

CONFIDENTIAL  
INTERNAL USE  
PUBLIC UPON APPROVAL

DOCUMENT OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK  
MULTILATERAL INVESTMENT FUND

**MEXICO**

**INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT IN THE TECHNOLOGY SECTOR FOR  
PERSONS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS**

**(ME-T1462 / ME-G1021)**

**DONORS MEMORANDUM**

This document was prepared by the project team consisting of: Patricio Aznar (DIS/CME), Masato Okumura (LAB/DIS), Tatiana Virviescas (DIS/CME), Paula Auerbach (DIS/CEC), Manuel Urquidi (SCL/LMK), Juan Pablo Salazar (SCL/GDI), Lorena Barrenechea Salazar (FML/LAB), and Galia Rabchinsky (DSP/DVF).

This document contains confidential information relating to one or more of the ten exceptions of the Access to Information Policy and will be initially treated as confidential and made available only to Bank employees. The document will be disclosed and made available to the public upon approval.

## CONTENTS

I.	THE PROBLEM .....	1
A.	Problem description .....	1
II.	THE INNOVATION PROPOSAL .....	2
A.	Project description .....	2
B.	Project outcomes, impact, monitoring, and evaluation .....	6
III.	ALIGNMENT WITH THE IDB GROUP, SCALABILITY, AND PROJECT RISKS.....	6
A.	Alignment with the IDB Group.....	6
B.	Scalability .....	7
C.	Project and institutional risks .....	8
IV.	BUDGET INSTRUMENT AND PROPOSAL .....	8
V.	EXECUTING AGENCY AND IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE .....	9
A.	Executing agency .....	9
B.	Implementation structure and mechanism .....	9
VI.	FULFILLMENT OF MILESTONES AND SPECIAL FIDUCIARY ARRANGEMENTS .....	10
VII.	INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY .....	11

## **PROJECT SUMMARY**

### **INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT IN THE TECHNOLOGY SECTOR FOR PERSONS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS**

**(ME-T1462 / ME-G1021)**

Persons with autism or autism spectrum disorders have significant potential to help meet demands related to information and communication technologies (ICTs) in Mexico and Latin America as a whole. Yet they do not manage to secure jobs, mostly because of cumbersome recruitment processes and a lack of effective training on how to handle employment relationships. The region's business sector and startup ecosystem are unaware of this potential, or unable to tap into it because they do not know how to recruit and manage this human capital. Specialisterne, the main partner under this proposal, has an established model for promoting the integration of persons with autism into the workforce. However, its training currently requires numerous exchanges (in person and virtual) that make it expensive and unscalable.

The public-interest nonprofit organization Specialisterne is a global network of companies and foundations in more than 13 countries. In Spain, it is a triple-impact social enterprise (B Corp) with the main objective of workforce integration of persons with autism. Over more than 16 years, it has successfully leveraged the capabilities of persons with autism and placed them in jobs under projects in more than 22 countries by: (i) providing outsourcing services to large companies using its own employees; and (ii) helping companies recruit and manage persons with an autism profile. The project executing agency will be Specialisterne México S.A. de C.V., which will implement the project with support from the Spanish entity.

The project will seek to develop and introduce new technologies and tools to dramatically scale up the solution to benefit 30,000 persons with autism and 20,000 members of the general public. This is projected to be accomplished by: (i) creating content and channels for massive open online courses (MOOCs) tailored for the first time to the reality of persons with autism; (ii) creating new tools and courses for organizations that support Specialisterne locally in such areas as selection, training, coaching, and therapy; and (iii) developing tools for training at companies by supporting and deepening existing work through specially designed corporate courses.

The main beneficiaries of the project will be persons with autism, firms interested in hiring workers with special skills, local organizations that will receive training in such areas as coaching and the development of socio-occupational areas and skills; and lastly, the families of persons with autism, who will go from being financially dependent to an economic engine that benefits everyone around them. The final impact sought is the workforce integration of persons with autism, with 300 people hired by 40 organizations/firms.

A nonreimbursable technical cooperation component will support the creation of new online training tools and content, and the addition of a contingent recovery investment grant is also being proposed. The total contribution of IDB Lab will be US\$750,000. Of that

amount, US\$250,000 will be the nonreimbursable technical cooperation funding, and US\$500,000 will be the contingent recovery investment grant. Counterpart financing of US\$750,000 will also be contributed by Specialisterne.

