

Empretec Women in Business Awards
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Argentina

Marianela Pavicich

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"We want to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities, through the development and creation of products with a 'universal design'".



Marianela and her sister Melisa incorporated their venture in 2018 to create an inclusive-design desk to promote the autonomy of people with physical disabilities. While finishing her degree in Industrial Design and working on designing standard components and equipment to automate production lines, Marianela got the idea during a visit to a Special Education School. It struck her that children with physical disabilities faced challenges using standard furniture, as it was not designed in a way that takes into consideration their needs. That would take away their autonomy, fuelling a sense of exclusion.

She realized that disability is a social problem and decided to start a furniture company with a *universal design* that would be suitable to all people, regardless of age, disability or other factors, following the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Robbina inclusive design promotes the inclusion of people with disabilities and allows them to fully enjoy their right to education.

Robbina Inclusive Table is a desk for school, therapy and recreational activities, which is suitable for children 5 years or older, as well as for adults. Robbina targets niche markets such as families, rehabilitation centers and clinics, educational institutions, governments and municipalities. *Robbina Inclusive Table* got several design and industry recognitions and awards, nationally and regionally.



Sales grew exponentially in the past two years, thanks also to a new commercial strategy with health and rehabilitation centres. Based in Buenos Aires, Robbina has been selling its products in 20 of the 23 Argentinian provinces. In the next couple of years, the company intends to strengthen its presence domestically and abroad, expanding to Uruguay and Chile.

Marianela completed the Empretec Entrepreneurship Training Workshop (ETW)

a few years ago and found it a truly transformative experience. She found the right push to start a business project that would be in line with her purpose in life. *“The workshop marked a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ in my personal and professional life. The group of people, the activities, the role playing, the experience of completing tasks and exercises during the training, everything was super enriching”*, she says. *“It was a week full of learning that shaped my way of seeing things. That workshop really changed my mind. I came out of there and started with several ideas, without being satisfied with any of them, but with the conviction that entrepreneurship was my way to go. Until I finally found a venture that aligned with my life purpose.”*

In 2023, Fundación Empretec – the Empretec centre in Argentina – helped Robbina with a mentoring services and advice on business strategy, investment plan and technical aspects to support the company’s expansion, under the national initiative called *Emprender Mujeres*.

For Marianela, the challenge every day is to make Robbina inclusive design a place of belonging, of continuous learning, that allows one to grow and discover oneself, while giving the best of oneself to improve the lives of more people. Marianela is also planning to promote inclusion not only at the end of the chain, but also in the production process, by setting up partnerships with cooperatives that employ people in vulnerable situations. Leading a team of four women, she wants the business to stand out not only for its design, but also as a champion of inclusion and diversity.