-by-doing** in authentic service-sector conditions
- **Task analysis and scaffolding**, adapting roles to individual capacities
- **Mentored workplace participation**, with continuous guidance from trained staff
- **Individualised support planning**, addressing diverse learning and support needs
- **Peer-supported learning**, fostering collaboration between participants

Participants are gradually introduced to responsibilities through a **step-by-step progression model**, ensuring both skill acquisition and confidence building.

Operational Implementation

Within the daily operation of the café-bar, participants are actively engaged in:

- Customer interaction and communication
- Preparation and serving of food and beverages
- Execution of structured workplace routines
- Collaboration within a team-based environment

The workplace is intentionally structured as a **safe but realistic professional setting**, balancing productivity with educational support.

Impact and Added Value

The initiative contributes to:

- **Transition pathways from training to employment** for people with disabilities
- Development of **vocational, social, and transversal competences**
- Reduction of **social exclusion and labour market barriers**
- Increased **community awareness and acceptance of diversity**



At a systemic level, "Pareaki" functions as a **replicable good practice**, demonstrating how **social economy initiatives can operationalise inclusive VET principles** in real-life contexts.

Practical Approach

Technology & Infrastructure: Implementation of simplified point-of-sale (POS) systems, visual aids for recipes, and ergonomic workstation layouts tailored to the cognitive needs of the staff.

Processes: Shift from "simulated training" to "live service." Employees handle real orders, customer interactions, and financial transactions under the guidance of mentors.

Impacted Employees: A dedicated team of individuals with special needs working in shifts, supported by professional baristas and trainers.

Reasonable Accommodations Process

Request Procedure: Identified by job coaches based on individual needs (e.g., simplified task lists, specialized equipment).

Budgeting: Follows a case-by-case model to address unique cognitive or physical requirements, often supported by social economy grants and cafe revenue.

Timeline: Rapid implementation of workplace adjustments to ensure trainees can begin their roles without delay.

Results

Evidence of Success: "Pareaki" has become a recognized community hub in Athens, maintaining consistent service quality that matches mainstream cafes.

Professional Growth: Trainees show significant improvements in social skills, financial literacy, and technical catering expertise, with several transitioning to external employment in the hospitality sector.

Community Impact: Reduced social stigma through direct daily interaction between the public and employees with special needs.



Success Factors

1. **Mission-Driven Leadership:** The Board prioritizes social integration over profit, allowing for the necessary "coaching time" during shifts.
2. **Mentorship Model:** Peer-to-peer and trainer-to-trainee support ensures a safe learning environment.
3. **Public Visibility:** The cafe's location and open-door policy are essential for true community integration.

Sustainability & Transferability

Sustainability: Maintained through a mix of commercial sales, donations, and Greek social enterprise funding.

Transferability: The "Social Cafe" model is highly replicable for other NGOs. Key requirements include a high-traffic location, trained job coaches, and a "Skills-First" approach to staff management.

Sources & Contacts

Organizational Details

Name: 'To pareaki' cafe

Address: Panagouli Square

Website: <https://topareaki.gr/>

General Enquiries: info@topareaki.gr, tel: 210 970 6757

Public Sources and Links

Greek Legislation for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities (PwD)

Greek law provides specific protections and incentives to promote the employment of people with disabilities:

- Law 2643/1998: The cornerstone of employment for "protected categories." It mandates the compulsory recruitment of PwD in both private and public sector



organizations that employ more than a certain number of employees (usually 50+).

- Law 4488/2017: This law aligns Greek legislation with UN directives on the rights of persons with disabilities, specifically focusing on non-discrimination in the workplace.
- Labor Rights & Leave: Employees with disabilities are entitled to 6 additional days of paid annual leave. They also benefit from reinforced protection against dismissal.
- Labor Inspectorate (HLI): Protected Categories & Rights (Official Government Portal)

Employment Subsidies & Support (DYPA / former OAED)

The Public Employment Service (DYPA) frequently runs programs to subsidize the recruitment and training of PwD:

- Targeted Subsidy Programs: Subsidies often cover up to 75%–90% of the salary and social security contributions for 12–24 months.
- Reasonable Accommodation Grants: Funding for employers to modify the physical workspace or purchase specialized software/equipment to accommodate an employee's disability.
- DYPA Portal: Employment Programs for PwD

Social Economy Framework

Since "Pareaki" operates as a social enterprise, it is governed by the framework of the Social and Solidarity Economy:

- Law 4430/2016: Defines the operation of Social Cooperative Enterprises (Koin.S.Ep.). It explains how "Integration Enterprises" (like Pareaki) can employ a high percentage of vulnerable workers while maintaining a commercial activity.
- ESAMEA (National Federation of Disabled People): esamea.gr – The peak body in Greece for disability rights, offering extensive resources on employment policy.



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