



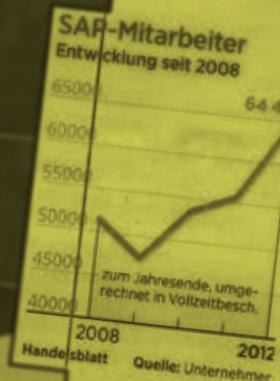
European Commission

# Results of four pilot projects on employment of persons with autism

**Autisten gesucht**  
 Erstmals wirbt ein Konzern gezielt um Mitarbeiter, die gemeinhin als krank gelten. Bis 2020 stellt SAP 650 Autisten ein. Das Unternehmen hat nicht allein seine soziale



...entdeckt - es will vielmehr die besonderen Programmiertalente nutzen.



...sind sie darum später oft viel besser als andere Menschen", erläutert Hermann Cordes, Vorsitzender des Instituts für Autismusforschung an der Universität Bremen.

So gefragt die Fähigkeiten von Autisten sind, so herausfordernd ist ihr Einsatz im Arbeitsalltag: Menschen, die an der Entwicklungsstörung leiden, können oft nichts mit den einfachsten sozialen Regeln anfangen. „Autisten verstehen keinen Sarkasmus, verstehen politische Intrigen überhaupt nicht“, sagt Anka Wittenberg, bei SAP zuständig für Diversity, zu Deutschland. Die Kollegen, die Teams mit Autisten führen, müssen deshalb speziell geschult werden.

Für solche Weiterbildungen nutzt SAP die Erfahrung der dänischen Firma Specialisterne. Sie hat sich auf die Schulung und die Auswahl geeigneter Autisten spezialisiert. „Etwa 85 Prozent aller Autisten sind arbeitslos“, erklärt Steen Thygesen, der Chef von Specialisterne. „Dabei könnten viele von ihnen Herausragendes leisten.“

Experten schätzen, dass 0,7 Prozent der Weltbevölkerung an Autismus leiden. Wenn nur ein Teil der Betroffenen mit Informationen so gezielt umgehen wie Raymond Babbitt in „Rain Man“, können sie wie SAP ein gewaltiges Potenzial. Deshalb heißt es: Autisten gesucht.

...ns Koenen, Miriam Schröder  
 ...nkfurt, Düsseldorf

...n „Rain Man“ lernt Raymond Babbitt ohne Mühe ein halbes Telefonbuch auswendig - mit allen Namen und Nummern. Er kann das, er ist Autist. Gleich vier Oscars erlebte er im US-Spielfilm 1989 - nicht zuletzt weil der von Dustin Hoffman geleitete Protagonist der ganzen Welt zeigt, wie ein Autist sein Leben meistert. Die seltsamen Verhaltensweisen der Autisten überraschenderweise, ja sogar unglaubliche Fähigkeiten. Die Fähigkeiten entdeckt nun mit einer Verspätung auch die Wirtschaft. Der deutsche Softwarekonzern SAP hat am Dienstag bekannt gemacht, bis zum Jahr 2020 ein Prozent seiner Arbeitsplätze mit Autisten zu besetzen. Gemessen an der aktuellen Mitarbeiterzahl, wären das über 650 autistische Mitarbeiter.

Wie SAP hat sich noch kein Unternehmen beim Einsatz von Menschen mit Autismus vorgewagt. Dabei ist SAP der weltgrößte Hersteller von Software nicht in erster Linie um der Software, sondern vor allem darum, die Fähigkeiten der besten Talente zu nutzen. „Nur wenn wir Mitarbeiter mit Autismus, die anders denken und so anders arbeiten, fördern, kann SAP den Anforderungen des 21. Jahrhunderts gerecht werden“, sagt Personalvorstand

...den unter einer Störung des Gehirns, die Wahrnehmung und Verarbeitung von Informationen beeinträchtigt. Alltägliche Tätigkeiten wie Autofahren oder Baden können zu Angstzuständen führen. Das Gehirn speichert Informationen nicht so gut wie die Mitarbeiter von SAP sehr gut - etwa zum Testen neuer Software. Millionen von Codezeilen

...überprüft werden. Autisten speichern diese Zeilen mit einem fast fotografischen Gedächtnis und gleichen sie ab. Fehler werden so wesentlich schneller und sicherer gefunden.

