

State of play of employment of people on the autism spectrum in Europe: barriers, good practices and trends

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About Autism-Europe

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About Autism-Europe



Representing an estimated 7 million people

- International association whose main objective is to **advance the rights of autistic people and their families** and to help them improve their quality of life.
- Autism-Europe brings **together almost 90 associations from 38 European countries**, and liaise with governments and European and international institutions.

About Autism-Europe



Autism-Europe plays a key role in:

- **Influencing the European decision-makers** to combat discrimination and foster inclusion
- **Promoting scientific research** on autism and evidence-based information on autism
- **Running initiatives** to improve the quality of life of people with autism and their families
- **Exchanging best practices**
- **Raising public awareness**

Autism and employment rates


About autism



Around 1% of the European population is on the autism spectrum

- Persistent **difficulties** with **social communication** and **social interaction**
- **Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests** since early childhood, to the extent that these "limit and impair everyday functioning"
- Many autistic people have **sensory sensitivity** and may struggle with sound and light, for example
- **Autism is a spectrum** and will affect each person in a different way

Employment rate of autistic people

A photograph of a young man with dark hair, wearing a blue and green plaid shirt, sitting on the ground and looking down. An orange text box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**73.9% of general population
are employed vs 48.1% for
persons with disabilities**

(European Labour Force Survey)

No official available data, disaggregated by impairment types on employment rates:

- Survey conducted in the UK by the National autistic society indicates that:
 - 16% of autistic people are in full-time work (no change since 2007)
 - 16% in part-time work

Employment rate of autistic people

Estimates indicate that across Europe:

- **< 10% people on the autism spectrum** (mostly employed in low-paid jobs or in sheltered settings)
- **Most of autistic people with high support needs are not in education, employment and training** and are not counted in statistics (i.e. live in institutions or in unsupported families).
- **Unemployment also affects disproportionately autistic people with above-average level of general education** as evidenced by research



Barriers to employment

Barriers to employment

In relation to autism:

- Social, communication and learning difficulties
- Executive functioning

Lack of access to all levels of education and vocational training:

- School drop off and exclusion
- Lack of vocational training opportunities and support

Prejudice amongst employers

- Unable to work
- Unreliability: fear of problems at the workplace

Barriers during the recruitment process

Lack of reasonable accommodation

Barriers to employment

Video- Could you stand the rejection?- National Autistic Society- UK

- Video on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAehvcnFjml>
- More info: <https://www.autism.org.uk/get-involved/campaign.aspx>



Barriers to employment



Lack of adequate support according to the 2018 UK survey by the National Autistic Society:

- **42% of autistic adults say they need employment support, but just 12% receive it**, meaning that the majority who need it do not get it.
- Just 13% said that the care and support they currently get helps them find – or stay in – work. Meanwhile, **37% said more support would help them find work**
- **Only 4% of autistic adults** said the staff working to support **job seekers** have a good understanding of autism.

The strengths of autism and success factors for employment

The strengths of autism



- **Attention to detail**
 - Thoroughness
 - Accuracy



- **Visual skills**
 - Visual learning and recall
 - Detail-focussed



- **Deep focus**
 - Concentration
 - Freedom from distraction



- **Expertise**
 - In-depth knowledge
 - High level of skills



- **Observational skills**
 - Listen, look, learn approach
 - Fact finding



- **Methodical approach**
 - Analytical
 - Spotting, patterns, repetition



- **Absorb and retain facts**
 - Excellent long term memory
 - Superior recall

(source: Harriet Cannon, University of Leeds)

The strengths of autism



- **Novel approaches**
- Unique thought processes
- Innovative solutions



- **Accepting of difference**
- Less likely to judge others
- May question norms



- **Creativity**
- Distinctive imagination
- Expression of ideas



- **Integrity**
- Honesty, loyalty
- Commitment



- **Tenacity and resilience**
- Determination
- Challenge opinions

Success factors to foster access to employment and job retention

Existing research suggests that :

- **Programs** helping people get jobs and stay employed should **consider the strengths of autistic people.**
- **Adopt person-centered, individualized approaches** to identify needs, working to improve the quality of life of each person according to what they want
- **Accommodation in the workplace are essential,** including modifying the task format and the work environment, such as lighting and sound.
- **On-the-job experience is key to success.** It is key to develop programs to gain experience and develop employment outcomes.



Success factors to foster access to employment and job retention



- Employers need **better metrics to know which strategies work and do not work**, with ready access to resources.
- **Employers should increase understanding of autism in the workplace** by offering educational tools to managers and those with direct contact with the autistic employee.
- **The process needs to start early in adolescence** to build “pathways” to employment.

