

Transcript: Pathways to Zero Barriers, Episode 3

Adapting Strategies Across Regions

Guests:

- Gabriela Garciadiego, Operations Director at Incluyeme.com
- Thomas Trümper, Advisor, Global Project Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities at GIZ

Host:

- Hosted by Anthony Giannoumis of Inclusive Creation, the Zero Project Scaling Solutions programme facilitator
- Intro and episode summary by Judith Hermetter of the Zero Project

Transcript:

[MUSIC]

Anthony: Hello, everyone. This is Anthony, your host, and welcome to Pathways to Zero Barriers. Today we have the privilege of introducing you to two outstanding individuals who are driving meaningful change in the world of inclusion and innovation. First, we're joined by Gabriela Garciadiego, the Operations Director at Incluyeme. Incluyeme is a trailblazing organization and the largest job portal in Latin America dedicated to supporting people with disabilities.

With a presence in 14 countries, they do more than connect job seekers with opportunities. They work hand in hand with companies to foster more inclusive workspaces through training, consulting, and accessibility solutions. Gabriela and her team are making a tangible difference by ensuring people with disabilities not only have access to jobs, but thrive in their careers. What we love about Incluyeme is their passion for creating systemic change in employment practices across the region.

Also with us today is Thomas Truemper, Advisor for the Global Project Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities at GIZ, our esteemed partner based in Germany. Thomas plays a crucial role in advancing the Zero Project Scaling Solutions Programme. Their involvement is dedicated to helping transformative projects like Incluyeme expand their reach and impact globally. His expertise in fostering international collaborations is paving the way for innovative solutions to scale successfully.

[01:41 Music and topic introduction]

Judith: Pathways to Zero Barriers: Scaling Solutions for Disability Inclusion

Adapting strategies across borders is key for scaling disability-inclusive solutions. Today, we'll explore how Incluyeme has navigated economic challenges, cultural differences, and how they tailored their programmes to local needs as they expand across 14 Latin American countries. We'll also discuss the importance of partnerships, capacity building, and sustainability in driving global impact, with insights from GIZ on creating systemic change for inclusive employment.

[02:22 Introducing the guests]

Anthony: Today's topic is strategy and objectives. Gabriela, could you please introduce yourselves to our audience?

Gabriela: Hi, Anthony. Thank you very much for the invitation. I'm Gabi. I'm Gabriela Garcia-Hedo, Director of Operations of Incluyeme.com. I'm based in Mexico City. I'm a woman in her 30s. I have straight hair and light brown color and brown eyes. Thank you so much for hosting us today.

Anthony: Amazing. Thank you, Gabriela. And, Thomas, could you introduce yourself, please?

Thomas: Thank you, Anthony. My name is Thomas. I'm German, 54 years old, have three children, blonde hair, wearing glasses, and yeah, back to you, Anthony.

Anthony: Amazing. And my name's Anthony. I've got salt and pepper hair, Mediterranean complexion. I'm sporting a beard, a blue blazer, and I just turned 45 yesterday. So I'm the reverse of Thomas' age of 54.

[03:32 Adapting to a particular economy when scaling a solution]

Anthony: So I want to start the questions with Gabriela. Gabriela, could you please share a specific instance where you adapted your job access strategy to a particular economy?

Gabriela: Yes, of course, Anthony. Well, Incluyeme.com, it was born in Argentina. And our mission of promoting the labor inclusion of people with disability started there. And right now, we have expanded to 14 countries of Latin America, as you mentioned in the introduction.

This growth has been possible thanks to a strategy that we have that combines the cultural and economic adaptation to each country. We prioritize having a local team in each region, professionals who bring essential insights into the specific needs and opportunities of their local job markets.

We have several differentiators which help us with this mission. And we have a robust database. We have over 240,000 people in Latin America. We do inclusive trainings. These are completely free and accessible to all types of disabilities, providing participants with tools that they might need to succeed in the labor market.

We also have a diverse corporate partnership. We collaborate with more than 700 companies with various industries. And we offer tailored solutions for each one of them. And we focus on all types of disability regarding the inclusion to all these companies.