SAP steht mit dem Interesse an Autisten nicht allein da. Auch Nokia, Oracle, Microsoft und andere greifen auf deren Fähigkeiten zurück. „Autisten greifen sich schon im Kindesalter auf ein bestimmtes Gebiet, zum Beispiel auf Zahlen. Als Sp

Justice

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# **Results of four pilot projects on employment of persons with autism**

VP/2010/017

PILOT PROJECTS ON EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH  
AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

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# Foreword

We are delighted to introduce this booklet featuring summaries and results of four pilot projects on employment of persons with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

People with ASD often need consistent and continuous highly qualified assistance, yet many of them do not receive such assistance as their condition is not regarded as particularly serious. Practice shows that many people with ASD can be productive and contribute considerably to the society in a structured and well-organised work environment. Yet their capability to work seems to be hugely underestimated.

The pilot projects and this booklet about them are a source of inspiration and knowledge. We want to share the results, commitment and insights of the organisations whose project were selected for support. These projects provide ideas about ways to better involve persons with disabilities in the world of work. They also show how to make workplaces better for disabled persons.

Even though these pilot projects were targeted at a very specific group of persons with disabilities, there are wider conclusions that can be drawn from their experiences. First and foremost, these projects emphasise that with proper engagement, many seemingly difficult obstacles can be overcome.

We want to express our appreciation for the commitment of the people who participated in these projects that were made possible thanks to an initiative of the European Parliament.

Unit for Rights of Persons with Disabilities  
Directorate General for Justice  
European Commission

## Executive Summary

From April 2011 to June 2013, the Commission implemented four pilot projects aiming to improve the employment situation of persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Concrete and transferable practical outcomes of sustainably placing a number of persons with autism in paid work were emphasised in calling for and choosing the proposals.

All four selected projects started in spring of 2011. Their duration varied from one year to two years, corresponding to their respective environments and approaches.

Methodology for the first stage - assessment - was broadly similar in all pilot projects. All projects based their approach on elaborating individual profiles, using in-depth interviews (including with the families of persons with ASD) and tests conducted over a substantial period of time, demonstrating maturity of the research basis for activation of persons with ASD.

Individual profiles constituted the foundation of the second stage - training and support to progress towards the profile desired by the potential employers. Training was aimed at developing two kinds of skills – technical skills and social skills – according to individual profiles of persons and targeted jobs. In most projects, support persons were trained simultaneously, giving them understanding of the nature of the ASD, of existing experience with placing ASD persons in jobs, and of the challenges particular to the environment in which projects were operating. At this stage, projects already exhibited certain differences. Some organisations already longer established in the field did not have to spend as much effort as did others who were just entering it. Nevertheless, sustained expert support clearly played a central role in all cases.

Approaches to acquisition of job openings and arranging placements – stage three – were even more diverse. For instance, Specialisterne Foundation (Denmark) is itself the employer for the persons with ASD. It is their core business to take care of the parts of business process that a client company wants to outsource – and at the same time to relieve the client companies of the specialist aspects of employing persons with ASD (support, training, legal questions). ESI-CEE (Bulgaria) also played the role of a job placement entity, using its credibility and contacts with the ICT companies. The SWANS project (Italy) targeted local small businesses and public sector for placements of their project participants, also to a certain extent playing a role of a mediator. Finally, Berufsbildungswerk Oberlinhaus (Germany) trained and supported their project beneficiaries in writing job applications and attending interviews, replicating the “real world” experience as closely as possible.

In stage five – reporting – all projects were able to conclude that stage four – employment – worked according to plan. Two main resources at this stage are: knowledge that is needed to manage the workplace, the communication and the expectations – and the support person who will take care of managing the environment and the person placed in the job.

Each of the four projects managed to overcome obstacles that persons with ASD face in entering the labour market. This shows that – given the will and determination – persons with ASD can be employed in small as well as big organisations, in all parts of Europe, be it Scandinavia, Central, Southern or Eastern Europe.

# Background of Pilot Projects

Access to employment is recognized as a fundamental human right in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)<sup>(1)</sup>, to which the EU is a party. We also need to give a real chance to work for each citizen in our shrinking working-age population.

The proportion of persons with disabilities not participating in the labour market is at least twice as high as that of average EU citizens<sup>(2)</sup>. This increases their poverty risk that social benefits cannot compensate, especially when the budgets are under pressure. As a good start in the labour market is very important for the further career, the situation is especially worrying for young persons.

Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are a diverse group of people that includes intellectually impaired persons as well as those of average or above average cognitive abilities. All of them are in a complex situation as their symptoms – impairments in social interaction, impairments in communication, restricted interests and repetitive behaviour – put them at a disadvantage in the increasingly communications-oriented service-economy job market of the EU. At the same time some of them have strengths such as accuracy, a good eye for detail, reliability and meticulous application of routine tasks. Practice shows that many people with ASD can thrive in a structured and well-organised environment.

