

PRESS RELEASE

Thursday 29th March 2018

Autism-Europe steps up call for the removal of barriers faced by autistic people

- **Autism-Europe (AE) is launching the second phase of its awareness campaign titled “Break barriers together for autism - Let’s build an accessible society” and step up its call for decision-makers to act to remove the barriers that hinder autistic people’s inclusion in society and enjoyment of their human rights.**
- **To mark World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD), AE will publish testimonials and recommendations to pinpoint concrete ways to make society more autism-friendly and co-organises a photography exhibition with MEP Rosa Estaràs, which will count with the participation of the President of European Parliament Antonio Tajani.**

Recent studies suggest autism affects approximately one per cent of Europeans,¹ which represents over five million people in the EU. Autism is often referred to as an invisible disability, because people can often be unaware that a person is autistic.

On World Autism Awareness Day, Autism-Europe is therefore calling on people to join them in bringing home the message that it is crucial to break down barriers to accessibility for people on the autism spectrum. Engaging with autistic people and hearing their experiences is key to understanding the many daily hurdles faced by the autism community, and it is only by working together that we can remove them, and foster a society in which everyone is included.

In 2018, the issue of accessibility for persons with disabilities is high on the EU agenda. The European Accessibility Act, proposed by the European Commission, is currently in the trilogue stage of the EU decision-making process, meaning we are approaching the moment at which the Act’s final form will be decided.

Autism-Europe has been actively voicing the needs of autistic people and their families since the initial stage of the elaboration of the Act. This year is a crucial time to bring to the forefront the access needs of people with autism, and to make decision-makers understand how they can improve the lives of the EU’s 5 million autistic citizens.

Activities planned by Autism-Europe

To illustrate the poignant necessity to “Break Barriers Together for Autism” campaign, April 2 will also mark the launch of a document of testimonies given by autistic people and family members from 16 European countries. They highlight widespread difficulties linked to access to diagnosis, education, employment, transport and public spaces, lifelong support, life in the community and access to justice and the right to vote. These testimonies outlines the structural barriers they face in their lives as well as policy recommendations and examples of good practices to overcome them.

From April 9-11 2018, AE organises a photography exhibition hosted by Member of the European Parliament, Rosa Estaràs. The President of European Parliament Antonio Tajani, representatives of the European Disability Forum and other EU policy makers will attend the *vernissage* of the exhibition on April 10 at 11am to give political momentum to this second phase of the campaign.

¹ ¹ Elsabbagh et al. 2012; Fombonne, 2011; ADDM 2012; Mattila et al. 2011; Saemundsen et al. 2013; Baird et al. 2011



Notes to editors:

[World Autism Awareness Day](#) was declared by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007 as an annual day to draw attention to the urgent needs of people with autism around the world.

Autism is a complex lifelong disability. People on the autism spectrum experience persistent difficulties with social communication and social interaction, and might display restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests.

Autism-Europe aisbl is an international association whose main objective is to advance the rights of people with autism and their families and to help them improve their quality of life. It ensures effective liaison among more than 80 member autism organisations in more than 30 European countries, including 26 Member States of the European Union, governments and European and international institutions. Autism-Europe is a member of the European Disability Forum and the Social Platform.

“Breaking through paper” campaign: To raise awareness of the objectives of the campaign, AE has asked people with autism and their allies to write a short description of what make society inaccessible for them on a banner or a piece of paper. Then they can photograph or film themselves holding their banner, before breaking through it or ripping it up as a way of symbolically breaking down this barrier. People willing to support the campaign can post pictures of them holding the banner on social media.

For more information and interviews, please do not hesitate to contact:

Aurélie Baranger

Director

aurelie.baranger@autismeurope.org

Cristina Fernández

Communication Officer

communication@autismeurope.org

To register to the *vernissage* of the exhibition “Break barriers for autism”, please click here **(until April 3 at 18:00h)**: <https://goo.gl/avBd6Z>