

Research and collection of inclusive VET and employment success stories

Report on the national systems and best cases in Italy (country of the partner) and Slovenia (additional EU country selected for studying).

UICI Firenze

1. Aims of the research

The primary goal of this study is to identify and document successful methodologies for inclusion across the professional lifecycle, specifically focusing on the transition from high level vocational education to sustainable employment. By analysing the practices of the **University of Primorska (UPR)** and **S.C.S. Cristoforo**, the research aims to:

- **Inform VET Practice:** Demonstrate how academic frameworks and specialized faculty training can ensure that students and educators are equipped with market-relevant inclusive skills.
- **Inform Inclusive Employment:** Showcase the "Individualized Project" model used by S.C.S. Cristoforo, where dedicated internal departments and technical adaptations enable workers with disabilities to achieve full professional autonomy.
- **Bridge the Transition:** Identify critical success factors, such as preparatory internships and specialized mentorship, that facilitate the move from an educational environment to a competitive commercial role.
- **Promote Replicability:** Provide an evidence-based folder for other European VET providers and employers to adopt "inclusion-by-default" standards, focusing on digital accessibility and structured support.

2. Scope and Definitions of the Research

2.1 Scope and Definitions as far as VET education is concerned (VET types, age, disability categories)

The research focuses on higher vocational education, pedagogical training, and specialized support services for sensory disabilities.

- **VET Providers:** Includes Higher Education Institutions like the **University of Primorska (UPR)** and specialized centres such as **Centre IRIS**, which provides

education, rehabilitation, and counselling for the blind and partially sighted.

- **Age Ranges:** Young adults (18-25) and mature learners/professionals.
- **Disability Categories:** Broad spectrum (physical, sensory, learning), with a specific focus on Visually Impaired Pupils (VIP).

Key Definitions:

- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Curriculum development providing equal learning opportunities. In practice, this includes the use of adapted materials to ensure equal access to education.
- **Extreme Personalization:** Moving beyond standard individualization to one-on-one tailored support to ensure truly personalized education.

2.2 Scope and Definitions as far as inclusive employment is concerned

The research analyses the **Social Cooperative model (Type B)** in Italy, which is legally mandated to integrate disadvantaged people into the workforce.

- **Organization:** S.C.S. Cristoforo is a leading "Type B" Social Cooperative in Italy, acting as a bridge between social welfare and the competitive market.
- **Scale and Impact:** With a workforce of over 3,400 employees and a yearly turnover of €80 million, it operates as a large-scale enterprise across multiple sectors, including logistics, facility management, and tourism (through the Cristoforo TEC business unit).
- **Target Population:** The scope includes over 800 employees with diverse disabilities (physical, sensory, and cognitive) and other disadvantaged backgrounds, integrated into the workforce through specialized legal frameworks (Law 68/99 and Law 381/91).

Key Definitions:

- **Work Integration Office (Ufficio Inserimenti Lavorativi):** A specialized internal unit that coordinates recruitment and monitoring of employees with disabilities.
- **Individualized Project:** A tailored professional development plan that matches the worker's functional abilities with specific job requirements. Directed by Italian Law through "Targeted Employment" (Collocamento Mirato), which is a strategic methodology that matches the functional capabilities of the individual with the specific technical requirements of the job position.

3. Criteria for Selecting Good Practices

The selected practices meet the following international standards for excellence:

- **Proven Effect:** Demonstrated by Cristoforo's high retention rates (monitoring at 6, 12, and 24 months) and UPR's academic leadership in inclusive pedagogy.
- **Sustainability:** Both entities have a long-term strategic commitment (Cristoforo since 2002) backed by dedicated annual budgets.
- **Transferability:** The "Work Integration Office" model is highly replicable for other

large corporations and cooperatives across the EU.

- **Reasonable Cost:** Focus on organizational flexibility (remote work, flexible shifts) and ergonomic adjustments rather than expensive structural changes.

4. Study Design and Sampling

4.1. Inclusive VET: UPR & Centre IRIS

The research identifies a dual approach to VET: academic excellence in pedagogical training and specialized field support for sensory disabilities.

