



EAFRD-funded projects

ΑΞΙΖΩ (Axizo)

Pasta and jam workshop for the employment and social integration of people with intellectual disabilities.

Promote access to work for disabled people in rural Greece.

A Charitable Association that is certified as a provider of social care services to young adults and minors with severe intellectual disabilities used LEADER funding to establish a pasta and jam making workshop. The workshop was established as an independent company to provide training and employment opportunities for young adults with disabilities under the supervision and support of the specialised staff of the Association.



Location

Komotini (Greece)

Programming period

2014 - 2020

Priority

P6 - Social Inclusion and Economic Development

Measure

M19 - LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 111 934

EAFRD 50 370

National/Regional 5 597

Private 55 967

Project duration

2021 - 2023

Project promoter

Stathis Kefalidis

Contact

stkom@gmail.com

Website

facebook.com/axizw

Results

The workshop created at least five full-time jobs, including for one person with an intellectual disability. Work opportunities are expected to increase when the demand for the workshop's products increase.

The project combats the social exclusion and discrimination endured by this particularly vulnerable group by promoting local development through the creation of jobs and the diversification of income sources for local producers.

The workshop uses material from five local producers. Three distribution companies distribute the workshop's products to a total of 65 stores.



ENRD Contact Point

Rue de la Loi, 38 Boîte n.4 - 1040

Brussels, Belgium

Tel. +32 2 801 38 00

Email: info@enrd.eu

Website: enrd.ec.europa.eu

Context

The Agioi Theodoroi Association was founded in 1981 by parents and friends of people with intellectual disabilities. This charitable association, which as of today counts 300 members, is the only certified provider of social care services in the Rodopi area. It mostly provides care for adults and minors with disabilities such as Down's syndrome, pervasive developmental disorders (PDD) and autism.

The Association aims to help people improve their social and personal care capacities and motor skills so that they can live as far as possible as independent and equal members of society. This is achieved through a varied programme of informal learning activities, including walks, excursions, outings to entertainment venues and cultural institutions and group visits to supermarkets and shops (in order to understand the purchase-payment processes). In addition, the Association created a day-care centre where the beneficiaries participate in many activities, such as preparing food (a useful practical skill for independent living), growing edible and ornamental plants and caring for domestic animals. The day-care centre's ongoing programme also includes creative activities such as music, drama and crafts.

In Greece, government support for people with intellectual disabilities is only provided until the age of 22. From then on, disabled people have little option but to remain isolated in their family environment, without necessarily having the opportunity to work, socialise and improve their skills.

The Association therefore decided to establish an independent body - a private company - to oversee the legal and operational management of a specific, adapted working environment in which the trainees could acquire professional skills and gain work experience. Thus, in 2021 the AxiZO project was established as a private company to support the work of the Agioi Theodoroi Association with the setting up and implementation of a pasta and jam workshop. These two organisations are complementary to each other, and have signed a cooperation agreement. As long as the association exists, the AxiZO project will continue its operation.

Objectives

The establishment of the AxiZO pasta and jam workshop aims to encourage active participation of people with intellectual disabilities in the economy through employment, and to promote their rights and values.

The workshop also fosters societal understanding of intellectual disability through familiarisation, and thus contributes to creating a more inclusive and fair society in which people with intellectual disabilities can live without fear of segregation and discrimination.

At the same time, the workshop contributes to local development through the provision of opportunities for income diversification for local agricultural producers.

Activities

The project consisted of the establishment of a pasta and jam workshop facility and was funded under the LEADER Measure via the Regional Development Agency of Rodopi S.A. (LAG of Komotini). The LAG of Komotini played a catalytic role in the establishment and implementation of the project as they informed on the different funding opportunities and offered support during the submission of the proposal as well as the project implementation.

The following activities were co-financed:

- Purchase and installation of workshop equipment, including a pasta machine, moulds for the pasta machine, a dryer, benches, a labeller, and a jam filling machine.
- Acquisition of the ISO 22000:2018 quality assurance certification.
- Purchase of the space and the construction and improvement of the workshop, including the installation of window frames and industrial flooring.
- Creation of a website, production of information brochures, creation of a visual identity for labels and signs, advertising and participation in exhibitions.

In December 2021, the private company axiZO and the Agioi Theodoroi Association signed a cooperation agreement setting out the framework for the education, training and possible integration of the Association's beneficiaries into the labour market through the workshop.

The Association and the workshop accept people with intellectual disabilities from any region of Greece and of any age. The only condition is that they are members of the Association and that they attend the day-care centre programme.

The beneficiaries are trained in the workshop until they are ready to be employed for a fee. Their training takes place in the protected environment of the workshop and under the careful supervision of specialised staff from the Association. This team includes occupational therapists and psychologists, who provide counselling and psychological support to the trainees as needed and motivate each of them according to their individual needs. The Association supervises and oversees the training of the beneficiaries, while the AxiZO company is responsible for delivering the training programme and ensuring the necessary means and equipment.

The workshop produces traditional handmade pasta, jams from seasonal fruits, and spoon sweets (fig, peach, pear, apricot, etc.). Most of the raw material is supplied by five local producers. The workshop has a small showroom where products are available for sale.

Main results

The workshop created five full-time jobs, including for one person with an intellectual disability.

Three people in training will be fully integrated into the production process and will receive a steady monthly income as soon as they become employed.

The number of people with intellectual disabilities that can be trained and employed at the workshop will increase as the demand for its products grows.

Initially, two food distribution companies distributed the products to 18 local stores and supermarkets, but now there are three distribution companies who distribute the products to a total of 65 stores.

Workshop activities contribute to the beneficiaries' emotional wellbeing as they are assigned responsibilities in accordance with their skills, capacities and interests. This active and structured occupation gives them a sense of calm, helps reduce their anxiety and contributes positively to their mental health. Their daily interactions at the workshop improve their social skills as they meet people, collaborate and set goals together. Engaging people with intellectual disabilities in a new subject, specialising and developing their skills creates work prospects and increases independence.

The Association and workshop offer something unique in the Rodopi Prefecture: services for people with intellectual disabilities who are over 22 years old with no government support. This provides routes to independence, social and cultural participation and the possibility of active employment.

The axiZO company cooperates with the Democritus University of Thrace, the Vocational Training Center of Komotini, the University of Macedonia and the University of the Aegean. It also collaborates with the Municipality of Komotini, the School of Komotini for people with disabilities, the special vocational training centres of the Rodopi Prefecture, and other disabled day-care centres.

Annually, 20-25 students from the above-mentioned universities and training centres carry out their internships and conduct research based on the activities of the Association and the Workshop. The learning and wellbeing framework and project organisational structure could be transferable to other regions and areas. New jobs were created for young people as most people in AxiZO project are young.

The establishment of the workshop contributes to the objectives of the European Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme as well as to the Long-term vision by creating jobs for young people in rural areas.

Additional sources of information

[Video 1 – Axizo project](#)

This project has been categorised under 'Socially inclusive & innovative futures' by the nominating National Rural Network