



Association for Research and Training on  
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# **Incubators for CO-productive Enterprises and Social Inclusion (IN-CUBA) Project**

## **Intellectual Output 2**

### ***Levers and obstacles in the access to entrepreneurship for people with Intellectual Disability***

**Research Survey Report**

Responsible: ARFIE

**IN-CUBA** (Incubators for CO-productive Enterprises and Social Inclusion) is a European Project coordinated by [APEMH Foundation](#) with the support of [ARFIE](#). It aims to foster social inclusion of people with intellectual disability through the **development of an enterprise incubation methodology based on the principles of co-production**. It involves 8 partners from 5 European countries<sup>1</sup>.

After having successfully demonstrated the value of co-production, it is time to further investigate its potential through activities able to enhance the competences of service providers, foster social inclusion, and increase independence of people with disabilities.

The co-productive approach implemented during the ENABLE Project has highlighted the capacity of users to become protagonists and have an active role in projects, to generate new innovative ideas, to take a new look at themselves (with increased self-esteem) and in a general way, it has opened the door to new possibilities and further developments. This opens up to new opportunities for the development of people's employability and social inclusion.

It appears therefore necessary to develop co-productive approaches in supporting people with intellectual disability, to encourage their initiatives, which ultimately contributes to a climate of innovation, employability and social inclusion. Hence, the interest for an incubator methodology based on co-production addressed to people with intellectual disability to foster the access to entrepreneurship and self-entrepreneurship considered in its widest meaning, referring to an organised project or undertaking, and eventually a business.

An **incubator** is an organisation that helps new and start-up companies to develop by providing support services and enabling access to the resources they need. In the context of IN-CUBA however, we can define incubator as **a support for the development of projects and ideas**... a methodology based on co-production that supports the development of ideas and projects to transform them into enterprises (considered in its widest meaning).

An important part of the project is the preliminary analysis regarding the levers and obstacles in access to entrepreneurship for people with intellectual disability (ID). This

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<sup>1</sup> The IN-CUBA partnership is composed of [APEMH Foundation](#), [ARFIE](#), [CADIAI](#), [OpenGroup](#), [Fondazione San Sebastiano Onlus](#), [DeLork](#), [AMPANS](#), [FENACERCI](#).

research is carried out with the help of the following short survey, aiming to identify how and where entrepreneurship is accessible at the European level for people with intellectual disability, and what are the main barriers in this regard.

The questionnaire was composed of 6 questions that tried to approach entrepreneurship for people with intellectual disability and the possible involvement of them in the management of companies.

This questionnaire has been shared with all the members of ARFIE and all the professionals and experts connected to the Network, as well as with the National networks of IN-CUBA Partners. It is in principle anonymous, but we asked the participants to leave their coordinates if they desire to be informed of the results of the survey and of the next steps of the project implementation.

Before starting the questionnaire we felt important to remind participants that, in the context of the project, the concept of enterprise is considered in its widest possible meaning, referring to any project or an undertaking, and more precisely to the action of starting a new project or undertaking, or developing an idea, even when it does not result in business creation (commercial or social). Thus, this wide definition covers all entrepreneurial activities, whether they be for profit or not, or whether they have a commercial or social aim.

In the period between March and April 2019, we received 50 replies from service providers, professionals in the disability sectors, researchers in the field of social inclusion, and public administrations from Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, and UK.

## Questions and feedbacks

1. The first question focused on discovering if in the participants Country of Region entrepreneurship is something that people with Intellectual Disability can achieve;

Here in general participants stressed that entrepreneurship for people with intellectual disability is a possibility but it is not always clear how from a legal point of view in terms of responsibility, legal capacity, and legal form. It was also stressed that when it happens risks to be of little economic value. It was also pointed out the needs for support, particularly from social service providers or from dedicated structures.

Real examples were difficult to find as well as dedicated support services. However, one relevant case emerged from one of ARFIE Portuguese members, CECD Mira Sintra, who supported Miguel Sebastião in the setting up of his gardening company *SebasJardins*. Set up in 2018, the company has now 32 customers, 4 workers: Miguel and 3 employees, and 3 vans. In this case it was stressed that the support of the service providers to Mr. Sebastião was very important.

2. The second question wanted to investigate if entrepreneurship can be considered a gateway to the labour market for people with intellectual disability.