- **Core Practice (UPR):** "Pedagogical Preparation for Diversity," which trains future educators to use digital tools and assistive technologies as a standard curriculum feature.
- **Core Practice (Centre IRIS):** "Itinerant Specialized Teaching," employing specialized teachers who provide one-on-one support for Visually Impaired Pupils (VIP).
- **Methodological Innovation:** Shifting from simple "individualization" to "extreme personalization" of methods and forms of work to ensure equal access to education.
- **Technological Accessibility:**
 - **Software:** Utilization of screen readers with speech synthesis and magnification software like ZoomText.
 - **Hardware:** Provision of Braille displays and specialized computer workstations.
- **UDL Integration:** Application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles specifically through the adaptation of all learning materials (PDFs, videos) to be accessible from the start.

4.2. Inclusive Employment: S.C.S. Cristoforo

S.C.S. Cristoforo implements a structured governance model that treats inclusion as a business advantage rather than just a social obligation.

- **The "Work Integration Office":** A specialized internal unit that acts as a central hub for recruitment, monitoring, and multi-stakeholder coordination.
- **The "Individualized Project":** A tailored professional development plan matching a worker's functional abilities with specific job requirements to ensure long-term career sustainability.
- **Reasonable Accommodations:**
 - **Physical/Technical:** Provision of height-adjustable desks, ergonomic workstations, and specialized hardware/software.
 - **Organizational:** A "Hybrid-by-design" model offering flexible shifts and remote work options.
- **Inclusive Recruitment:** Use of the "Cristoforo Jobs" portal and preparatory internships (tirocini propedeutici) to facilitate a smooth transition into the workforce.

5. Data Sources and Tools

5.1. Evaluation for VET (UPR & Centre IRIS)

- **Proven Effect:** Demonstrated by UPR's academic leadership in inclusive pedagogy and Centre IRIS's success in achieving approximately equal educational access for VIP students.
- **Sustainability:** Both entities show long-term commitment (UPR's strategic focus and Centre IRIS's two-year established itinerant model) supported by specialized staff.
- **Transferability:** The practices are replicable if other VET providers secure staff readiness and account for the specialized knowledge required to use assistive technologies.
- **Success Factors:** Success is driven by a supportive team environment and a proactive effort to change the mindset regarding disability.

5.2. Evaluation for Employment (S.C.S. Cristoforo)

- **Proven Effect:** Validated by high retention rates (monitored at 6, 12, and 24 months) and lower absenteeism compared to industry averages.
- **Sustainability:** A permanent feature of the organization since 2002, backed by a dedicated annual budget for accessibility audits and technological updates.
- **Transferability:** The "Work Integration Office" model is highly replicable for other large corporations and cooperatives across the EU.
- **Cost Efficiency:** Focuses on organizational flexibility and ergonomic adjustments, which are viewed as investments that transform social responsibility into a competitive advantage.

6. Best practices for inclusive VET

Case Study: University of Primorska (UPR) – Faculty of Education & Centre IRIS

- **Core Practice: "Pedagogical Preparation and Personalized Support":** UPR focuses on training future educators to use digital tools and assistive technologies as a standard part of the curriculum. This is complemented by the Centre IRIS model of "Itinerant Specialized Teaching," where teachers work with pupils individually to ensure education is truly personalized in both methods and forms of work.
- **Transition Strategy:** The university acts as a bridge between research and field application, ensuring that VET trainers are equipped to handle diverse classrooms using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. This is supported by a focus on student readiness and the use of adapted materials to provide equal access to education.
- **Innovation and ICT Solutions:**
 - Continuous focus on ICT solutions to ensure that learning materials (PDFs, videos, platforms) are accessible to all students from the start.
 - Implementation of specific hardware and software, including screen readers with speech synthesis, Braille displays, and magnification tools like ZoomText.

- Standardized use of adapted materials that correspond to the ideology of UDL to ensure sensory accessibility.
- **Success Factors and Sustainability:** The practice is sustained by a supportive team and a commitment to changing the institutional mindset regarding disability. It has been successfully implemented for the last two years with a focus on cost-efficiency through the use of specialized pedagogical resources.