This project will complement other existing initiatives in IDB Lab's active portfolio, such as the Inserta project (operation RG-T3466) being implemented with Fundación ONCE (which has already worked with Specialisterne in Spain), and opportunities for collaboration have been identified in the region, particularly in Colombia and Costa Rica. As Specialisterne expands into other countries in the region, it could also partner with Fundación Descúbreme and the Chile Productivity Pact (operation CH-T1224). There could also be potential for collaboration through IDB Invest and its clients in the region interested in promoting diversity at their firms.

## **ANNEXES**

Annex I	Results Matrix
Annex II	Itemized Budget
Annex III	Project iDELTA

## **APPENDICES**

Proposed Resolution

## **INFORMATION AVAILABLE IN THE TECHNICAL DOCUMENTS SECTION OF THE IDB LAB PROJECT INFORMATION SYSTEM**

Annex IV	Table of milestones
Annex V	Draft term sheet for contingent recovery investment grant
Annex VI	Diagnostic Assessment of Integrity and Institutional Capacity (DICI)
Annex VII	Procurement and contracting plan (in preparation)
Annex VIII	Core elements of the project Operating Regulations

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ICT	Information and communication technology
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
MOOC	Massive open online course
NGO	Nongovernmental organization

## PROJECT INFORMATION

### MEXICO

#### INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT IN THE TECHNOLOGY SECTOR FOR PERSONS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

(ME-T1462 / ME-G1021)

<b>Country and geographic location:</b>	Mexico		
<b>Executing partner:</b>	Specialisterne México S.A. de C.V.		
<b>Focus area:</b>	Knowledge Economy		
<b>Coordination with other donors/Bank operations:</b>	Work will be done in coordination with the Labor Markets Division (LMK) to ensure alignment to the inclusive employment strategies for persons with disabilities and to share lessons learned.		
<b>Project beneficiaries:</b>	In all, 30,000 persons with autism will receive training through the new model, and 300 of them will find employment (many for the first time) and have a career in high-demand, well-paying areas that allow professional as well as personal and social development. Forty local organizations will employ persons with autism. The families of persons with autism will also benefit indirectly. Additionally, 20,000 members of the general public on the employer side are expected to receive training to promote the integration of persons with autism into the workforce.		
<b>Financing:</b>	Technical cooperation	US\$250,000	40%
	Contingent recovery investment grant	US\$500,000	60%
	<b>Total IDB Lab contribution</b>	US\$750,000	50%
	Counterpart contribution	US\$750,000	50%
	<b>Total project budget</b>	US\$1,500,000	100%
<b>Execution and disbursement period:</b>	36 months for execution, and 42 months for disbursement.		
<b>Special contractual conditions:</b>			
<b>Environmental and social impact review:</b>	This operation was screened and classified as required by the IDB's Environment and Safeguards Compliance Policy (Operational Policy OP-703). Since the impacts and risks are limited, the proposed category for the project is "C".		

## I. THE PROBLEM

### A. Problem description

- 1.1 The diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders is characterized by a varying degree of permanent alteration in social behavior, communication, and language, as well as a restricted, stereotyped, and repetitive repertoire of interests and activities. According to the World Health Organization, one in every 160 children<sup>1</sup> worldwide has autism. Moreover, based on recent studies, one in every 54 children in the United States (1.85%) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC))<sup>2</sup> and one in every 66 children in Canada (Canadian government)<sup>3</sup> have the condition. Beyond the exact number of persons with autism, what the statistics reflect is an epidemic rise in this diagnosis across the globe. Although Latin America lacks the in-depth studies that the United States and European nations have conducted on the number of persons with autism, if one assumes its figures are similar to those countries', an estimated 4 million to 11 million people in the region are living with this condition.<sup>4</sup> In Mexico, the Department of Health estimates that 1% of the population, or 1.2 million people, has autism.
- 1.2 In countries with available studies, more than 80%<sup>5</sup> of persons with autism do not manage to find work, and 58% of young people with autism under 30 have never had a job.<sup>6</sup> This is a worldwide problem that also places a burden on entire families, who must support their relatives with autism financially as dependents. Given the limited possibilities for public support through disability assistance, unemployment in this group is an even more serious issue in Latin America than in the United States or Europe.
- 1.3 According to the World Economic Forum, Latin America has the biggest skills gap in the world,<sup>7</sup> especially when it comes to professions related to information and communication technologies (ICTs). The IDB projects that by 2025 the region will employ more than 1.2 million technology intensive workers (as programmers, data and artificial intelligence/machine learning experts, etc.), and firms will have great difficulty finding and retaining the professionals they need to meet the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In Mexico's case, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has emphasized the need to boost skills related to the innovation sector.<sup>8</sup>
- 1.4 While persons with autism face challenges in their daily lives due to their disorder, they often possess valuable qualities, such as excellent concentration, diligence