The incidence of diagnosed ASD in children in US and Europe appears to be in a range of 6 to 20 per 1000. In recent decades the number of people diagnosed with ASD has increased significantly. The over-representation of males (four to one) is confirmed, as well as the presence of ASD in all social classes and different cultures.<sup>(3)</sup>

In 2010, at the request of the European Parliament, the Commission invited grant applications from projects that could help to develop policies to improve the employment situation of persons with ASD. This pilot action puts emphasis on concrete and transferable practical outcomes of sustainably placing a number of persons with autism in paid work.

From the pilot projects, the Commission aimed to gain better understanding of challenges and obstacles facing people with ASD in entering the labour market, notably of needs for adaptation of workplaces and related environments. We also wanted to identify existing policy approaches or types of measures in the Member States with a view to identifying what might be the best practices.

<sup>(1)</sup> Notably Article 27

<sup>(2)</sup> Stefanos Grammenos, *Indicators of Disability Equality in Europe - ANED 2011 Task 4*, ANED (ed), 2011, p. 22, <http://www.disability-europe.net/content/aned/media/ANED%202011%20Task%204%20-%20Synthesis%20Report.doc> (accessed 17/09/2013).

<sup>(3)</sup> <http://www.autismeurope.org/files/files/persons-with-autism-spectrum-disorders-identification-understanding-intervention.pdf>

## Project One, **Bulgaria**

# Development and piloting a model for occupational training and employment of people with ASD in the ICT sector

Conducted in Bulgaria, mainly capital Sofia, by Foundation European Software Institute Center Eastern Europe (ESI-CEE).

**Duration:** from 18 April 2011 to 17 April 2012

### **Participants:**

#### *a) Project team*

Foundation European Software Institute Center Eastern Europe (ESI-CEE) – project coordinator. BASSCOM (The Bulgarian Association of Software Companies) – project partner.

#### *b) Beneficiaries*

20 persons with ASD and their families – recipients of training and support

BASSCOM members (Bulgarian IT companies) – employers, also recipients of training and knowledge

This project was focused on employment in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector.

The innovative part of this project was welcoming all applicants with ASD regardless of their functionality levels. Previously known projects limited their scope to “high-functioning” persons with ASD, often with existing basic skills and knowledge in the IT area. Out of 20 eventual participants with ASD four persons had acquired computer literacy in self-study, others had no ICT skills or knowledge.

Individual periodically updatable profiles of personal and professional features were developed for each participant with ASD.<sup>(4)</sup> Potential employers (mainly 50 ICT companies, members of BASSCOM) were invited to list

information they would like to know about the potential employees with ASD.<sup>(5)</sup>

ESI-CEE worked simultaneously with the ASD persons and their families as well as with the possible employers. Careful attention was paid to information needs of both sides. Presentations to address most frequently asked questions of the employers were created. The main information needs regarded the impact of working environment on a person with ASD and kind and amount of necessary support. General knowledge on ASD and a summarized profile of the project participants contained in the presentations worked well to address existing concern.

An adapted curriculum of training for “ITCard” certification<sup>(6)</sup> was developed in Bulgarian language. Interactive multimedia tutorials were adapted and installed on the computers in the training centre of “Association Autism”. After the basic ICT training 8 persons started practical training in companies and organizations, 10 persons continued with individual classes on basic ICT skills.

<sup>(4)</sup> Based on 60 interviews with 20 persons and their families for a period of two months, conducted by the expert team of 8 psychologists and special pedagogues.

<sup>(5)</sup> Employers' questions addressed candidate's computer literacy level, specific interests, previous work experience, requirements in terms of work environment, support needs, social and physical limitations, education, learning style and abilities, etc. Standardized methods for psychological and social profile elaboration do not address these potentially valuable information points.

<sup>(6)</sup> ITCard is an independent, universal computer knowledge certificate, similar to ECDL. It was developed by the European Software Institute (ESI) and is acknowledged in Europe, Latin America, Asia, USA and Australia.

In order to meet the requirements of the open labour market, training needs beyond the certificate requirements were identified, such as languages (mainly English), interpersonal skills and certain technical knowledge<sup>(7)</sup>.

Based on the experience, a step by step methodology describing the process of hiring persons with ASD was developed. The Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy showed active interest to design suitable support programs for people with ASD. The project team assisted the Ministry, providing materials and participating in meetings. Furthermore, the methodology developed was successfully applied and implemented in Kosovo, where the Ministry of Public Administration worked at including people with different intellectual and physical disabilities in the training and employment activities.

