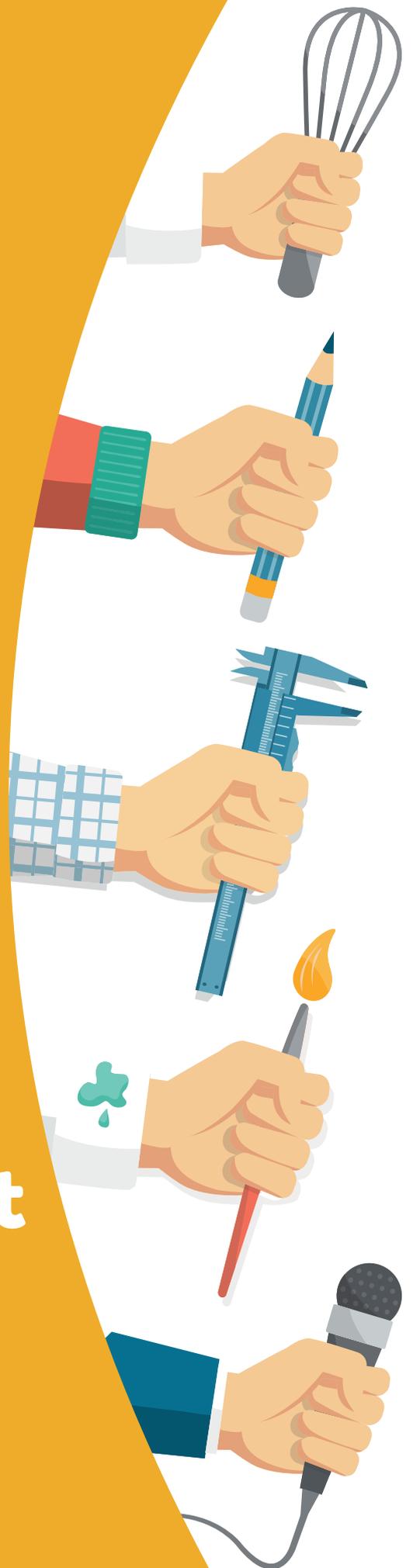


# I can LEARN I can WORK

Europe-wide awareness-raising  
campaign 2020- 2021

## Campaign toolkit annex for 2021

An initiative of:



# Table of contents

## 1. The first stage of the campaign in 2020

- 1.1 Campaign preparations
- 1.2 Actions to mark the day
- 1.3 Advocacy activities

## 2. Updates to the current context

- 2.1 The EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030
- 2.2 The Action Plan for the EU Pillar of Social Rights

## 3. The second stage of the campaign in 2021

- 3.1 Key actions
- 3.2 New key messages
- 3.3 Engaging with the campaign

## 4. New downloadable resources



Easy-to-Read version

## 5. Campaign checklist

# 1. The first stage of the campaign in 2020

In the framework of its Strategy 2018-2021, Autism-Europe (AE) is promoting access to quality inclusive education (including to university and vocational training) and access to employment.

In early 2020, AE launched its two-year awareness-raising campaign "I can LEARN. I can WORK", virtually raising awareness about access to education and employment for people on the autism spectrum.

## 1.1 Campaign preparations

Preparations for the first stage of the campaign, between January and March 2020, included the publication of the campaign toolkit in [English](#), [French](#) and [Easy-to-Read version](#). The campaign toolkit explains the idea behind the theme and outlines in detail how and when people can support the campaign in whichever way they prefer. The toolkit brings together recommendations on how to make people more aware of diversity and inclusion, and builds momentum in pushing for a more inclusive society, notably in relation to education and employment.

In that period, Autism-Europe sent dedicated newsletters in English and in French about the campaign developments to members, key stakeholders and European organisations, and project colleagues. AE also contacted more than 100 key Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and other policy makers to inform them about the campaign and to ask for their support. In terms of cooperation, AE collaborated with the European Disability Forum on the [issue 3 of its "Disability voice"](#), that was devoted to autism and the campaign.

Download the campaign toolkit in [English](#), [French](#) and [Easy-to-Read version](#)

## 1.2 Actions to mark the day

Around the 2nd April, AE announced the winner of its "I can WORK" online competition. Individuals, families, employers or any other interested stakeholders, were invited to share their stories on how autistic people have used their strengths and passion to gain successful employment in diverse fields; or the types of reasonable accommodation they may need.



