

Not invisible: A Manifesto for the Rights and Inclusion of Autistic People

Autism-Europe represents autistic people and their families at European level. We are the largest autism advocacy organisation in Europe with over 90 member organisations across 40 countries. Our mission is to highlight the lived realities of autistic people and advocate for their rights and inclusion in society.

Autism is a complex lifelong developmental disability experienced differently by each individual. An estimated seven million people in Europe are autistic, given that prevalence rates estimate that at least one in 100 people are on the autism spectrum.

Autistic people are often described as having an “invisible disability”. Yet the barriers they face are very real: discrimination across all areas of life, lack of adequate support, inaccessible services, and persistent stereotypes. Too often, autistic people remain *not seen, not heard and not considered* in policies and practices at European, national and regional levels.

Our campaign “Not Invisible” is about raising awareness and including autistic people and their families into discussions about their needs, their challenges and their realities.

In 2026, with our multi-year campaign “Not Invisible”, Autism-Europe is calling for change: autistic people must be seen and recognised as rights-holders, citizens, and contributors. Being visible means being acknowledged, included, and able to participate fully, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).

This manifesto sets out Autism-Europe’s priorities for the next phase of the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ESRPD). This is a clear call to action for European, national and regional decision-makers. While the European framework is essential, actual change happens locally. Therefore, this manifesto addresses responsibilities at all levels of governance.

1. Not Invisible in rights and decision-making

Autistic people must be visible in policy and legislative processes that affect their lives. Despite progress at EU level, autistic people's specific needs and experiences are still insufficiently reflected in disability, social, health, education and employment policies.

At European level, the next phase of the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities must explicitly address autism, in line with the UN CRPD Committee's 2025 concluding observations on the EU¹ and the European Parliament Resolution on harmonising the rights of autistic people². Autistic people are equal rights holders, entitled to full participation in society. It is therefore also essential that their legal capacity is respected.

At national and regional levels, governments must ensure that disability and mainstream policies are designed and implemented in ways that genuinely include autistic people. This requires structured, adequately funded consultation mechanisms with autistic people and their representative organisations, in line with Article 4(3) of the UN CRPD.

Autism-Europe calls for:

- Systematic involvement of autistic people and their organisations in policy design, implementation and monitoring, through co-production and participatory research at EU, national and regional levels.
- A strong rights-based approach to autism, embedded across disability, social, education, employment and health policies.
- Member States to transition from guardianship toward supported decision-making systems that respect legal capacity of all autistic people.
- Transparent monitoring of disability policies, disability-specific data collection, with publicly available evaluations and meaningful participation of autistic people.

Being *visible* means being recognised as experts in our own lives.

¹ Concluding observations on the combined 2nd and 3rd periodic reports of the European Union : Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
[UN. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(32nd sess. : 2025 : Geneva\) 2025](#)

² European Parliament resolution of 4 October 2023 on harmonising the rights of autistic persons (2023/2728(RSP))[EUR-Lex - 52023IP0343 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

2. Not Invisible in society: awareness, representation and combating disinformation

Misconceptions and disinformation about autism continue to fuel stigma, discrimination and harmful practices. Autistic people are often portrayed through narrow or inaccurate narratives, while those with high support needs, younger people, women, and people from minority backgrounds remain particularly invisible.

Autism-Europe believes that awareness-raising must go beyond symbolic gestures. It must be evidence-based, co-designed with autistic people and their families, and reflect the diversity of the autism spectrum. Lived experience is central to challenging stereotypes and showing the realities of autistic lives.

At EU level, a coordinated awareness-raising initiative on autism and disability rights should be developed, building on existing campaigns and aligned with the ESRPD. At national and regional levels, authorities should support sustained public education initiatives, including in schools, public services and media. We must strive for not only autism-awareness but autism acceptance in all facets of society

Across the EU, many professionals still lack adequate training on autism and disability rights, which limits autistic people's access to quality support services, education, healthcare, employment services, justice systems and public administration. Specialists delivering autism-specific services must follow mandatory, evidence and rights-based training.

Moreover, it is critical that mainstream professionals receive compulsory training that builds understanding of autism from a rights-based perspective and equips them to provide reasonable accommodation, accessible communication and inclusive support. All training must follow international human-rights standards and be co-designed with autistic people and their representative organisations. EU funding programmes such as ESF+, ERDF, Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe should be used to develop, deliver and sustain high-quality mainstream and autism-specific training across Member States.