After the conclusion of the Pilot Project, the project team and the specialist Employment Support Group (ESG) have carried on with their activities on a voluntary basis, providing support to people with autism in getting necessary the ICT qualifications and in job search. Also the employers of persons with ASD continue to receive consultancy in their everyday work with autistic youths from ESG and psychologists of Association Autism.

The partners continue to search for financial support for the development of the model involving people with different disabilities.



(7) Specific software environments like CRM, ERP, CMS, BISS, also Google Statistics.

## Project Two, Germany

### ABC – jobs for people with ASD

Conducted in Germany, mainly near Potsdam, by Berufsbildungswerk im Oberlinhaus gGmbH.

**Duration:** from 2 May 2011 to 30 April 2013

#### **Participants:**

##### *a) Project team*

Berufsbildungswerk im Oberlinhaus gGmbH (BBWO) – project coordinator.

Netzwerk für Integrationsassistenz Brandenburg (NIAB), Lebenshilfe für Behinderte Neubrandenburg e. V. (LH NB), autWorker e. G., CJD Prignitz, Professor Dr. Matthias Dalferth – project partners.

##### *b) Beneficiaries*

Young persons with an autism spectrum disorder about to finish or just finished with the rehabilitation curriculum of the BBWO – 17 men and women in their early twenties. Often these persons also had a learning disability, developmental disorders and / or attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD).

##### *c) Co-beneficiaries*

Employees of service providers (e.g. the German Labour Agency); stakeholder organizations in the region; employers; colleagues of the hired ASD persons at their workplaces. Good workplaces were often found in companies operating with a very clear and stable set of instructions for employees, such as the food franchise Nannosh or the specialist quality control and repair services provider Bitronic.

#### **Project:**

The ABC-project focused on two areas at the same time: assistance to 17 people with ASD in their integration into the mainstream labour market and provision of training and awareness to the stakeholders in the labour market integration (employers, service providers, authorities, civil society).

In the first area, BBWO worked to establish a practice of “case management”, that is a tailored approach to each individual. 17 young persons, assisted by person-

On 16.06.2012 our ABC project participants attended the first Camp evaluation part. The theme of the event: “If we build a bridge.”



al coaches went through a **three-step action plan**, which focused on training them as well as prospective employers.

In the phase of **preparation**, the crucial component was building and using a realistic profile of personal capabilities. Here, a dedicated web portal of autWorker eG proved very valuable. This exercise had additional “therapeutic” value for both young people and employers, as it allowed to practice reconciling reality with its perception by the participants. Also, an “application portfolio” that could be adjusted for each application, was prepared.

In the phase of **job hunt**, the participants cooperated very closely with support personnel (the “Job-Coach”) in acquiring vacancies and preparing interviews. The Job-Coach’s role could be described as a “helicopter parent”, who communicates with the applicant as well as with the targeted enterprise, helping to shape each side’s expectations and making clear the basic rules of behaviour and basic steps (such as getting to the interview venue) of the process. By his or her physical presence, the Job-Coach creates necessary stability and assurance – for both sides.

In the phase of **employment**, the coaches stayed close to participants, the employers received individual consultations and employed participants were assigned a volunteer mentor from amongst the new colleagues. Reasonable adjustments were made to workplaces and job descriptions. They were primarily targeted to creating a well-regulated very stable environment reliably free of interruptions. Relevant colleagues were trained in clear and stress-free communication.

By the end of the project, seven persons had found a job – five full time and two part-time. Six more persons are in training at the workplace (*Ausbildungsberuf*). On average, this was preceded by nearly 50 job applications over more than seven months in each case.

In the second area of activity, the staff members of employment agencies were trained, thematic workshops were organised twice a year and a manual for labour market integration of people with ASD was written. Other awareness-raising events included an information dinner with employers and the closing event of the project.

## Results and their sustainability

Overall, 13 persons out of 17 found an entry into the mainstream job market by the time of the closing meeting of the project. They seem likely to retain, and in case of six trainees, to improve their position. This can be attributed to the systematic and methodical work at matching the profiles of jobs and applicants, as well as ensuring that employers knew the specific needs of employees with ASD at the workplace before employing them. Furthermore, availability of facilitators, namely Job Coaches and mentors offers a reasonable guarantee for sustainability of the employment.

