



© Source : freepik.com
© Photo from the INFUSE project 2023

BRIDGING THE AUTISM EMPLOYMENT GAP IN EUROPE:

A COMPENDIUM OF CURRENT PRACTICES AND INITIATIVES

Table of content

Executive summary	03
Introduction	04
1. The urgent need to tackle the autism employment gap and comply with the right to work on an equal basis with others	05
2. The strengths of autistic people in the workplace	07
2.1. The spectrum of skills of autistic employees and jobseekers	07
2.2. The advantage of hiring neurodivergent employees	08
3. Supporting autistic people in the workplace: a guide	09
3.1. Talking about autism in the workplace: language and approaches	09
3.2. How to adapt the recruitment process to attract neurodivergent talent	09
3.3. Reasonable accommodations in the workplace	10
4. Employment Lexicon	11
5. Compendium of good practice practice in the field of employment for autistic people: international examples	11
5.1. Examples of public and non-governmental services dedicated to awareness raising and supporting recruitment	11
5.2. Job coaching	14
5.3. Examples of work inclusion programmes in the agricultural and handicraft sectors	18
5.4. Examples of work inclusion programmes in the hospitality, food and tourism sectors	22
5.5- Inclusion projects in private companies	24
5.6. Self-employment activities	24
5.7. Traineeships or trial period employment opportunities	25
6. Key practical resources and tools of European projects to support access to employment for autistic people	25
7. Conclusion	28

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



© Source: AdobeStock

Executive summary

An estimated 7 million autistic people live in Europe. Studies show that between 75 to 90% of autistic adults are unemployed despite many having the willingness and ability to participate in the labour market with the right support. The reasons behind these unemployment rates include widespread discrimination against autistic people, lack of access to adapted training and education pathways, lack of understanding of autism and the employable skills of autistic people, lack of provision of reasonable accommodation in the workplace as well as insufficient employment programmes to support the participation of disabled workers.

The fact that millions of Europeans on the autism spectrum are being denied their right to be included in the world of work is in breach of disability legislation that protects autistic people's fundamental right to access and stay in employment, in line with Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UN CRPD). European legislation adopted across the EU through the European Commission's Directive 2000/78/EC also establishes disabled people's right to be protected against discrimination in the workplace. European and national strategies on disability such as the EU Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030 (ESRPD) as well as national disability or autism-specific plans also make accessing employment a priority. Unfortunately, the autism employment gap demonstrates that the effective implementation of the measures protecting and promoting disabled workers' right to access reasonable accommodation and support in training and employment is still a long way away.

This compendium includes examples of a range of programmes supporting autistic people in vocational training and employment,

through traineeships or trial period employment opportunities, job coaching services or public and non-governmental services focusing on supporting the recruitment of autistic people and raising awareness on autism and across different sectors (agricultural, farming, handicraft, tourism, IT, etc.). Several of the programmes outlined in this document are tailored towards autistic jobseekers and workers with high support needs and take the form of rehabilitation services or sheltered workshops. It is important that these programmes are used to support autistic people to transition into the open labour market, in line with the UN CRPD.

It is also key to note that many of these examples rely on private donations and initiatives and that many autistic people remain without any support to access the world of work. We call for additional and continued public funding at European and national levels to be earmarked for measures that support inclusive employment of autistic people, in particular to help them in finding, obtaining and maintaining employment. Supported employment programmes and job coaching services highlight the importance of adopting a strengths-based approach to autism, where autistic people's individual skills are valued. Every autistic person has their own strengths but many share attention to detail, a unique perspective, reliability and value for repetition as some of their skills. It is also essential that the workplace becomes truly inclusive and that individual accommodation needs (for example in the area of communication or executive function) are recognised and adequately supported. Inclusive hiring practices can benefit the labour market and should be seen as investments, which profit not only the autistic community but also society as a whole.

Introduction

© Photo from the INFUSE project 2023, AGSAT



The purpose of this compendium of good practices is to offer an overview of current programmes and services that successfully promote or support the employment of people on the autism spectrum at European level. Despite existing legislation and policies in place around the EU, the autistic community remains disproportionately affected by unemployment, potentially reaching 90%, which constitutes a breach of their right to work on an equal basis with others. In the meantime, studies suggest that promoting employment opportunities and training for autistic jobseekers – and the neurodiverse population in general – not only increases inclusion in society but also widens the scope of the workforce and even has the potential to improve productivity.

This compendium will first address the importance of adopting a strengths-based approach to autism, identifying the skills and possible support needs of autistic jobseekers and employees to ensure accessibility and tailored reasonable accommodations in the workplace. The ultimate objective is to promote and improve job opportunities, benefitting autistic people but also society as a whole. This document will then provide concrete international examples of inclusion programmes, training pathways, supported employment services as well as European projects on these topics to provide practical insights on how inclusion in employment has been achieved so far and its positive impact.