Research is a key area to promote knowledge and understanding, the European Commission and the Member States must promote research co-produced with autistic people and their families, with the aim of improving autistic people's quality of life.

Autism-Europe calls for:

- Investment in rights-based, pan-European and national awareness-raising campaigns co-produced with autistic people and their families.
- Active measures to combat misinformation and disinformation about autism, particularly online.
- Inclusive representation of autistic people, including those with high support needs, through accessible and easy-to-read formats.
- Promotion of mandatory training for autism-specific services professionals and mainstream services providers, that are evidence-based and rights-based, and co-designed with autistic people and their families.
- Research agenda and related funding allocation to be decided in partnership with autistic people and their families

Being *visible* means being represented truthfully, respectfully and being understood and heard in all areas of society.

3. Not Invisible in community life: independent living and support across the lifespan

Too many autistic people across Europe lack access to adequate community-based support services. As a result, many face social isolation, over-reliance on family members or placement in institutional or segregated settings. Autistic people with high support needs are particularly at risk.

Independent living is a human right under Article 19 of the UN CRPD. It requires accessible housing, personalised support, and services rooted in the community. We welcome the EU Guidance on independent living and inclusion in the community³ and call for its full implementation at national and regional levels. Service providers should also adopt quality assessment systems focused on inclusion, participation and users' quality of life.

³ Commission Notice – Guidance on independent living and inclusion in the community of persons with disabilities in the context of EU funding C/2024/7897; [EUR-Lex - 52024XC07188 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

Families and informal carers, most often women, also remain largely invisible in policies, despite their essential role and the significant social and economic costs they bear.

Autism-Europe calls for:

- Effective implementation of deinstitutionalisation strategies at national and regional levels, supported by EU funding and monitoring.
- Investment in quality, autism-specific and person-centered support services in the community available across the lifespan.
- Recognition and adequate support for informal carers, including access to respite, income protection and pension rights.

Being *visible* means being able to live in the community, with choice, dignity and support.

4. Not Invisible in education and employment

Education and employment are key pathways to inclusion, autonomy and participation in society. Yet, autistic people continue to face significant barriers in both areas. Lack of reasonable accommodation, insufficiently trained professionals and fragmented support systems result in exclusion from mainstream education and extremely high unemployment rates.

At EU level, education and employment policies must fully integrate disability and autism perspectives. At national and regional levels, authorities are responsible for ensuring that schools, higher education, vocational training systems and workplaces are accessible and inclusive in practice.

Transitions, particularly from education to employment and from youth to adulthood, are critical moments where many autistic people lose support and become invisible to services.

Autism-Europe calls for:

- Investment in inclusive education systems, with adequate support, trained staff and accessible learning environments.
- EU and national measures to reduce regional disparities in access to education support services.
- Targeted employment measures for autistic people, including personalised support, accessible recruitment processes and employer training.

- Coordinated transition support linking education, employment, housing and health services.

Being *visible* means having equal chances to learn, work and contribute.

5. Not Invisible through accessibility and mobility

Accessibility for autistic people goes beyond physical access. Cognitive, sensory and communication accessibility are essential for participation in everyday life, yet they remain insufficiently addressed in legislation and practice.

Barriers to disability recognition and lack of mutual recognition of autism diagnoses across Member States further undermine freedom of movement. Autistic people and their families moving across borders often lose access to support, benefits and reasonable accommodation, rendering them invisible within administrative systems.

Autism-Europe calls for:

- Strong enforcement and expansion of accessibility standards, including sensory, cognitive and communication accessibility.
- Development of harmonised principles for disability assessment and mutual recognition of disability status across the EU.
- Accessible information and simplified administrative procedures for cross-border mobility.

Being *visible* means being able to move, access services and participate on an equal basis across Europe.

From Visibility to Change

The “**Not Invisible**” campaign is a call to action. Visibility must lead to rights, resources and real change in people’s lives.

Autism-Europe urges European, national and regional decision-makers to work with autistic people and their organisations to turn commitments into action. By including autistic people and their families in decision-making and society across all sectors, the EU and its Member States can move closer to fulfilling its obligations under the UN CRPD and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Autistic people must not be invisible. It is time to act.