As the project leader BBWO is an established organisation in their field, and will continue operating in this field, the networks it helped to establish to facilitate communication between labour agencies, enterprises, NGOs and authorities will also be sustained as a part of BBWOs daily business. Individual representatives of stakeholders are expected to continue to act as “multipliers” in their respective fields of work.

Further, two mentors who were trained during the project, colleagues of persons with ASD, will continue their work with people with ASD. This is facilitated by financial support that has been ensured for the future. BBWO considers mentoring system to be very effective and proposes to use it as a best practice example to find more interested employers and colleagues in companies.

The manual – with guides for employers, colleagues, mentors and job brokers – that was developed remains usable as a tool to support integration of people with ASD into the mainstream labour market.

Finally, also training material for mentors remains available for training interested potential mentors in companies and the “ability portal” designed to empower the participants to recognize their own strengths will be used and improved by the project-partner autWorker.

## Project Three, Denmark and Poland

# Accelerating the employment of People with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Real Business

Multiple EU countries: Denmark, Scotland, Germany, Poland, Spain.

**Duration:** from 4 April 2011 to 30 June 2012

### Participants:

#### a) Project team

Specialist People Foundation (SPF) in cooperation with around 30 businesses, foundations and educational establishments active in Denmark, Scotland, Germany, Spain, Poland, and UK. The best-known businesses participating were Deloitte, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Microsoft, BMW, Siemens and Manpower. From the business education sector, ESADE business school (Spain) and London Business School participated in the Specialisterne project as did the more academic Knowledge Centre of Autism (Denmark). Foundations, non-profit and public entities included giants such as Bildungswerk der Bayerischen Wirtschaft e.V. with over 8000 employees alongside National Autist Society (UK), Synapsis Foundation (part of Autism Poland), Confederacion Autismo (Spain). A partner in its own category was the Ashoka network that connects individual social entrepreneurs across the globe.

#### b) Beneficiaries

Persons with ASD who work as “consultants” for Specialisterne and its clients.

### Project:

Specialist People Foundation (SPF, Specialisterne) employs mainly people with a diagnosis of ASD, who are placed as “consultants” in other enterprises to work on selected specialist tasks such as software testing, programming and data-entry.

At the core of Specialisterne’s operating model is an assessment program where candidates with ASD go through different exercises, tasks and work situations.

This assessment program helps the candidates to recognise their real personality, skill-set and potential. The thoroughness of the program is demonstrated by its five-month duration.

Specialisterne licenses its model to other countries and this pilot program was aimed at knowledge transfer and sharing of transnational experiences with Germany, Spain, the UK and Poland as a preliminary step to commencing full-scale operations in these four large EU countries.

The project was conducted in a number of work streams, first of all developing best practices and enhancing the “Specialisterne” concept in each link of the business value chain, such as: lead phase; customer contact; identification and scoping; allocation of resources; contracting; kick-off; project/task execution; reporting and delivery to customer; internal evaluation and feedback from consultants; evaluation and feedback from customers etc.

Further work streams included preparing feasibility studies for countries where establishment of operations was foreseen; conducting negotiations and agreements with persons and entities in targeted countries; activating and maintaining networks of businesses both on supplier and customer side; conducting a large-scale publicity and PR campaign – and finding work opportunities for Specialisterne “consultants” in enterprises.

### Results and their sustainability

Review of business processes led to better tools, also to better training process for “consultants”. This was shared with new Specialisterne entities and other social enterprises.

Three feasibility studies concluded that conditions were generally right for implementing Specialisterne operations in the UK, Spain and Poland.

Following the completion of the project, Specialist People Foundation has successfully begun Specialisterne operations in Spain, Germany, Poland and in the UK. Specialisterne is now active in 12 countries worldwide, including Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Ireland, Austria, Switzerland, USA and Canada.

Specialisterne Polska opened its office in Warsaw in October 2012 and offers assessment of persons with ASD in collaboration with two local stakeholders (Synapsis & SOTIS) and employment services within business process outsourcing (BPO). In the initial period 32 candidates have been assessed, trained, and in internship, with 16 persons in employment by November 2012. Specialisterne Polska is seeking additional funding to grow operations and expand into other parts of Poland, including Cracow, Lodz, Wroclaw and Gdansk.

The economic crisis affected negatively the possibilities of finding work for consultants. Particularly in Scotland fewer consultants than hoped were employed - 10 employees at project start and 5 by the end of the period. In Denmark 6 employees were added to existing 33 consultants. 59 people in Denmark and 24 in Scotland were assessed and trained.

