

## PRESS RELEASE

# Let's celebrate World Autism Awareness Day by promoting respect, acceptance, and inclusion

On World Autism Awareness Day (2 April), Autism-Europe will launch a long-running awareness campaign around the theme "Respect, Acceptance, Inclusion". The objective of the campaign is to challenge people to better understand what it is like to live with autism, providing a platform to shift the focus from mere "awareness" to "acceptance" of autism. People are invited to raise awareness on social media and during events by symbolically passing a relay baton to promote greater inclusion and participation of people with autism in society. This call for action is also extended to decisions-makers, underlining the need to foster inclusive policies and promote the respect of the rights of people with autism.

Nowadays many people are aware of autism, currently affecting one in every one hundred people in Europe, yet very few people actually understand what it means to live life on the autism spectrum. This lack of understanding creates attitudinal barriers that hamper the inclusion of autistic people in society. As such, persons with autism often face a great deal of isolation from their local communities, and from society as a whole, all of which reinforces the discrimination they face in many fields of life.

Autism-Europe invites policy-makers at the EU and Member State levels to take action to pave the way for a more inclusive and neurodiverse society. Following the successful adoption of the [Written Declaration on Autism](#) by the European Parliament in September 2015, Autism-Europe is now calling on the European Commission and EU national governments to begin the next leg of the relay, following demands by the European Parliament to initiate a European Strategy for autism. A strategy will be crucial for providing a coherent and holistic approach to supporting persons with autism and their families and fostering the respect of their rights.

This strategy would respond to the needs of persons with autism, many of whom face huge barriers in many areas of life, not least due to lack of support and understanding in society. People with autism may appear to behave unusually when seen from the point of view of someone who is unfamiliar with autism, but certain behaviours may offer a way for a person to cope with a particular situation. Many autistic people, for example, have difficulty processing sensory information such as sounds, sights and smells. This is usually called having sensory integration difficulties, or sensory sensitivity. It can have a profound effect on a person's life and trigger unusual reactions.

Stereotypes and prejudices are also a major barrier to accessing the labour market, where discrimination starts as early as the recruitment phase. There appears to be an acute lack of awareness of the fact that people with autism can be highly skilled and qualified, and may be extremely employable, but may need some reasonable accommodation in order to reach their full potential. Nowadays, between 76 and 90 per cent of adults with autism in Europe are unemployed compared with 11.5 per cent of adults without autism<sup>1</sup>. As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon points out in his message for World Autism Awareness Day 2016, shunning people with autism from society is not only a "violation of human rights" but also a "waste of human potential". This reasoning is equally central to the calls for action in [Autism-Europe's campaign manifesto](#).

On World Autism Awareness day, Autism-Europe would like to emphasise the key role each member of

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<sup>1</sup> Autism-Europe, (2014). *Autism and Work: Together we can*. Available at : <http://www.autismeurope.org/files/files/report-on-autism-and-employment-en-online-updated.pdf>

society can play in removing some of the core barriers to inclusion faced by people with autism, and recall the principles of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities](#) to bring about the conditions for an inclusive society.

[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 disorder that affects the brain. It impairs an individual's social and communication abilities and often causes them to display unusual or repetitive behaviours and interests. Currently, around 1 in 100 children in the European Union are diagnosed with autism.

**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 25 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](#).

- **More information and interviews, please do not hesitate to contact Aurélie Baranger, Director of Autism-Europe, in Brussels. Tel: +32 (0)2 675 75 05 Email: [aurelie.baranger@autismeurope.org](mailto:aurelie.baranger@autismeurope.org)**
- **Follow us on social media and spread the message using the hashtag:**

**#AutismDay2016**



#### **World Autism Awareness Day social media campaign: Relay baton hand-over**

To help show support for our campaign, we are asking people to take photos of themselves either holding a relay baton, or holding a print-out of our campaign banner, and to post these on social media using the hashtag #AutismDay2016.

As well as being a symbol of acceptance and inclusion, through its reference to sport it highlights the strength that comes from working together and complementing each other's strengths.

This social media campaign will stay up and running until September 2016, to coincide with the Paralympic games taking place in Rio de Janeiro.

For more information on how to get involved, or to see the **campaign toolkit**, or to download the campaign banner, go to: <http://www.autismeurope.org/>.

Or contact AE Communications Officer, Cristina Fernández:

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