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/es/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/autism-spectrum-disorders>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/features/new-asd-prevalence-numbers-show-gaps-are-closing.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/autism-spectrum-disorder-childrenyouth-canada-2018.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://salud.edomex.gob.mx/cevece/documentos/difusion/tripticos/2017/Semana%2024.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/64CB422A-ED08-43F0-F795CA9DE364B6BE/unemploymentandasd7-15\(2\).docx](https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/64CB422A-ED08-43F0-F795CA9DE364B6BE/unemploymentandasd7-15(2).docx)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/04/21/401243060/young-adults-with-autism-more-likely-to-beunemployed-isolated>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/03/latin-america-has-the-biggest-skills-gap-in-the-world-here-s-how-to-bridge-it/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/mexico/OECD-Skills-Strategy-Diagnostic-Report-Mexico.pdf>



when performing systematic tasks, a passion for detail, an ability to detect patterns, and straightforwardness. These qualities are especially in demand in sectors like software and hardware testing, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence. In some cases, persons with autism also have superior IQs, a trait that could be better leveraged in a work environment.<sup>9</sup>

- 1.5 Persons with autism thus have significant potential to help meet ICT-related demands in Mexico and Latin America as a whole. Yet they do not manage to secure jobs, mostly because of cumbersome recruitment processes and a lack of effective training on how to handle employment relationships. The region's business sector and startup ecosystem are unaware of this potential, or unable to tap into it because they do not know how to recruit and manage this human capital. Specialisterne, the main partner under this proposal, has an established model for promoting the integration of persons with autism into the workforce. However, its training currently requires numerous exchanges (in person and virtual) that make it expensive and unscalable.

## II. THE INNOVATION PROPOSAL

### A. Project description

- 2.1 **Project objective.** The project objective is to support the integration of persons with autism into the technology sector workforce through training for this population and its potential employers. The project will contribute to this through the Specialisterne educational model, which focuses on leveraging the special capabilities of persons with autism—attention to detail, logical and analytical thinking, and an above-average ability to concentrate for long periods of time—who currently lack access to jobs in high-demand technological development and innovation areas of the Latin American and Caribbean knowledge economy.
- 2.2 The Specialisterne model, tested over 17 years in 23 countries on 4 continents, includes training for persons with autism (and the teams they join) and specialized coaching after their integration. The training process covers technical and socio-occupational components and lasts up to five months, three of which take place at the actual firm where they will be employed. Specialisterne has successfully placed over 10,000 people in jobs with a very low turnover rate (at SAP, where more than 1,000 people have been placed, the retention rate has been 93% over 7 years).
- 2.3 As reflected in the feasibility study conducted by Specialisterne for Mexico, autism is underdiagnosed, few organizations and professionals specialize in handling the condition, and employability programs for people living with it are largely inexistent. Even nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and public agencies most often do not have such programs, due to their inexperience with the subject and the difficulty inherent in training this population. Specialisterne would not only help fill this vacuum, but would also harness the natural abilities that a considerable number of these people possess and generate interest among many of the country's largest employers in attracting talent with autism.