More than 50 representatives of private companies were actively engaged during the project period, raising their awareness and willingness to employ consultants with ASD.

The results appear sustainable, as the Specialisterne Foundation is expanding its operations. SPF entered in May 2013 into a global partnership with the enterprise software and solutions industry leader, SAP, and Specialisterne Deutschland is based in Munich and opening up office in Walldorf, near Frankfurt, to work with SAPs on employment of people with autism. Specialisterne Deutschland is seeking additional funding to grow its team and organizational structure in Germany.

Specialisterne Spain has been established in partnership with local partners and investors, and has starting working with people with autism in Barcelona. Madrid will be the next location in Spain in 2014.

In the United Kingdom, Specialisterne UK is operating in Glasgow, Belfast and London. Specialisterne UK is seeking additional funding to grow its operations and expand its UK activities.

In each of the locations the planning assumption is to sustainably create at least 50 jobs over a 3-4 year horizon for people with autism and similar challenges.

## Project Four, Italy

# SWANS – Sustainable Work for Autism Networking Support

Conducted in Umbria, region of Mid-Tiber.

**Duration:** from 17 April 2011 to 16 April 2013

### Participants:

#### a) Project team

Comunità Montana Associazione dei Comuni Trasimeno Medio - Tevere) – project coordinator. Ag.USL Umbria 1, Consorzio Auriga (IT), King' College (UK), Antwerpen Autisme Opleiding Centrum – project partners.

#### b) Beneficiaries

27 persons (aged between 16 and 40) with an autism spectrum disorder, 6 of them female.

#### c) Co-beneficiaries

18 persons receiving tutor training and 50 more social and health workers who attended 3-day training on autism issues.

### Project:

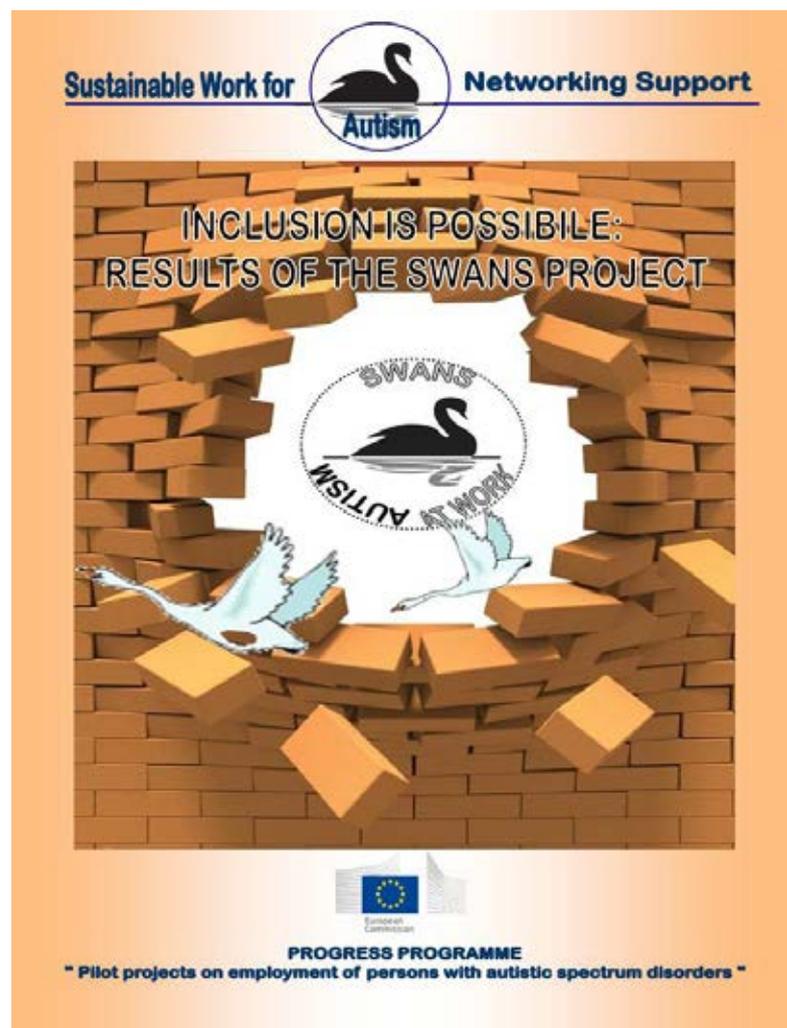
The SWANS-project had a strong academic component, with UK researchers providing systematised knowledge and know-how in the initial phase and also evaluating the feedback from the practical project experience. Unique feature in the context of present pilot projects of the SWANS project was the direct involvement of local health authorities (Ag.USL Umbria 1).