Our biggest challenge right now, it's expanding to Central America where the conditions are more precarious than the countries that we usually work with. And a specific, a very, very challenged country is Argentina where we were born. And because of, it's a country that it's characterized by its high economic volatility. So it presents a unique challenge including fluctuating currency exchange rates and restrictive banking policies that complicate the flow of international funds.

We have to adjust our operational model due to this situation. And a flexible approach has allowed us to continue fostering labor inclusion in Argentina, despite the challenges posed by its economic instability and provide us a model for adapting to the complex economical context.

Anthony: I absolutely love it. And I mean, what a flex to be able to say 14 countries, 240,000 people. That's just absolutely amazing levels of impact. I'm just so impressed with the work that you guys are doing.

I want to turn now to Thomas. Thomas, could you talk about how you can establish a scaling strategy for job access across different economies? Gabriela already mentioned the challenges in countries like Argentina. What's your take on this issue?

Thomas: Thank you, Anthony. I have to say that I would like first of all to present a little bit GIZ as an organization, because I think it is important to understand what GIZ stands for and what our objectives are and our business model. So GIZ is actually not a private company. It is a state-owned company. GIZ is a German development cooperation agency, and we work always on behalf of the German ministry. Here, mostly on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ. Most of you may have heard of it. So we work on a government level most of the time, and we are working in over like 120 countries, mostly in the global south, to support the sustainable development of their countries. So we focus on many areas, on all sustainable development goals, including

and particularly on goal SDG number eight, decent work and economic growth.

That's the topic of this podcast here, to find scalable strategies for job promotion and access. So we do this in more or less like 80 countries in the global south. So we partner with governments to create jobs, support private sector development. And this we have done for over, or we are doing for over 50 years, and we are using an integrated approach to strengthen labor markets and economies as such as a whole. And this includes really working at all levels with all stakeholders on macro levels, on framework conditions, legislation, policies like TVET policies, and so on. And on micro level, directly supporting, working, collaborating with companies and also as individuals. So that is our main area that we operate in.

And historically, unfortunately, many of these efforts in our projects on the ground didn't consider inclusion of persons with disabilities a lot, but that has changed now. So BMZ introduced some policy markers for inclusion and a new human rights strategy. And now really inclusion is a binding goal for all GIZ projects. This has to be considered.

And my take and my hope is that all those projects, employment promotion projects, skills development projects of GIZ on behalf of BMZ that we are carrying out in all the different countries are now being more and more accessible and inclusive of persons with disabilities.

And now I want to come to our strategy for scalability. And I think there are a couple of key factors. As I said, we have decades of experience on this, and we need to really include persons with disabilities and other minority groups in these projects. And we always start with a thorough needs analysis based on each country or region that we operate in. And then of course, we engage stakeholders, partners at every level to ensure like ownership and long-term success and also capacity building is very important to achieve sustainability on a long term. So that is, I would say in short, our strategy.

Anthony: That's so incredibly comprehensive, and you've hit on so many key issues that I think are just insightful. So I want to just thank you for that response.

[11:10 Maintaining or shifting objectives across countries]

Anthony: Gabriela, I want to turn back to you, please. Can you provide an example of how your objectives might have shifted when you were expanding into a new country?

Gabriela: Yes. Well, the central objective of including Includeme.com, regardless of the country, it's always the social labor inclusion of people with disability.

So with this in focus, and this remains constant of every single action that we do along the way. But the way we approach it, it does vary depending on the specific needs and conditions of each country.

The key objectives when we start working with a country, it's adapting our programmes. And this includes four main things. So one, it's tailoring to local demands, because different countries have varying job labor markets. So we assess with different requirements, depending on the talent that they need.

For instance, in Mexico, which a larger economy, it varies on the higher demand and a specific needs compared to a country, for example, like Peru, which is smaller and maybe in DNI culture it's not as mature as Mexico. So this impacts on the scale and type of programme that we offer them.