Source: Getting people with autism to work. An international Society For Autism Research Policy Brief. INSAR 2018 https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.autism-insar.org/resource/resmgr/files/policybriefs/2018-insar_policy_brief.pdf

Types of employment and support methods

Types of employment



- **Competitive employment**, including through reasonable accommodation
- **Supported employment** in the labour market with ongoing support on the job
- **Customised employment**, adapting an existing job to the profile of the person
- **Self-employment**, including in social economy
- **Sheltered employment:**

The “right ... to the opportunity to gain his living by work ... freely chosen or accepted” is not realized ... in ... sheltered facilities (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee)

More appropriate when it provides training to develop pre-vocational, vocational and life skills

Types of employment

- **The goal should always be to obtain employment** in the open labour market.
- **Small units of supported or sheltered employment may be an alternative** for persons whose support needs cannot be met in the open labour market
- **The quality of sheltered workshops must be assessed** in terms of their relevance in providing opportunities to gain employment in the labour market.



Support methods



☐ **Specialised guidance and counselling (job counselling and job coaching):**

- Matching jobs with individual strengths, interests and weaknesses
- Providing assistance with interview skills
- Assessing and accommodating the environment (including social aspects and working time)

☐ **On-going support and advice to employees, employers and colleagues**

Examples of good practices in STEM: Job coaching and hiring programmes

Specialisterne - Denmark



- Founded in 2004, offering recruiting, training and support services for people with autism - www.specialistpeople.com
- Helped create hundreds of jobs for people with autism in the field of IT and technology
- Aims to create 1 million jobs for people with autism
- Has branches in several countries worldwide

Specialisterne- Denmark



- Specialisterne works with companies such as SAP, Nokia, Deloitte, Cisco, Microsoft and Oracle
- Highlights the unique characteristics of people with autism which make them valuable assets for companies:
 - attention to detail
 - inclination towards repetitive tasks
 - zero tolerance for mistakes
 - perseverance
 - loyalty

Specialisterne- Denmark



- Each employee with autism starts by following a 5 months training period to assess his/her strengths and support needs
- The work environment is adapted to the employees' needs and specific requirements
- SAP – one of Specialisterne client – believes it gives companies a business advantage to exploit the unique skills of people with autism
- Given the positive results so far, the company has decided to increase the number of employees with autism to 1% by 2020

Passwerk & Auticon



Passwerk and Auticon have developed **similar models of coaching autistic consultants and cooperate with a range of clients**, such as:

- Belgian federal authorities, the Brussels public transport, banks, pharmaceutical companies
- Vodafone, Siemens, Allianz

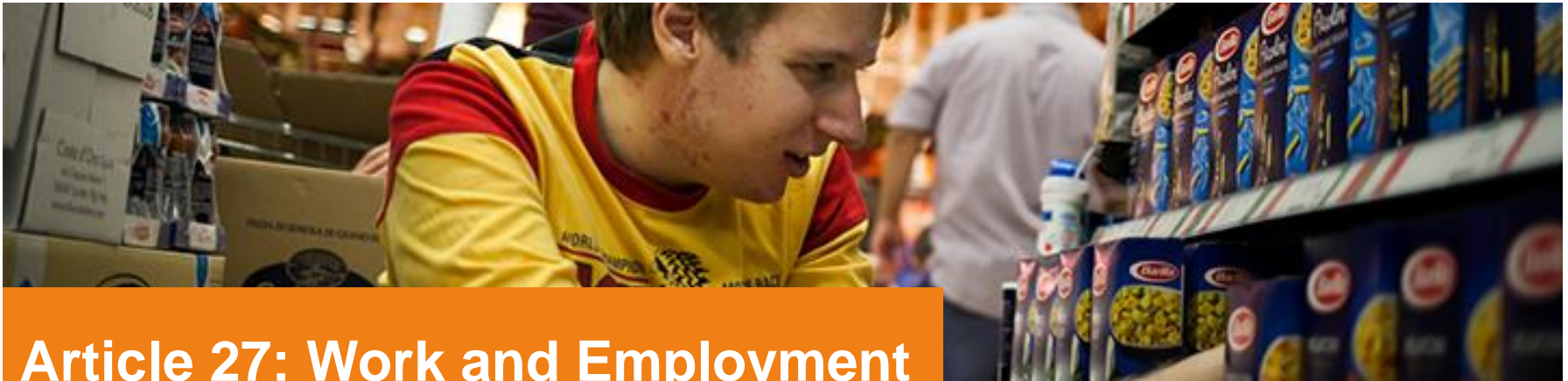
Need to support the diversity of the profiles



- **Sciences and ICT are not the only fields** in which autistic people should be supported.
- Surveys and research suggest that autistic people have interest in **working in diverse areas**, such as:
 - Performing Arts
 - Administrative and office work
 - Library/museums