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://eldefinido.cl/actualidad/mundo/5358/El-nuevo-Einstein-del-siglo-XXI-un-nino-autista-de-16-anos/>

- 2.4 Specialisterne has been studied extensively by organizations such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT),<sup>10</sup> Harvard,<sup>11</sup> and PricewaterhouseCoopers,<sup>12</sup> and is actively involved in United Nations efforts to raise awareness about autism.<sup>13</sup> It has also been awarded the prestigious BBVA Momentum prize.<sup>14</sup>
- 2.5 This project solves the problem in an innovative way: rather than viewing autism as a disability, it sees the condition as an asset that, if well managed, becomes a competitive advantage for firms and helps them acquire exceptional talent to fill technology-related positions where candidates are few. The proposal will help scale up the Specialisterne model through online training, first in Mexico, and at a later phase, in several countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The innovation under this proposal is to develop and introduce new technologies and tools to dramatically scale up the solution to benefit persons with autism in a short time. This will mainly entail the creation of content and channels for massive open online courses (MOOCs) tailored for the first time to the reality of persons with autism, as well as new tools to enable training that is 100% online, so the model can be implemented in any country in the region. This will also include training for local partners (NGOs and psychologist offices) and staff from firms that manage human talent. Developing online content for persons with autism is particularly complex, given their psychological and socioemotional characteristics and the dearth of experience in this field.
- 2.6 Around 300 people will secure high-demand technology-related positions with above-average pay. At least 40 organizations will acquire this talent and learn to manage it through the Specialisterne training. This training will be Specialisterne's primary source of revenue. As a result of the project, 30,000 persons with autism will participate in job counseling and technical training courses to increase their employability, 20,000 members of the general public will participate in open introductory courses on neurodiversity and its advantages for organizations, and 10 local organizations will become Specialisterne partners and learn about the employability of persons with autism.
- 2.7 **Component I. Content creation and training  
(IDB Lab: US\$231,409; Counterpart: US\$21,300)**
- 2.8 The **objective** of this component is to develop the MOOC audiovisual training content. This will first involve creating content about job counseling, software testing and document management, and socio-occupational and project management skills. It will also include adapting the online platform, IT practices, and professional profile evaluation.
- 2.9 Specialisterne will leverage its own experience developing the program and receive advisory support from physicians/academics from institutions including the universities of Salamanca and Barcelona. Special emphasis will be put on training

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://direct.mit.edu/itgg/article/3/1/11/9518/Harnessing-the-Power-of-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder>

<sup>11</sup> <https://hbsp.harvard.edu/product/608109-PDF-ENG>

<sup>12</sup> [https://es.specialisterne.com/files/2015/06/20150601\\_Project\\_Dandelion\\_Report\\_vF.pdf](https://es.specialisterne.com/files/2015/06/20150601_Project_Dandelion_Report_vF.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <https://es.specialisterne.com/en/association-united-nations/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.momentum.bbva.com/en/emprendimientos/specialisterne-espana/>

- in software testing, an area where the potential of persons with autism has been demonstrated. A student evaluation model adapted to the MOOC format will also be designed.
- 2.10 This component further seeks to create new tools for organizations that support Specialisterne locally in such areas as selection, training, coaching, and therapy. These organizations are typically specialized psychologist offices or NGOs devoted to the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The fact that these tools will be online will speed up their adoption and help build local capacity. The main activities under this component include audiovisual content creation, deployment of content and training, and preparation of the Mexico team.
- 2.11 Specialisterne offers employers a service package to assist with the hiring of people who will be trained through its program. This model is what generates most of Specialisterne's revenue. The package includes candidate searches, support in the selection process, and training for hired candidates, human resources employees, and soon-to-be coworkers of the new team members. In some cases, Specialisterne offers a more general training session for the employers' entire staff.
- 2.12 These new types of digital courses and tools will help speed up the process of training both persons with autism and employers. As the main expected **outcomes** of this component, training will be provided for 30,000 persons with autism through MOOCs and 20,000 members of the general public in virtual and hybrid formats (the hybrid format combines virtual and in-person, if the pandemic allows). Audiences will learn about various ways to promote job training and workforce integration for persons with autism, while gaining an understanding of why it is advantageous to incorporate this population, and how labor relations should be adjusted to facilitate that process, among other topics.
- 2.13 **Component II. Outreach and awareness-raising  
(IDB Lab: US\$17,000; Counterpart: US\$10,000)**
- 2.14 The **objective** of this component is to raise awareness about the talents persons with autism possess, which is fundamental to their workforce integration. This component includes building the website, as well as organizing events (geared for persons with autism and local firms and organizations), media campaigns, and awareness-raising forums for companies.
- 2.15 The component will also seek to integrate models and lessons learned from this pilot, to strengthen existing job placement services in the public sector. Work will be done with both the federal and regional government and various entities like the Mexico City Institute for Persons with Disabilities or Banco de México, to promote Specialisterne's activities through public support. The ultimate goal is to develop a space for dialogue with the public sector to raise the visibility of persons with autism and jointly promote activities focused on their employability, as has been achieved in several European countries. The main activities include designing a marketing and outreach plan and creating outreach content. The main expected **outcomes** of this component are 200 outreach events with 20,000 people and 300 firms in attendance.

