



PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday 30th March 2021

***To be released the 2nd April 2021, on the occasion of World Autism Awareness Day**

Autism-Europe calls on the EU to better develop access to education and employment

- Autism-Europe (AE) is running the **Europe-wide two-year campaign “I can LEARN. I can WORK”** to inform and raise awareness on access to education and employment for people on the autism spectrum, even during the pandemic and its containment measures.
- To mark World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD), April 2, AE encourages all members of society to perform the campaign **“holding a tool” gesture** as a way of showing the diversity of ability that society can nurture to be more inclusive.
- On March 30th, AE held an **online webinar** to discuss **the state of play of education and employment of autistic people in Europe, and their support needs during the pandemic.**

It is estimated that **5 million people are on the autism spectrum** in the European Union. Most of them experience widespread discrimination in many areas of life as well as social exclusion. In order to respond to the daily challenges autistic people face, the **campaign “I can LEARN, I can WORK”** is centered around two key themes that are necessary for the social inclusion of autistic people: access to education and employment. During the second stage of the campaign in 2021, **specific COVID-19 related topics** including distance education, reasonable accommodation, mental health and pandemic related challenges are being addressed too.

One of the objectives is to promote access to quality inclusive education (including to university and vocational training) for autistic people and tackling the barriers they face across Europe. The other objective is to foster positive initiatives related to the employment of autistic people and to call for the implementation of EU anti-discrimination legislation in the field of employment. Indeed, it is estimated that across the European Union **less than 10% people on the autism spectrum are employed** mostly in low-paid jobs or in sheltered settings.

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** mark the first months of 2021. These developments to support the rights of people with disabilities in the European Union will set the pace for our campaign actions, as access to education and employment for autistic people have a strong presence within these instruments.



Autism-Europe's key demands

- We need **adapted support and reasonable accommodation** to benefit from education and access to employment
- We need to have access to **vocational training and lifelong learning opportunities**
- **Fostering the strengths of autistic learners** implies flexibility of curriculums and infrastructure
- We need guidelines and concrete action to support **the prevention of abuse and bullying** against people on the autism spectrum
- National and regional governments should adopt **binding legislation for reasonable accommodation** in employment addressing the needs of autistic workers.
- Support **awareness-raising of employers** regarding the potential of autistic workers in a variety of domains
- **Benefits trap must be tackled** by EU member states
- We need **harmonised disability recognition** to allow autistic people to enjoy their right to work abroad
- We advocate for **adequate use of EU funds** to support inclusion
- We call for an **adequate response to the COVID-19 emergency that leaves no one behind**

On-demand webinar “I can LEARN, I can WORK”

In these challenging times for the autistic community, AE hosted the webinar “I can LEARN. I can WORK”, on March 30th, and released an on-demand version which will be available until April 30th.

The **European Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli and Members of the European Parliament Katrin Langensiepen and Chiara Gemma** provided insight into the rights and needs of people with disabilities across Europe in terms of education and employment. Autistic people and their families, autism organisations, professionals, employers, EU policy-makers and the general population took also part of this **collaborative online event**.

Commissioner Helena **Dalli** said: *“For people with invisible disabilities such as the autism spectrum, life can be especially difficult as they may not always receive the needed tailored support. I am grateful for the invaluable work of experts and civil society organisations who on a daily basis are ensuring that every single citizen’s access to education and employment on an equal basis with others. The pursuit of equality does require a collective dedication and our strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 is a step further towards a Union of Equality.”*

[Click here for more information](#)



How can I support the campaign?

People willing to support the campaign can post pictures of themselves on social media using the hashtag [#AutismDay2021](#). They can either hold a tool that represents one of their skills (it can be linked either with their ability to learn, or their ability to work on a specific field) or hold the campaign visual.

AE has also released a [campaign toolkit](#) (and a [special annex for 2021](#)) that explains the objectives of the campaign and includes communication materials and strategies, as well as in [Easy-To-Read format](#) (also for the [2021 annex](#)).

Notes to editors

[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-Europe](#) is an 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. It ensures effective liaison among 90-member autism organisations in 38 European countries, including 25 Member States of the European Union, governments and European and international institutions.

Acceptable language: Autism-Europe operates on the principle of respect for diversity. AE feels that it is important to use language that people are comfortable with. However, there are some terms that are likely to cause offense and that it is advisable to avoid using.

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