To mark World Autism Awareness Day, AE released a [video](#) and kept up momentum by sharing key messages of the campaign on social media and monitoring the hashtag #AutismDay2020. To showcase the reach of the campaign, a [dedicated webpage](#) was also created.

Other activities undertaken in the framework of the campaign in 2020 included the dissemination of images and messages of EU Policy-makers supporting the campaign, the [online conference on access to education](#) in June 2020, and the generation of buzz on social media for the campaign when posting about related policy topics or key days (ex. Teachers Day, Back to school, etc.).



MEP Dolors Montserrat (Spain) doing the campaign's gesture



### 1.3 Advocacy activities

In terms of advocacy, AE called for an ambitious European Disability Strategy for 2021-2030 that leaves no one behind and takes into account the diversity of disability, support and accessibility needs.

A [feedback paper](#) was released in response to the European Commission's roadmap for the upcoming Disability Rights Strategy. In the paper, AE addresses specific areas of action to be considered including access to education and employment.

In November 2020, AE issued its [response to the European Commission's consultation](#) on the future action plan that is needed for the European Pillar of Social Rights' implementation, to be presented in early 2021. It includes key demands and recommendations to help autistic people reach their full potential and to be included in the community through equal opportunities in terms of access to education and employment; fair working conditions; social protection and inclusion; and the promotion of European values in places of work. AE also contributed to a consultation regarding the [EU Child Guarantee](#), to highlight the needs in terms of access to health, early child care, and education.



Within the field of employment, AE has been working closely with MEP Katrin Langensiepen (Greens/EFA, Germany) to draft a report on the equal treatment of persons with disabilities in employment. The [draft report](#) outlines the current situation and discusses the inequality of and the discrimination against persons with disabilities in the labour market. It was made clear in the report that Member States and the European Union are not yet meeting their commitments to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. On October 15th, MEP Langensiepen presented the draft report to the EMPL committee of the European Parliament.



In 2020, AE has been involved in six different EU projects fostering inclusion on education and employment:

- [ASD-EAST](#)– Autism Spectrum Disorder-Empowering and Supporting Teachers
- [Train-ASD](#)– Vocational training on communication and teaching approaches for autistic people
- [ChildIN](#)– Training childminders across Europe for inclusion
- [IPA2](#)– Improving school transitions
- [IVRAP](#)– Virtual reality to support learning
- [IVEA](#)– Innovative Vocational Education for Autism

## 2. Updates to the current context

The release of the European Disability Strategy for 2021-2030 and the Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as the announcement of the Child Guarantee are marking the first months of 2021. These landmarks to support the rights of people with disabilities in the European Union set the pace for our campaign actions, as access to education and employment for autistic people have a strong presence within these instruments.

Our demands and key messages will be based on the common needs across Europe and will also highlight the importance of:

- Having a holistic approach to autism as access to education and employment are linked;
- Supporting the implementation of the European Disability Strategy 2021-2030 that supports access to employment and quality education;
- Supporting the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Work Life Balance directive (an important instrument for carers' leave) at national level;
- Advocating for a EU guideline on reasonable accommodation, so that all types of accessibility needs are taken into consideration.
- Advocating for adequate use of EU funds to support inclusion
- Advocating for an adequate response to the COVID-19 emergency that leaves no one behind; etc.

In the field of employment, on March 10th 2021 the European Parliament adopted the report entitled "Establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, taking into account the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)".

It was drawn up by MEP Langensiepen who consulted with 9 organisations representing people with disabilities, including Autism-Europe and the European Disability Forum, four human

rights groups, the European Network of Equality Bodies and two academic disability experts. The report exposes how the European Union member states are still failing to meet their obligation to guarantee a right to accessible employment for people with disabilities. It demands: the phasing out of sheltered workshops not in line with the UNCRPD; EU guidelines on reasonable accommodation; diversity quotas; Universal Design; intersectionality consideration; mutual recognition of disability status; and data collection disaggregated by gender, age, types

[Click here](#) to download the report in full (Easy-to-Read version made possible in collaboration with Autism-Europe and Inclusion Europe can be found on page 5), or scan the following QR code:



(from page 5)



of disability, ethnic origin and sexual orientation. In the field of education, the European Commission released in September 2020 its Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027). Embedded in the European Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030, the plan includes some references to the needs of learners with disabilities as Member states are supported in securing assistive technologies and in providing accessible digital learning environments and content. Autism-Europe, together with other disability organisations including the European Disability Forum (EDF), is happy to see its concerns reflected clearly in this communication, but more concrete actions are needed for a real impact.