- 2.16 **Component III. Inclusive employment**  
**(IDB Lab: US\$292,162; Counterpart: US\$703,318)**
- 2.17 The **objective** of this component is to place persons with autism in jobs through direct placement projects with businesses in Mexico. To execute these projects, local partners need to be identified beforehand to actively assist with both the client search and the project's execution through training and coaching. This project is expected to place 300 people in Mexico in jobs, giving them a quality work opportunity and providing firms with new sources of talent. This line of action will account for a significant part of Specialisterne's revenue, which will support its business model and allow it grow in the long term. Activities are expected to begin in the national capital and then expand to other cities.
- 2.18 In the last phases of the project, the program's achievements and lessons learned will be disseminated both within Mexico and in other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, to find the path to upscaling the model. More specifically, the plan is to leverage the new virtual training tools created under the program to find local partners in countries where Specialisterne already has a presence (e.g., Costa Rica and Argentina) and in new countries (e.g., Colombia, Peru, and other Central American countries such as El Salvador).<sup>15</sup> With local partners providing part of the training and the coaching, and other part offered through online platforms, the cost of Specialisterne's services would diminish dramatically, enabling it to reach far more countries and organizations. The project would also help make the firm and its services known across the Spanish-speaking world, facilitating its commercial expansion. The main activities under this component will be business-related, such as seeking a network of business partners and conducting a market study to determine how to replicate actions in other cities of Mexico or other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The expected **outcomes** of this component will be 300 persons with autism hired by 40 organizations/firms. An evaluation of the effectiveness and sustainability of the project model will be done under this component.
- 2.19 **Component IV: Organizational consolidation**  
**(IDB Lab: US\$209,429; Counterpart: US\$15,382)**
- 2.20 This last component seeks to consolidate Specialisterne's organizational structure in order to establish the project's implementation mechanism and manage it efficiently. The component includes setting up the Mexico office using the IDB Lab contingent recovery investment grant portion. It also entails an end-of-project evaluation of the objectives, focused mainly on the effectiveness of the new MOOC format with a view to expanding its use.
- 2.21 The initiative to include persons with autism will have a considerable number of beneficiaries. First, there would be a direct impact on the firms where they work, as new talent joins, and, therefore, on all of their coworkers. Second, the families and friends of persons with autism would ultimately benefit indirectly, since the persons with autism would generate their own incomes and, in doing so, feel happier and more fulfilled. Lastly, society at large would benefit, since persons with

---

<sup>15</sup> There is an association in El Salvador that promotes the inclusion of persons with autism called Asociación Salvadoreña de Autismo [Salvadorian Autism Association], <https://autismoelsalvador.org/>.

autism would go from being unemployed and, at times, receiving government assistance to creating value through their work and wealth via the taxes they pay.

