



April 2009

Because Autism is today a very serious education and health issue around the world, the United Nations has declared April 2nd as World Autism Awareness Day.

**AT THE OCCASION OF THE SECOND WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY,
AUTISM EUROPE RECALLS THE FOLLOWING TO THE MEMBER STATES
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

Autism is a pervasive and lifelong disorder, which affects the developing brain and which are apparent from infancy onwards. Autism is characterised by several symptoms: impairments in social interactions; impairments in communication; and restricted interests and repetitive behaviour. In 2009, scientific evidence indicates that many different genetic, medical and neurological factors are involved in autism. The early belief that parental practices are responsible for autism has been disproved.

Because the disability affects 0.6% of the population, Europe (including all members of the Council of Europe) counts around 5 million people with autism.

The goal of Autism Europe is to make sure that a particular attention is paid to the respect of the dignity and human rights of people with autism

People with autism have of course the same human value as anyone else and as such, have the same human rights. In particular, people with autism must benefit from all same rights as those which must be preserved and defended for all people with disabilities.

Although some Member States have already ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which entered into force on May 3, 2008, Autism-Europe request that this Convention be ratified by all Member States of the European Union and of the Council of Europe and not only by few of them.

The respect by Member States of the UN Convention shall permit people with autism to benefit from the guiding principles that underlie the Convention, among which:

- Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons
- Non-discrimination
- Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
- Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity
- Equality of opportunity
- Right for appropriate health
- Right for appropriate education

Autism-Europe believes that the needs of persons with autism in the field of health care, education and employment are not sufficiently taken into account, and human rights violations against people with autism take place daily across EU countries.

Autism-Europe particularly recommends the 10 following measures:

1. Improving the existing indicators on specific health care services in order to be able to measure the proportion of persons with autism or a complex dependency needs disability benefiting from adequate re-habilitation programmes
2. Reinforcing the initial and continuous training of health professionals on the internationally accepted diagnostic systems and evidence based treatments and ensuring an appropriate training of professionals in charge of the education of persons with autism
3. Ensuring a partnership between parents and professionals in order to determine appropriate educational or other programmes
4. Ensuring equal enrolment and access for all to the education systems, and ensuring equal opportunities to develop individual potential in every kind and level of education, regardless of the nature or severity of disability, by means of research-sound educational strategies and individually tailored educational programmes
5. Integrating the specific behavioural and communication features and needs of persons with autism or a complex dependency needs disability into the standard education systems by means of the continuous training of parents and professionals at all levels and not only as part of specialised training,
6. Reinforcing life-long education and training of persons with autism or a complex dependency needs disability, notably professional training.
7. Strengthening and adapting support at the workplace to the needs of persons with autism or a complex dependency needs disability.
8. Having an environment that fosters communication and is adapted to the problems of behaviour faced by persons with autism
9. Choosing a way of living either at home or in a residential setting with adequate support from health and education services
10. Having access to a good quality of life in terms of physical, emotional, social and material wellbeing.

At the request of the United Nations' Department of Public Information, Evelyne Friedel, president of Autism-Europe, will make a presentation in New York on April 2nd, 2009 at a conference on "Autism and Human Rights - Understanding and Safeguarding the Rights of People with Autism". The three other personalities invited by the United Nations are Dr. Paulo Barrozo, professor of law at Harvard University, Lee Grossman, president of Autism Society of America, and Stephen Shore, Assistant Professor at Adelphi University.

Autism-Europe is an international association whose main objective is to advance the rights of persons with autism and their families and to help them improve their quality of life.

Autism-Europe's overarching mission is indeed to improve the quality of life of all persons with autism and their families by promoting and defending their rights. This is achieved through:

- Representing persons with autism towards all European institutions
- Promoting awareness on the appropriate care, education, and well-being of persons with autism
- Promoting the exchange of information, good practices and experience.

Autism-Europe constitutes a European network which ensures effective liaison between approximately 80 member associations of parents of persons with autism in 30 European countries, governments and European and international institutions.

In order to implement its objectives, Autism Europe has built strategic alliances with social partners to maximise its impact on EU policies. Autism-Europe is a founding member of and strictly collaborates with the European Disability Forum and the Platform of European Social NGOs.

Autism-Europe has also established a structured dialogue with the European Institutions of the European Union, and of the Council of Europe, as well as with the World Health Organisation.

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This publication is supported by the Directorate-General for Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities of the European Commission under the Programme PROGRESS. For more information see: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/progress/index_en.html