7. Best practices for inclusive employment

Case Study: S.C.S. Cristoforo – "Work Integration Office"

- **Description of the Practice:** Since February 2002, S.C.S. Cristoforo has implemented a structured governance model for inclusion. The core of this practice is the "Individualized Project," which moves beyond simple recruitment to ensure long term career sustainability.
- **Internal Governance:** The process is managed by the Work Integration Office, which acts as the central hub. It involves internal sponsors (Leadership Mandate), process owners, and external partners (local public agencies and NGOs), ensuring a multi stakeholder approach to every hire.
- **Reasonable Accommodations:**
 - **Physical & Technical:** The cooperative provides height-adjustable desks, ergonomic workstations, and specialized hardware/software upon request to eliminate physical barriers.
 - **Organizational Flexibility:** A "Hybrid-by-design" model is adopted where possible. Flexibility in shifts and remote work options are key features, alongside a strict commitment to meeting accessibility standards (e.g., accessible PDFs and captioned videos).
 - **Recruitment:** The hiring process is fully inclusive, utilizing the "Cristoforo Jobs" portal. Candidates undergo accessible assessments and structured interviews, often preceded by preparatory internships (tirocini propedeutici) to facilitate a smooth transition into the company.
- **Success Indicators & Results:** The cooperative monitors success through a robust KPI system: Assumption Rate, Time-to-Productivity, and Retention Tracking at 6, 12, and 24 months.
 - **Economic & Social Value:** Internal data shows that inclusive practices lead to lower absenteeism (fewer sick days) and a higher level of employee engagement, transforming social responsibility into a competitive business advantage.
- **Funding and Sustainability:** Inclusion is not a temporary project but a permanent feature, supported by a dedicated annual budget line for accessibility audits, staff training, and technological updates.

8. Ethics and Data Protection

This research has been conducted in full compliance with the ethical standards of the Erasmus+ programme and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016/679.

- **Consent Procedures:** All participants and contributing organizations (S.C.S. Cristoforo and UPR) provided their Informed Consent prior to data collection. For the case studies, representatives were informed about the purpose of the research, the intended use of the data, and their right to withdraw at any stage without prejudice.
- **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** In alignment with the privacy policies of S.C.S. Cristoforo, high-level organizational data is shared to highlight best practices, while all personal data regarding specific employees with disabilities has been anonymized or aggregated. No sensitive health data (medical certificates or specific diagnoses) has been processed directly for this report, focusing instead on "functional profiles" and "accommodation needs."
- **Data Storage and Security:** All collected data, including survey responses (CSV/Excel files) and interview notes, are stored in secured, password-protected digital environments. Access is restricted to the project researchers. Physical documents, if any, are kept in locked cabinets according to the partner organizations' internal security protocols.
- **Accessible Formats for Participants:** To ensure inclusive participation in the research process:
 - Surveys were distributed in digital accessible formats (compatible with screen readers).
 - Information about the project was provided in clear, plain language to ensure it was understandable for individuals with different cognitive or sensory needs.
 - Final outputs of this report will be made available in tagged PDFs and other accessible formats to ensure that the findings are reachable by the very community they aim to support.
- **Data Retention:** Data will be retained only for the duration of the project and the mandatory audit period required by the European Commission, after which all sensitive information will be permanently deleted.

9. References

Institutional & Corporate Websites

- **S.C.S. Cristoforo:** Official website and corporate profile. Available at: <https://www.coopcristoforo.it/>
- **Cristoforo Jobs:** Dedicated inclusive recruitment platform. Available via the S.C.S. Cristoforo corporate portal.
- **University of Primorska (UPR):** Faculty of Education (PEF) institutional portal. Available at: <https://www.pef.upr.si/en>
- **Centre IRIS:** Centre for Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion and Counselling for the Blind and Partially Sighted

Research Instruments and Data Sources

- VET Research Questionnaire (Module 1), qualitative data and responses provided by the itinerant teacher for VIP pupils (Centre IRIS).
- S.C.S. Cristoforo, structured questionnaire (Module 1) completed by the HR/Inclusion department.
- Documentary Review: Institutional annual social reports and academic curricula for special needs educators.

National Legislation and Policy Frameworks

Italian Government: Law 68/99 (*Norme per il diritto al lavoro dei disabili*), governing the targeted employment and integration of people with disabilities in Italy.

Italian Government: Law 381/91, regulating Social Cooperatives (Type A and Type B) and their role in the social and vocational integration of disadvantaged citizens.

Slovenian Government: Higher Education Act and national strategies for inclusive education and the integration of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

International Standards

- **European Union:** General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016/679.
- **United Nations:** Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), specifically Article 24 (Education) and Article 27 (Work and Employment).
- **W3C:** Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, applied to digital tools and recruitment platforms.

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