The training of Italian participants, mainly the support personnel, was based on academic knowledge and experiences of a similar undertaking in the UK, the "Prospects" project conducted in London. Italian persons who were to work as tutors were trained and educated based on UK academic and practical experience, but also on

practical experience from the project partner Antwerpen Autisme Opleiding Centrum.

The training provided theoretical knowledge of ASD and of characteristics of persons with ASD. It also provided detailed and systematised overview of practical experiences made in other countries in placing persons with ASD in jobs. Finally, the training provided concrete advice on recommended work environment for persons with ASD and communication advice.

Academic review and training of support personnel were followed by evaluation of potential recruits with ASD, who were mainly proposed by mental health and other



clinical departments (35), with social and job services contributing to some extent (7) and families or family association proposing 1 each.

Series of tests led to selection of 27 persons, 6 of them female. The majority of selected participants were between 19 and 22 years of age, with 4 between 16 and 18 and 1 over 30.

Simultaneously, over 40 employers were approached for placement of persons with ASD in their enterprises. 27 agreements for placements in 25 enterprises were concluded. Among employers willing to offer a job, 9 belonged partly or wholly to the public sector (municipalities, schools, cooperatives). 25 private sector employers came from a wide selection of fields, but generally offered services or goods to general public (hospitality, retail). They were pre-eminently family firms with less than 10 employees.

The duration of placements was between 2 and 12 months, depending on availability of the employers and ASD persons for the placements. All placed persons were supported by a trained tutor/facilitator, who reduced their presence at the workplace in correspondence with increasing autonomy of the placed persons and rising level of awareness and skills in the work environment. Results of the placements were evaluated by three psychologists who focused both on performance indicators of the placed persons and conditions at workplace. After the end of the project, funds raised allowed to continue the expert support to the 14 placements with 12 employers.

## Results and their sustainability

The main impact of the project in the region of Umbria, and more widely, in Italy, was primarily in the areas of awareness and attitude change.

The placements of 14 persons with ASD in jobs that were sustained after the end of the project can be sustained if resources are found to continue expert support. Work to establish permanent systems and structures needs to continue, in the interests of both labour market integration and involvement of authorities.

Practical and theoretical training of support personnel remains sustained, especially if they continue to be engaged in supporting persons with ASD in workplaces.

Increased awareness of stakeholders, especially public authorities appeared sufficiently high at the finish of the project, but will naturally need periodic reinforcing. Materials and publications<sup>(8)</sup> of the SWANS project will be useful for that purpose.

The academic results remain at the disposal of the research community and policymakers; they are thus sustainable and reusable. The project coordinator sees a good use for them in helping to demonstrate to relevant authorities the advantages of including persons with ASD in the mainstream job placement system.

(8)

[www.swans-autism.eu](http://www.swans-autism.eu)

# Findings and recommendations

## Common ground for all projects

First of all, each project saw the necessity to dedicate a significant amount of resources to informing the stakeholders. Potential employers and colleagues of persons with ASD are as a rule insufficiently informed about particularities of this impairment, as well as of the adjustments needed in the workplace. It is often the inability to assess the risks and burdens that creates a reluctance to engage persons with ASD. Projects showed that once the unknown factors became known factors, openness of the employers increased considerably. Informing and training colleagues in the workplace as well as concerned persons in a wider environment of the private and public sector is equally important for successful integration of a person with ASD in workplace.

The second common feature was an individual approach to each person with ASD.

Thirdly, an active approach to job placement was a challenge that all pilot projects took very seriously, tackling it among the very first steps. However time-consuming and challenging the sourcing of job openings may be, it remains absolutely crucial.

Finally, reliable availability of on-going expert support was seen as critical in all projects. This benefits employees with ASD as well as his or her colleagues. With time, the support need may diminish but it cannot be fully withdrawn.

## Regarding jobs that persons with ASD can do and useful training

The position occupied by a person with ASD should offer constant or stable working conditions and duties with very little interaction requirements. Certain areas of business activity already correspond to this description – the examples can be found in franchises operating strictly according to their manuals, services of verification, control or repairs. Jobs in other areas, such as hospitality, food production, outsourcing, consulting or public administration can be adapted, often without great difficulty.