EDF, took part actively in the consultation linked to the action plan and submitted a position paper outlining the major issues learners with disabilities face in accessing digital education. EDF also focused on the challenges learners have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Click here](#) to download EDF's response to the European Commission's Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027, or scan the following QR code:



Access to education is a key factor for inclusion



In addition to the campaign, AE has been involved in new European projects related to education and employment in 2021. The Neurodivergent project aims to support teachers and educational professionals on how to approach and work with autistic students in initial VET. AE is also a partner of the ALERRT project which works to educate first responders across Europe on how to recognise, interact, and appropriately assist people on the autism spectrum in cases of emergency.

In terms of employment projects, WIN-WITH-U focuses on improving the inclusion of autistic people in the work world, by providing training to employers and firms and supporting autistic people in their journey toward employment.

Given the current situation involving the COVID-19 pandemic, AE conducted a survey to better understand the ways in which autistic people and their families have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the results of the survey, we put together a report and outlined recommendations for how autistic people and their families can be better supported during the pandemic and beyond.



[Click here](#) to download the Autism-Europe's report: "Impact of COVID-19 on autistic people and their families across Europe", or scan the following QR code:



## 2.1 The EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021- 2030

The European Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030 has arrived at a unique time as persons with disabilities are facing many new difficulties and barriers. Released in March 2021, the Strategy aims to deliver significant improvements to all areas of the lives of persons with disabilities within the EU and beyond. Over the coming decade, this Strategy will support both Member States and EU institutions in their endeavour to implement the UNCRPD. Throughout the consultation and review stages of the strategy, Autism-Europe has actively contributed to voice the needs of autistic people.

AE welcomes that the Strategy specifically raises awareness of the missing "systematic research (...) so far on the conditions necessary for learners with disabilities to succeed, including learners with invisible disabilities such as autism, dyslexia, or hyperactivity". Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, AE agrees that the strategy notes that "persons with invisible disabilities (such as chronic pain or intellectual disabilities), with rare diseases or with cancer, that often lead to impairments, do not always receive the tailored support needed nor do women and refugees with disabilities".

The strategy includes policies and actions on inclusive education systems and effective pathways to fair employment for persons with disabilities. It sets targets for: improving the skill development of people with disabilities for new jobs; supporting the development of teacher education systems to manage diversity in the classroom; developing a toolkit for inclusion in early childhood education and care with a chapter on children with disabilities; establishing sub-Working groups in the European Schools System under the UNCRPD; and adopting an action plan on educational support and inclusive education.

The Commission will support EU Member States in implementing relevant employment guidelines throughout the European Semester and developing statistical tools. The Commission will also promote the exchange of best practices and ensure rigorous application by Member States of the rights covered by the Employment Equality Directive and reporting on directive's application. An action plan on social economy including opportunities will be proposed and implemented through social enterprise with focus on integration into open labour market, therefore increasing the employment rate of people with disabilities.

Furthermore, the Commission will lead by example by renewing its Human Resources strategy action to boost the recruitment, effective employment and career perspectives of staff with disabilities via a Diversity and Inclusion Office and mandatory staff trainings.

Some people with disabilities in paid employment lose forms of financial support. The strategy's proposal for guidance on reforms is welcomed but it should emphasise the importance of disability assessment in order to ensure that enough financial support is provided to allow for life of dignity in the community.

Employment and trainings of people with disabilities still takes place in sheltered workshops not compliant with the UNCRPD. While community based living is a corner stone of the Strategy, a strategy for deinstitutionalisation is needed. EU funds should not be used to make small group homes which classify as institutions.

The objectives of this Strategy will need to be achieved through a strong commitment by the Member States to promote the outlined policies and take action. "I can LEARN. I can WORK" aims to support the implementation of the European Disability Strategy 2021-2030, specifically it's goals on access to employment and quality education at an EU level.

## 2.2 The Action Plan for the EU Pillar of Social Rights

Launched in 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights seeks to provide a framework for better assessing if countries' social and employment policies are in line with EU recommendations, and for providing guidance on how to improve them. It builds upon 20 key principles including the inclusion of people with disabilities, active support to employment, secure and adaptable employment, access to education, training and life-long learning and equal opportunities. The action plan outlines the measures the EU Commission will take to ensure these principles are addressed.