## **B. Project outcomes, impact, monitoring, and evaluation**

- 2.22 **Results Matrix indicators.** After three years, the main outcomes will include 300 persons with autism who have good-quality jobs in the technology sector. To ensure job quality, salary levels and work environments will be monitored for each case. Additionally, 40 organizations and firms will be trained in talent management for persons with autism. At least 30,000 persons with autism are expected to participate in, and complete, the technical and job training MOOC, and 20,000 people are expected to participate in, and complete, the introduction to neurodiversity MOOC. Additionally, 200 program outreach events and conferences are expected to be held with approximately 20,000 attendees, both online and in person, to promote optimal communication and enrollment in the program.
- 2.23 **Monitoring and evaluation.** Specialisterne will be responsible for monitoring the project's outcomes as presented in the Results Matrix, using the tools available on its current platform, where the MOOCs will be given. This will allow it to track how many persons with autism register for MOOCs, as well as the number of organizations that receive training in talent management for this population. Specialisterne will develop a project dashboard that will be used as a six-monthly monitoring tool to measure the fulfillment of Results Matrix indicators and the overall effectiveness of the proposed model. This system will also be used to monitor outcomes and statistics and perform evaluations of the people and firms participating in the project's training courses.
- 2.24 **Evaluation.** This project will include a final evaluation, if the Bank deems it necessary. This evaluation will include any reasonable parameters requested by the Bank and, at a minimum: (a) an analysis of the degree to which the project's objectives and indicators, as described in the Results Matrix, have been fulfilled; (b) a cost-benefit analysis the project's; and (c) lessons learned from the project. The evaluation will be prepared in such a way that it can be published and disseminated by IDB Lab and Specialisterne.

## **III. ALIGNMENT WITH THE IDB GROUP, SCALABILITY, AND PROJECT RISKS**

- 3.1 This project is aligned with the following Sustainable Development Goals: 4.4, "By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship;" 8.5, "By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value;" and 10.2, "By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status."

### **A. Alignment with the IDB Group**

- 3.2 This project is aligned with the Update to the Institutional Strategy through the development challenges of "social inclusion and equality" and "productivity and

- innovation.” The project is also aligned with GDLab,<sup>16</sup> a gender and diversity knowledge initiative launched by the IDB Group in November 2020 with the goal of financing research that helps close gender gaps and promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- 3.3 The project fits into IDB Lab’s “Knowledge Economy” thematic area, since it promotes social mobility and inclusion, as well the development of digital skills and employability for the digital economy. This project exemplifies how IDB Lab is leading the IDB Group’s efforts to drive innovation for inclusion in the region by co-creating solutions that change the lives of vulnerable people, creating conditions that favor broad economic development. Specifically, IDB Lab does this by supporting innovation vehicles that are aligned with the IDB Group Country Strategy with Mexico 2019-2024 (document GN-2982) through the strategic objectives to “increase education coverage and quality” and “strengthen the labor market.”
- 3.4 This project is innovative in that it approaches inclusion from a diversity perspective by promoting the workforce integration of persons with disabilities. However, it is also pioneering because it focuses on persons with intellectual disabilities, whereas the majority of IDB Group projects have benefited persons with physical disabilities. An IDB Lab prototype solution is now in execution that involves the design of a fun learning platform (digitalizing the Raviv methodology) to improve the attention span and learning abilities of children with autism to (operation CH-T1234).
- 3.5 **Science, Technology, and Innovation Division.** The project is consistent with the Innovation, Science, and Technology Sector Framework Document (document GN-2791-5), under which one of the Bank’s priorities in this sector will be to assist the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean in developing highly qualified human capital necessary to support and further develop their innovation systems. The document also indicates that the Bank will give priority to supporting actions that help these economies become able to take full advantage of the potential of the digital economy, including particularly investments in human capital for the digital economy and technical and professional training.
- 3.6 This project will complement other existing initiatives in IDB Lab’s active portfolio, such as the Inserta project (operation RG-T3466) being implemented with Fundación ONCE (which has already worked with Specialisterne in Spain), and opportunities for collaboration have been identified in the region, particularly in Colombia and Costa Rica. As Specialisterne expands into other countries in the region, it could also partner with Fundación Descúbreme and the Chile Productivity Pact (operation CH-T1224). There could also be potential for collaboration through IDB Invest and its clients in the region interested in promoting diversity at their firms.

## **B. Scalability**

- 3.7 To scale up the Specialisterne model in Latin America and the Caribbean, it will be necessary to: (i) create outreach and mass learning tools; (ii) lower costs in order to reach the largest number of people and organizations; and (iii) spread

---

<sup>16</sup> <https://gdlab.iadb.org/en/home>

awareness about the advantages of human talent with autism and Specialisterne's services. The project's thesis of scale is that: (a) online mass dissemination and training tools (MOOCs) will help it reach a large number of people, firms, and local partners; (b) online training and the development of partnerships with NGOs and local psychologists will lower costs; and (c) working with IDB Lab will help spread awareness about what Specialisterne does and strengthen the package of services it offers in the region. Points (a), (b), and (c) are expected to be in place by the end of year three, creating the possibility to reach potential beneficiaries at a massive scale.