The reply here was generally enthusiastically positive. There is an attitude that wants this to be considered a real option. However, several participants stressed the need of supporting structures and the absence of dedicated policies in this direction. In this sense, it was also pointed out that people with a mild intellectual disability might be able and willing to take up self-employment or business ownership as a paid work option, but this might risk being hardly a sustainable option without extensive and/or long-term support.

3. The third question of the survey focused on assessing the access to entrepreneurship for people with intellectual disabilities. To do so, four points were indicated providing five possible replies: very negative, negative, neutral, positive, very positive.

	very negative ☹☹	Negative ☹	Neutral ☹☺	Positive ☺	Very positive ☺☺
The network of organisations specialized in this area (incubators, associations, etc.)		☹		☺	
The accessibility to the supporting offer for the creation of enterprises	☹☹	☹			
The legal and regulatory framework		☹			
The financial support for the setting-up of a specific company for people with disabilities	☹☹				

The four points related to:

- *The network of organisations specialised in this area (incubators, associations, etc.):*  
 ☹-☺ Here replies vary, being alternatively positive or negative. It emerged that there are associations willing to support people in their path to entrepreneurship, but they are not specialised for people with intellectual disability.

- *The accessibility to the supporting offer for the creation of enterprises:* 😞 - 😞😞 Here the replies were between negative and very negative. It seems that the support offer doesn't look in the direction of people with intellectual disability.
  - *The legal and regulatory framework:* 😞 The reply here was general negative. Participants were not able to identify a dedicated legal or regulatory framework that goes in the direction of supporting entrepreneurship for people with intellectual disability.
  - *The financial support for the setting-up of a specific company for people with disabilities:* 😞😞 To this point the reply was almost unanimously very negative. No specific financial support scheme was identified.
4. The fourth question focused on the identification of the obstacles to entrepreneurship for people with intellectual disability. The most common and relevant mentioned are:
- The legal and regulatory framework and its complexity;
  - Not enough opportunities, little training and coaching, little or no financial support, little accessibility to entrepreneurship;
  - Lack of support services and difficulties in the access to finance;
  - In certain cases, the fact that people with intellectual disability are officially recognised as unable to work;
  - Lack of information, particularly for the families;
  - “Benefit trap”: the risk of losing benefits if an economic activity is carried out;
  - prejudice and lack of confidence (cultural barriers);
  - The difficulty in proposing competitive products with an efficient structure.
5. The fifth question was meant to understand if people with intellectual disability have the opportunity to be involved in the management of the company where they are employed (participating in the board of director or in the management board). The point was to understand if there is involvement in the management and growth in terms of participation.



The replies received pointed out that it is general possible to have people with intellectual disability involved in the management of the company they work for, but it is not usual. Here there are differences from country to country and the legal form of the company plays a decisive role. In this sense, participatory company may favour this involvement. In areas where cooperative are widespread, people with ID may be involved in the management, particularly social cooperatives.

6. The sixth and final question focused on understanding if the social aim of an enterprise can be considered a driver in favouring the involvement of people with intellectual disability in the management and governance of a company.

In general, the reply to this question is positive. The social aim of the companies brings more openness towards people with intellectual disability. Examples however are not always easy to find... more in areas were social cooperatives are widespread like in Italy (Emilia-Romagna), Spain, and Portugal.



## Conclusion

The survey shows that there is a gap to fill in terms of support in the access to entrepreneurship for people with intellectual disability.

Entrepreneurship can be considered a gateway to the labour market for people with ID, but there are barriers to break. Legislation is not always clear, but it doesn't seem an obstacle per se, even though it doesn't favour directly entrepreneurship for people with intellectual disability. It appears however that there is still a lot of work to do at local level to break cultural barriers and allow users to be actively involved in professional activities and stimulated towards entrepreneurial projects. This should be done as a network, co-productively, with the active involvement of all the actors concerned.

There are prejudice and lack of confidence to overcome and support services to be shaped. The access to finance seems an issue.

It can be noted that there is an interest towards the access to entrepreneurship for people with intellectual disability and the IN-CUBA Project seems to go in the right way in trying to fill the gap and maybe make the right push to start breaking certain barriers.

A business incubator for social entrepreneurs with intellectual disability would be particularly useful because it would allow the provision of support, opportunity, peer mentoring, technical assistance, and shared resources.