The legal and policy framework

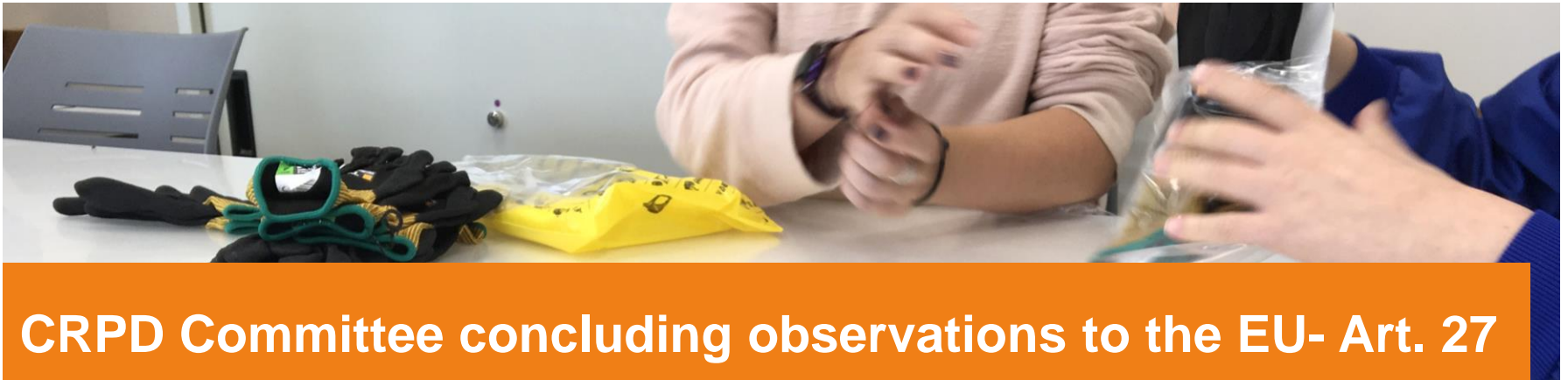
UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities



Article 27: Work and Employment

“Opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible”

UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities



CRPD Committee concluding observations to the EU- Art. 27

In 2015, it was recommended to the EU to:

- take effective actions to **measure the employment of persons with disabilities**;
- **increase their employment rate in the open labour market**, especially for persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities, including by providing training for member States on reasonable accommodation and accessibility in the context of employment.

Sustainable Development Goals



Goal 8- Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

- **Goal 5:** Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for ... persons with disabilities
- **Goal 6:** substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Employment Equality Directive



Directive 2000/78/EC – or the Employment Equality Directive

– prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion and belief, age, disability and sexual orientation.

- **It covers the fields of:**
 - employment & occupation
 - vocational training
 - membership of employer and employee organisations

European Pillar of Social Rights



4. Active support to employment

Everyone has the right to timely and **tailor-made assistance to improve employment or self-employment prospects**. This includes the right to receive support for job search, training and re-qualification. Everyone has the **right to transfer social protection** and training entitlements during professional transitions.



17. Inclusion of people with disabilities

People with disabilities have the right to income support that ensures living in dignity, **services that enable them to participate in the labour market** and in society, and a **work environment adapted to their needs**.

Recommendations for the national and European level

Recommendations at national level



At national level, in cooperation with autism organisations governments should:



- **Collect data and monitor** the number of autistic people in employment and set targets to improve employment rates



- **Develop autism employment pathways** including end-to-end specialist support and monitor outcomes



- **Launch programmes to promote the employment potential of autistic people to employers**, including develop programmes to match their skills with the labour market

Recommendations at national level



At national level, in cooperation with autism organisations governments should:



- **Invest in research** to study the outcomes of autistic adults, identify and develop effective support programmes



- Make sure that **services assisting job seekers are trained in autism** and provide **reasonable accommodation**



- **Promote access to vocational training and apprenticeship**, including by providing incentives to employers

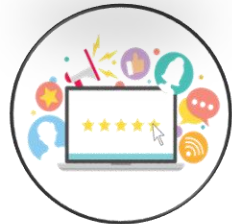
Recommendations at national level



At national level, in cooperation with autism organisations governments should:



- Run pilot programmes for apprenticeships to foster **gold standards**



- Lead by example and **increase work experience schemes for autistic** adults in public administration



- Address the issue of **benefits trap**

Recommendations for the EU level



- Adopt a **strong and ambitious European disability strategy** for the period 2020-2030
- **Adequate resources** should be allocated and **disability should be mainstreamed across all policy sectors, including employment**, via an efficient coordination mechanism
- EC to propose binding legislation **harmonising obligations for employers and national/regional governments** throughout the EU regarding the **provision of reasonable accommodation** for workers with disabilities, including autism.



Recommendations for the EU level



- **Improve data collection on people with disabilities**, including by types of disability
- Adoption of a **strong Regulation for European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** that will use EU funds to foster inclusion of persons with disabilities in society and improve opportunities.
- **Freedom of movement: Harmonisation of disability assessment recognition** to allow persons with disabilities to enjoy freedom of movement and work abroad on an equal footing with others.



Recommendations for the EU level



- **Support research and social investment and initiatives to support inclusion** at work of autistic people
- **Support awareness-raising actions**
- **Cooperating with representative organisations**



Questions?



Sponsors



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Thanks for your attention

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