The Commission calls on the Member States, social partners and other relevant actors like regional and local authorities as well as civil society organisations to put the high social standards reflected in the Pillar at the centre of their investments and reforms powering the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Action plan, released shortly after the Disability Rights Strategy, puts forward EU level actions for the further implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, in order to build a stronger Social Europe for just transitions and recovery.

It sets three EU headline targets for 2030:

1. At least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030.
2. At least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year.
3. The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million by 2030.



Only 50.8% of persons with disabilities are in employment compared to 75% without disabilities. Employment helps people to live fuller and more independent lives. It is necessary to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to participate in the labour market to the fullest extent of their capacity. This will also contribute to a more inclusive employment growth.

Especially important for the employment of people with disabilities is the revised Social Scoreboard. Together with other disability associations, AE has called for disability indicators of the Social Scoreboard. AE welcomes the new indicator 'disability employment gap'.

Given the impact of modernisation and automation, it is fundamental that workers acquire new digital skills. It is therefore important to create new and sustained opportunities for lifelong learning for the whole population.

About 28.4% of persons with disabilities are at risk of poverty and social exclusion compared to 18.4% of persons without disabilities. Lifting people out of poverty and indicating a specific target for children living in poverty is crucial. Reducing child poverty also means breaking the cycle of disadvantaged children becoming disadvantaged adults.

The "I can LEARN. I can WORK" campaign seeks to highlight the importance of supporting the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and encouraging Member States to adopt it at the Social Summit in Porto on 7–8 May 2021. This event will provide the opportunity to confirm, at the highest political level, the commitment and ambition to put people first in Europe's recovery and beyond.

## 3. The second stage of the campaign in 2021

Although there have been many changes and challenges since the launch of the campaign in early 2020, AE has adapted its campaign taking into account the current situation in order to better address the needs of the autism community. Therefore, in addition to access to education and employment, the campaign also addresses specific COVID-19 related topics including distance education, reasonable accommodation, mental health and pandemic related challenges.

### 3.1 Key actions

The first stage of the campaign presented the following goals:

1. To raise global awareness of autism in society and promote better understanding of how to include and support autistic people
2. To advocate for the rights of autistic people in relation to education and employment
3. To share know-how and expertise across Europe in relation to education and employment

As AE moves into the second stage of the campaign, the current situation and the needs of the autism community at this time must be taken into account. In light of this, AE has decided to add new goals and objectives for the campaign to address.

#### New campaign objectives in 2021:

**To raise awareness about the COVID-19 related challenges autistic people are currently facing**

- Bring to light the mental health struggles of autistic people;
- Advocate for legislation and policies on reasonable accommodation (more specifically during the pandemic).

**To place emphasis on the right to learn and the right to work (even during the pandemic and its containment measures)**

- Raise awareness on the challenges of distance education/ e-learning/ working from home and promote access to this form of education.

**To address EU policy areas and use them as tools to support the campaign objectives**

- Promote the new EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021- 2030;
- Advocate for an increase in structural and investment funds;
- Support the implementation of the EU Pillar of Social Rights and its new Action Plan.

### 3.2 New Key messages

**“Enough resources must be allocated to support the individual needs of autistic learners”**

*COVID-19 has impacted the way autistic people learn with many of them being unable to continue learning or engaging in learning to a lesser extent.*

**“Mental health for autistic people should be addressed, including improved availability and access to personalised, affordable, evidence and community-based services”**

*There has been an increase in mental health issues of autistic people during the pandemic due to stress caused by lack of support and inability to use their usual coping strategies.*

**“Information about COVID-19 must be available to autistic people in a variety of accessible formats”**

*There is a lack of initiatives from public authorities across the EU to provide continuous updates and information about the COVID-19 situation.*

**“People on the autism spectrum must enjoy all rights”**

*The actions proposed under the European Disability Rights Strategy and the action plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights should be implemented ambitiously. Flagship initiatives like the EU Disability Card should be made available everywhere for autistic people as well.*

**“Reasonable accommodation in terms of testing, treatment and vaccination procedures is needed”**

*The accessibility of testing and vaccination procedures should be enhanced by providing preparatory materials to demonstrate the procedure in advance, having quiet waiting areas and alternative testing procedures (e.g. saliva testing).*

**“Autistic people belong to an at-risk group and need vaccination prioritisation”**

*People with disabilities are considered at-risk groups but autistic people have not always been included in the category for vaccination prioritization.*