Also navigating legal and regulatory differences. Some countries in Latin America have quotas. They require companies to hire a specific percentage of people with disability, such as Peru or Chile. And these regular requirements influence the way that we engage with companies and shape our outreach programmes. We ensure that our efforts align with local laws, both to foster compliance and to support companies in meeting this quota effectively.

Also localizing training and support. In each country, we assess the specific barriers that people with disability face. So this could include issues like limited access to transportation or particular disability types that are more prevalent or local culture perceptions of disability. And our training programs and support structures are adjusted to meeting these local challenges, ensuring that they're relevant and impactful in each country.

And lastly, but equally important, it's building strong local partnerships. We collaborate with local businesses, with NGOs, universities to promote job accesses. In countries more mature disability inclusion programmes, this could mean working on a strategic partnership to increase the job placement, or in countries with emerging or less developed inclusion practices, we could focus more on advocacy and raising awareness. We do face, in general, a lot of challenges like lack of data or the intersectionality of challenges, and of course, the specific country difference that we mentioned before.

Anthony: It's just spectacular. And your wisdom is coming through so loud and clear to me. I really do appreciate your comments.

I see Thomas has something he'd like to add. Thomas, what would you like to add to the conversation?

Thomas: Anthony, thank you. So, I just wanted to add also what I mentioned earlier is that in GIZ, we are using a variety of tools to improve employment. And for example, such as vocational training, we support training curricula. We even are doing the construction work to set up all the facilities or the training centers in the global south. We are supporting job placement service or digital solutions like virtual job fairs or digital training, cybersecurity, and so on. And this is really important to ensure that programmes are adaptable and scalable.

Anthony: 100%. And that sounds like there's a lot of complementarities with the work that Includyeme is doing.

Thomas, I want to go back to you then also about these core objectives. What do you think the core objectives are for expanding job access programmes in new countries?

Thomas: Yeah, I can only tell of my own experience here in GIZ. And when we do that as GIZ on behalf of our ministry and the partner ministries in the respective country, we always try, or the key objective is to create a long-lasting sustainable solution, which also aligns with really the country's needs and own development priorities. So that is at least what I can say from the GIZ perspective.

So we don't do anything that is not demanded or needed by that specific country or context. We focus really on strengthening local institutions, authorities, such as mentioned before, employment agencies, training centers, and so on. So after maybe we finished our intervention, our project, that they then can continue their work independently. So another thing is very important, and that is why we are here tonight, is that collaborating with partners, also with organizations of persons with disabilities and business like corporates; that is very essential to ensure also that training programmes and employment programme are meeting the real needs of the job market and the individuals. So yeah, I would say that are the most key objectives. Thank you.

Anthony: 100%. The thing that keeps coming out is sustainable solutions. If we just helicopter in and drop in a new way of working or doing things and leave, it's really doing no one any good. If we're making sure that the work that we're doing is sustainable long term, that's what creates real change. So beautiful, beautiful response there, Thomas.

[17:56 Overcoming challenges]

Anthony: Gabriela, I want to turn back to you and ask you if you could describe a challenge that you faced while scaling your programme in a specific country, and how did you even manage that sort of challenge?

Gabriela: Yes, one that pops to mind really quickly is we did a project for the last three years called Juntos a la Par. This was with the support of the Inter-American Bank of Development, and it was to support Venezuelan migrants with a disability in Argentina and Chile. And initially, the project focused on offering technological training and labor inclusion, but however, we quickly discovered several challenges that required adjustments, and some of them were the lack of data.

There was no specific data on Venezuelan migrants with disabilities. So we had to focus our outreach and data collection, which was not initially planned. Our second challenge was the intersectionality challenges. Migrants with disability face compound barriers, which made it harder to implement the original training and job placement goals that we had. So this led to prioritizing migrant women with disabilities and expanding our support to address unique needs. And thirdly, the country-specific differences that we talked before. The political and economic conditions differ greatly between Argentina and Chile. Argentina's economic instability and Chile's strict migration regulations affected our strategies and required us to adapt our approach to each country-specific context.