- 3.8 The project's pathway to scale will begin with the implementation of digital tools like MOOCs, which will allow it to reach thousands of people. This model will provide feedback to itself through evaluations that measure its effectiveness, as well as user satisfaction. The project team will work to see the model incorporated into existing public sector job services by sharing the lessons learned, which, in turn, will contribute to its scaling and replication. Once this solution has been adapted in Mexico, and a network of local partners has been formed and strengthened, the goal will be to replicate it in other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

### **C. Project and institutional risks**

- 3.9 One of the project's risks is the difficulty of identifying persons with autism spectrum disorders and capturing their interest in being part of initiative. To mitigate this risk, the project will perform an important task of forging strategic partnerships with local, national, and department-level stakeholders, to achieve sufficient penetration to raise awareness among persons with autism, as well as their family members.
- 3.10 Another risk is that firms and the corporate sector may not be interested in participating as key project stakeholders to promote the workforce integration of persons with autism. This risk will be mitigated through awareness campaigns encouraging firms to shift their recruiting strategies to include persons with autism.
- 3.11 Rising unemployment in the region is a reality that the project will try to mitigate by seizing the opportunities resulting from telework to benefit persons with autism spectrum-related challenges, as this arrangement offers them more suitable work options and better environments for professional development.

## **IV. BUDGET INSTRUMENT AND PROPOSAL**

- 4.1 The project has a total cost of US\$1,500,000, US\$750,000 (50%) of which will be provided by IDB Lab. Of this amount, US\$250,000 will be nonreimbursable technical cooperation funding, and US\$500,000 will be allocated as a contingent recovery investment grant. Additionally, US\$750,000 (50%) will be provided as counterpart financing by the executing agency.

Project categories	IDB Lab Nonreimbursable (US\$)	IDB Lab Contingent recovery investment grant (US\$)	Counterpart (US\$)	Total (US\$)
<i>Component 1: Content creation</i>	136,667	94,742	21,300	252,709
Component 2: Outreach and awareness-raising	9,500	7,500	10,000	27,000
<i>Component 3: Inclusive employment</i>	58,942	233,220	703,318	995,480
<i>Component 4: Project management</i>	44,891	164,538	15,382	224,811
<b>Project total</b>	250,000	500,000	750,000	1,500,000
<b>Percentage of financing</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## V. EXECUTING AGENCY AND IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE

### A. Executing agency

- 5.1 The executing agency will be Specialisterne México S.A. de C.V., which was recently founded on 12 May 2021 and receives support from Specialisterne Spain and Denmark. Specialisterne México will be a subsidiary of Specialisterne Spain with the same shareholders and management. Though it will have full technical, operational, and administrative backing from Spain, it will operate autonomously. All Specialisterne franchises work in coordination with one another using shared tools, but the methodology that will be adopted for the project was developed in Spain and is currently being implemented in southern Europe.
- 5.2 Specialisterne is a public-interest nonprofit organization created in Denmark more than 17 years ago. In that time, it has become a global benchmark in employability for persons with autism in the technology sector. Its founder, Thorkil Sonne, is a renowned speaker who has delivered presentations on the workforce integration of persons with disabilities at events of organizations such as Global Compact, Ashoka, and the World Economic Forum. Specialisterne also has a foundation, the Specialisterne Foundation, which promotes outreach and awareness-raising activities related to the integration of persons with autism into the workforce.
- 5.3 Specialisterne began its international expansion 10 years ago. Specialisterne Spain, created in 2011, is in charge of the Latin American and Caribbean market.
- 5.4 **Integrity review.** In accordance with the Bank's policies (document OP-474-1), an integrity review of the senior executives and management of Specialisterne México S.A. de C.V. was conducted as part of the Diagnostic Assessment of Integrity and Institutional Capacity (DICI) and found no irregularities associated with them.

### B. Implementation structure and mechanism

- 5.5 An execution unit will be established for the implementation of this project, consisting of a general director, who will also serve as business developer, and a coordinating psychologist, who will also be in charge of operations. This unit will report to the governing body of Specialisterne Spain and Latin America and the Caribbean. The Mexican firm's administrative work will be subcontracted out to external entities, which will also report to the same Specialisterne governing body. The execution unit will also have a project coordinator, technical/administrative



assistant, and communications specialist and will receive accounting support from Specialisterne Spain and be supervised by senior management.