**“Employment for autistic people should be safeguarded and employers should be aware of how to support autistic workers during the pandemic”**

*There has been a rise in unemployment and a shift in working culture due to COVID-19 which has directly affected autistic people. To help them we need to know how many autistic people are in employment. The European Commission's revised Social Scoreboard includes the disability employment gap which is a step in the right direction.*

**Click [here](#) to download more key messages of the campaign on education and employment**



### 3.3 Engaging with the campaign

Similar to the last year, AE will be raising awareness virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting restrictions. AE advises everyone who would like to get involved in the campaign to plan and conduct activities online. AE invites all interested stakeholders to join the campaign virtually, as there are still many ways to get involved!

#### A. On-demand webinar “I can LEARN. I can WORK”

In order to mark World Autism Awareness Day (April 2), AE will be hosting the webinar “I can LEARN. I can WORK”, as a part of its long-running awareness campaign 2020-2021. The webinar will take place on Tuesday, March 30th at 12:00 (CET) and an on-demand version will be available until April 30th.

This webinar will voice AE’s demands and key messages based on common needs across Europe (see point 2 of this document).

If you are unable to make the webinar, why not host your own? Online events are incredibly easy to organize and can reach a wide range of stakeholders. A virtual event can target professionals, autistic people, policy-makers or other interested parties within your network depending on your resources and profile. Screenshots of the event can be taken and shared online to achieve further coverage.

#### B. Tune into The Different Minds podcast

This year for World Autism Awareness Day, AE has partnered with journalist John Offord to record a special episode for his Different Minds podcast series about the importance of fostering employment and education for autistic people. The podcast will feature a main interview with a member of AE on the autism spectrum and other points of view from autistic people and their families across the EU, including the challenges they have faced due to the pandemic.

Keep an eye out on AE’s online channels for an announcement about the podcast in the coming weeks. You are invited to promote it online and incorporate it into activities you may be organising in the framework of the campaign.

#### C. Share the campaign’s new key messages and resources online

AE has fine-tuned key messages for the new aims of the campaign and developed social media teasers and resources based on them for supporters of the campaign to share. For tips on sharing teasers and resources on social media please see page 18 of the Toolkit.

Additionally, AE has put together a sample press-release that can be adapted for your organisation’s needs and shared with local media at the time of the campaign’s launch, or simply when organising an online campaign related event.

Both the resources and the press-release can be downloaded from the “new downloadable resources” section below.

Further actions to get involved in the campaign:

- Reach out to possible ambassadors and involve (national and international) famous/influential people.
- Increase visibility on TV and social media channels.
- Help mobilise the autistic community.
- Campaign on social media (Make the campaign gesture and sharing it using the hashtag #AutismDay2021).
- Advocate at various levels for the demands of the campaign.

To effectively address a wide range of stakeholders in society – general population, professionals, employers, policy-makers (both at national and EU-level) etc. – each action will have a specific target and different key communication tools that can be perfectly adapted by all our members when they need.

## 4. Downloadable resources



**New tools for 2021**  
Teasers and resources for Facebook- LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram.



Click on the icon to the left to access this Annex in Easy to Read version



Click on the icon to the left to access the toolkit in Easy to Read version



#### Visual identity

Official visuals, fonts, banner in A4, support images, acceptable language.



#### Marketing tools

Web ads, flyers, posters, infographics, email signature.



#### Promotional tools

Business card, roll-up banner, table-tent, A4 document template.



#### Social Media tools

Teasers and resources for Facebook- LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram.



#### Press & Advocacy tools

Press release and manifesto

## 5. Campaign checklist

Now that you have read the Toolkit and Annex, AE hopes you are ready to launch and promote this initiative with us and make this campaign a great success over the next few months! Here’s a checklist to follow summarizing the next steps you should take:

- I have familiarized myself with the new features and tools of the campaign
- I have translated the resources (including the visuals)
- I have contacted policy-makers about our key political demands: how to address the needs of autistic people to access education and employment
- I have taken pictures doing the “holding a tool” gesture, or with the campaign visual
- I am sharing them on social media using the hashtag #AutismDay2021
- I have informed my friends, members and partners about the campaign and invited them to join
- I have mobilised ambassadors to join the campaign and help spread the message
- I have organised events in line with the campaign
- I have translated or adapted the press-release and the manifesto for my local context

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