But these adjustments really, at the end, allow us to better serve the needs of this group, in particular, with maintaining our focus on social labor inclusion. We also thought that it was going to be easier to find Venezuelan migrants in both countries, and we had to expand our strategy to find them and actually give them this support and connections with companies so that they could reach a quicker and a more stable job inclusion.

Anthony: Absolutely amazing. Thomas, now I want to hear from you. What sort of strategies are effective when it comes to overcoming barriers to scaling across diverse regions?

Thomas: Anthony, thank you again. And allow me to rephrase a little bit the question for me that it maybe is also more beneficial for our listeners, that I really would like to say a few sentences on how actually innovators or companies or NGOs like Includeme can overcome barriers to scaling when they want to scale to other regions, because also we receive many requests here from NGOs or partners like Includeme, how GIZ could

support them, how we can break barriers and connecting the dots that they can reach out to new regions.

And here I have to say, GIZ is not a donor per se. So we are implementing projects on the ground on behalf of the German government, always in alignment or in cooperation with the government of other countries. So if Includeme, for example, would like to reach out to other countries, we as a GIZ need to check whether we have employment promotion or skills development projects in that specific country. We need to find out the persons responsible for the project and get in contact with them to offer our solution and to see whether the solution of Includeme fits in the project design of GIZ, which GIZ then proposes to the government of that country and to the BMZ.

So in that way, we can get Includeme on board to scale to other countries. It is not up to us to decide and to give money. So it's always we need to partner and we have to have a good business case and we need to show the benefits of our model of the fellows, of the innovators, to the GIZ programmes in the different countries and really reach out to them and promote the specific solutions that you have here.

That is the only way and we cannot do it for you. You have to do it by yourself. I can help you on the way and I'm happy to help also other fellows and innovators who would like to get in contact with GIZ to break those barriers when it comes to scaling to other regions. Thank you.

[23:16 Wrap-up]

Anthony: Thomas, I think you just highlighted and showcased the real value that the GIZ provides to organizations like Includeme. I mean, that's really where the value of your work comes into play. I just want to take a minute. I got seven key concepts and ideas that you kind of all addressed in your responses. So I want to just sum up here and address these.

So number one, you have to be flexible and adaptable in this kind of work. Your strategy has got to be flexible and adaptable. Number two, partner with government and persons with disabilities who are on the ground facing the issues that you're working on. Number three, align your work with the needs of stakeholders. That means moving beyond just imagining you know what the problem is, but really taking what you're trying to do and make it work with the stakeholders in your local areas. Number four, consider the demand, the maturity and ownership of the work. Number five, discover challenges like the lack of data early on and adjust your strategy as you go. Number six, take an intersectional lens on your work.

And number seven, always create sustainable solutions that will be around for a long time in the future.

Gabriela, I want to give you the last word here. What should our audience do to keep up with you and the amazing work that Incluyeme is doing?

Gabriela: Thank you so much. Well, we are present in all social medias and just reach out. We have several channels where you can connect. We will be more and more than happy to talk a little bit of what we do and how we can help.

I think as Thomas said, this is a huge problem and it's worldwide. And I think we need a lot of allies and collaboration between different organizations to actually make a difference. And we're very, very excited to start working with GIZ. We've been wanting to work with Thomas for a while and this project is actually amazing to see how we can actually make a difference.

And just thank you. And I think we just need people with conviction to make a difference and try to make... I can't remember the word in English. Try to make people share this passion of including and making a difference because just we do have to work with it. A lot of companies believe that just having a programme of training, that will be all they need. And we do need organizations and people who specialize in this to actually make a programme work. And thank you very much for this invitation. Very, very excited to see what all this collaboration brings.

Anthony: When I think of people who have passion, Gabriela, you, Thomas, you guys just come to mind almost immediately. Thank you both for taking your time. And I hope the audience out there, I hope you guys have a great day.

[26:27 Outro and season greetings]

Judith: Thank you for joining us on this episode of Pathways to Zero Barriers. We're taking a short break for the holidays, but we'll be back with a brand-new episode in early January. Until then, we wish you a joyful season, all the best for the New Year. See you in 2025!