## **VI. FULFILLMENT OF MILESTONES AND SPECIAL FIDUCIARY ARRANGEMENTS**

- 6.1 **Contingent recovery.** This project will include a US\$500,000 contingent recovery investment grant component, given that Specialisterne's business model generates revenue from businesses (employers) through its service package for the employment of persons with autism or other types of more general training. The project's technical files include the term sheet agreed upon with the executing agency. The key elements are: (i) if the gross margin (gross revenue less direct expenditures) accumulated by the executing agency in the fourth full fiscal year, running from the establishment of the firm in Mexico, is US\$200,000 or more, the reimbursable amount will be equivalent to 25% of the total amount disbursed, up to US\$100,000 (25% of US\$500,000), at the end of the disbursement period; (ii) if the gross margin (gross revenue less direct expenditures) accumulated by the executing agency in the fourth full fiscal year, running from the establishment of the firm in Mexico, is US\$350,000 or more, the reimbursable amount will be equivalent to 50% of the total amount disbursed, up to US\$250,000 (50% of US\$500,000), at the end of the disbursement period; and (iii) if the gross margin (gross revenue less direct expenditures) accumulated by the executing agency in the fourth full fiscal year, running from the establishment of the firm in Mexico, is US\$500,000 or more, the reimbursable amount will be equivalent to 100% of the total amount disbursed, up to US\$500,000 (100% of US\$500,000), at the end of the disbursement period. The executing agency will make reimbursement payments every six months, beginning in month 49, running from the month when the agreement is signed. Payments will continue until the full reimbursable amount has been reimbursed, or the eight payments have been made, whichever occurs first.
- 6.2 **Results-based disbursement and fiduciary arrangements** Specialisterne México S.A. de C.V., as the executing agency, will agree to IDB Lab's standard arrangements for results-based disbursements, procurement, and financial management, as specified in the technical file. Project disbursements will be contingent on the verification of the fulfillment of milestones, according to the means of verification agreed upon between the executing agency and IDB Lab. Achievement of milestones does not exempt the executing agency from responsibility to attain the indicator targets established in the Results Matrix and the project objectives.
- 6.3 Under the risk- and performance-based project management modality, project disbursement amounts will be determined according to the project's projected liquidity needs for a period of up to six months. Such needs will be agreed upon between IDB Lab and the executing agency, reflecting the activities and costs programmed in the annual planning exercise. The first disbursement will be contingent upon fulfillment of the conditions precedent. Successive disbursements will be made, provided that the following two conditions have been met: (i) IDB Lab has verified that milestones have been achieved, as agreed in the annual planning exercise; and (ii) the executing agency has justified at least 80% of the cumulative advances of funds.

- 6.4 **Procurement.** For the procurement of goods and consulting services, the executing agency will be governed by the Bank's policies on procurement<sup>17</sup> and financial management.<sup>18</sup> Specialisterne México S.A. de C.V. is a private, legally established entity with its own procurement procedures that are compatible with private sector practices, so Appendix 4 of the consultant selection policies is applicable.
- 6.5 **Modality and frequency of ex post supervision.** Annual review of disbursements and procurements will be conducted using the institution's audited financial statements, which will include a paragraph that describes: (i) the revenue received from IDB Lab, the counterpart, and the project partners; (ii) all outlays with funds contributed by IDB Lab and the counterpart, as reflected in the cash flow statement; and (iii) the amounts expended and available balances for each project component, as shown in the statement of expenditures or cumulative investments.

## VII. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

- 7.1 **Intellectual property.** Specialisterne México S.A. de C.V. will retain ownership of all intellectual property rights to the products developed and studies conducted under the project and will grant IDB Lab a nonexclusive, free license to use them for noncommercial purposes in Mexico and throughout the region. This will ensure that the lessons learned from the project are disseminated as widely as possible throughout Mexico and Latin America and the Caribbean.

---

<sup>17</sup> [Document GN-2350-9.](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Link to the Financial Management Guidelines for IDB-Financed Projects.](#)