Actions or initiatives aiming to place persons with ASD in a workplace should include training (preceded by assessment) as an integral component. ESI-CEE (Bulgaria) and Oberlinhaus (Germany) explicitly recommend that training programmes should aim to grant a useful professional qualification and accreditation to its participants. If a training curriculum is to be designed, an initiative should focus on only a few similar economic sectors, to allow precise targeting of the training curriculum to particular needs of the jobs in that sector. Specialis-terne business model is also designed around giving very practical qualifications, yet no specific accreditations or diplomas are featured.

## Training of ASD persons to apply for jobs and work

All project findings agree in that training should be based on an objective and detailed psychological and professional profile, prepared for each person with ASD. ESI-CEE also recommends targeting and acquiring employers with this profile, to avoid costly setbacks later.

Fostering the development of facilitating characteristics that employers would expect from any applicant would have a therapeutic or rehabilitating effect on persons with ASD in all areas of life. In addition to realistic assessment of situations and presenting relevant abilities appropriately, the Oberlinhaus project findings highlighted the importance of such perceived qualities as positivity, friendliness and “traditional work ethos”.

## Adjusting workplace and environment

Making adjustments in workplace is akin to solving a rather complicated equation that includes very variable factors such as degree of functioning of a particular ASD person and demands of a particular job. A certain cost factor is an unavoidable part of the solution, particularly as support needs to be provided by specialist job coaches, sometimes also other experts such as psychologists, special pedagogues, speech therapists etc.

Notably, supportive networks in the workplace are ideally complemented by supportive networks in the everyday environment. Oberlinhaus found that, for instance, clear and stable – sometimes assisted – housing conditions are important for a worker with ASD and very helpful in focusing on acquisition of key competencies and development of capacity for independent and goal-oriented work.

Work done by families and voluntary mentors would help to lower the costs of support, investing in incentives for them would be wise, found both Oberlinhaus and ESI-CEE.

### **Involving the stakeholders, raising awareness**

Project findings demonstrate that all related stakeholders should be involved – training organizations, organizations for support of persons with ASD, employer organizations, related state authorities, persons with ASD and their families. In both the environments, where concepts related to employment of persons with ASD were relatively unknown, and the environments, where these concepts have been promoted over several years, the projects invested considerably in raising awareness on ASD and the benefits from hiring people with ASD among employers. The campaigns related to pilot projects lasted at least 6 months, but to achieve sustainable results, also awareness and involvement work should be sustained. Italian project findings underlined that higher level of awareness of stakeholders and general public is important also for establishing a credible claim to share of funding already available from national and EU sources to support training and work placements of unemployed persons.

Methods of raising awareness include workshops, individual meetings and trainings of the managers and mentors, producing guidelines for work with persons with ASD and contacts with employers to ensure consistency between business goals and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

SWANS project in Italy worked to ensure that networks and structures were firmly established in the locality of the project, and in the whole country. Where this has not yet been done, their finding underlined that it is essential to initiate and maintain contacts between the families

and associations of ASD persons and relevant public service providers (health, education, social services).

### **Innovative solutions**

The Specialisterne model where enterprises outsource some processes and also outsource the responsibility for ASD people working on these processes, although already in place since 2005, is innovative. Pilot projects conducted by Specialisterne confirmed that this model could potentially work across the EU, other projects of Specialisterne are expected to demonstrate that it works worldwide. Specialisterne's experience with this project also shows, however, that outsourcing-based business plans are vulnerable to worsening of economic conditions, as potential clients become unwilling to outsource work when they have to cut the numbers of already existing employees.

The SWANS project team proposed an “ethical bonds” solution to secure funding necessary for maintaining expert support. “Ethical bonds” would be debt obligations issued expressly with a link to training and work placement activities for people with disabilities. SWANS was not in a position to test this solution. SWANS was also innovative in trying to insert persons with ASD in small enterprises, which so far had not been seen as having the required resources to make adjustments to workplaces.

Oberlinhaus in Germany made advances in developing an integrated concept of education, training and job placement targeted at developing maximal possible level of independence for persons with ASD.

Finally, ESI-CEE developed their own solutions for training persons with ASD in IT skills and providing them with a qualification certificate.

## Annexes / useful links

### Project One

<http://it-project.autism-bg.net>

### Project Two

<http://www.bbw-oberlinhaus-potsdam.de/informationen/projekte/abgeschlossene-projekte/modellprojekt-abc-jobs-fuer-menschen-mit-autismus-spektrum-stoerung-ass/>

### Project Three

<http://dk.specialisterne.com/en/>

### Project Four

<http://www.swans-autism.eu/swans-project>

### Europe

[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/disabilities/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/disabilities/index_en.htm)

<http://www.autismeurope.org/>

European Commission

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