This compendium has been elaborated in the context of the INFUSE (seedling competences and harvesting work inclusiveNess For adUlt antiStic people) Erasmus+ project carried out in 2022 and 2023 by three partners: A.G.S.A.T. (Associazione Genitori Soggetti Autistici del Trentino – Parents Association of Persons with Autism Trentino, Italy – project coordinator), social cooperative Tuttoverde (Italy) as well as European NGO Autism-Europe. The objective of INFUSE is notably to develop vocational training pathways for autistic adults to work in the agricultural sector by developing their skills in the field of officinal plant cultivation and sale, to train educators to improve educational programmes for adults on the autism spectrum in the agricultural sector as well as to promote autism awareness.¹



© Photo from the INFUSE project 2023, AGSAT



© Photo from the INFUSE project 2023, AGSAT

1 INFUSE project webpage on Autism-Europe's website: <https://www.autismeurope.org/blog/what-we-do/infuse-seedling-competences-and-harvesting-work-inclusiveness-for-adult-autistic-people/>

1. The urgent need to tackle the autism employment gap and comply with the right to work on an equal basis with others

People with disabilities are disproportionately affected by unemployment compared to the overall population, and studies suggest that the autistic community has even higher unemployment rates, potentially reaching 90%.² Currently, the disability employment gap in the EU sits at around 23% and considering a 73% overall employment rate, this means that approximately only half of disabled people in the Union are employed.³ As there is no official European data on employment rates per type of disability, we have to rely on surveys and studies for additional information on the employment rate of autistic people, some pointing to a 5-15% rate.⁴

In Italy, where the INFUSE project was designed and implemented, although the disability employment gap is lower than the EU average mentioned above, at roughly 15%, an overall difficult national context in terms of employment rates and conditions must be taken into account, as well as a lack of recent data regarding disability.⁵

A 2019 report by the Italian National Institute of Statistics on the topic of disability highlighted the impact of education and training level when it comes to employment rates as well as the low engagement of the private sector in hiring people with disabilities.⁶ These are two challenges that our INFUSE project has sought to address by providing an adapted training and job placement path for autistic adults in the agricultural sector, aligning with European and national Italian objectives for inclusion in the labour market.



© The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations

At the European level, autistic people's rights in the field of employment are protected under legislation relating to people with disabilities. At international level, the rights of people with disabilities to access, freely accept, retain employment and be protected against discrimination are enshrined in Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) dedicated to 'work and employment'. This founding human rights treaty, which promotes a social approach to disability instead of a medical one, was ratified by all EU countries and by the European Union itself in 2010. As it is legally binding, State Parties committed to pass legislation in accordance with its principles. Article 27 focuses specifically on employment stating that:

'1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, [...] by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation. [...]

*2. States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are not held in slavery or in servitude, and are protected, on an equal basis with others, from forced or compulsory labour.'*⁷

- 2 Marco Fasciglione, "Article 27 of the CRPD and the Right of Inclusive Employment of People with Autism" in Protecting the Rights of People with Autism in the Fields of Education and Employment: International, European and National Perspectives, p. 146; Autism-Europe, "I can learn, I can work: Europe-wide awareness-raising campaign 2020-2021" (2021), accessed March 2023; Autism-Europe, Autism and Work: Together we can (Autism-Europe, 2014), p. 53.
- 3 "Employment – annual statistics as percentage of the population aged 20 to 64 in the EU", Eurostat (2023), accessed March 2023. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment_-_annual_statistics; "Disability employment gap by level of activity limitation and sex (source EU-SILC)", Eurostat (2023), accessed March 2023. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tepsr_sp200/default/table?lang=en
- 4 Observatoire de l'emploi et du handicap – études et statistiques, Autisme et emploi : état des lieux et perspectives, Agefiph (April 2023), p. 18.
- 5 Elena Vivaldi, Paolo Addis, European Semester 2022-2023 country fiche on disability equality: Italy, Human European Consultancy for the European Commission (January 2023), p. 12.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN online source, accessed March 2023. https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convention_accessible_pdf.pdf

This Article includes a wide-range of provisions, such as access to training programmes, employment in the public and private sectors, anti-discrimination measures, access to the open-labour market and the right to reasonable accommodation in the workplace. Reasonable accommodation in the workplace is usually defined as an adjustment provided to an employee so that they are able to perform their work tasks on an equal footing with others. For autistic workers, reasonable accommodation can involve a schedule adaption, a work station adjustment, light or acoustic changes, use of alternative communication techniques, etc. It is important to note however that every person on the autism spectrum has different needs and that therefore, reasonable accommodation should be tailored to each individual .

The UN CRPD is the guiding framework for European and national policy and legislation regarding disability. European disability strategies, including the latest EU Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030 (ESRPD), national disability plans (e.g. the Belgian Federal Action Plan for Disability 2021-2024), as well as autism-specific plans (e.g. the Spanish Autism Strategy) follow its principles in view of supporting its full implementation. The ESRPD aims to promote disability rights by fostering EU-wide initiatives and cooperation between the European institutions, national governments and civil society. The Disability Employment Package, the core employment initiative from the ESRPD, includes several measures that seek to tackle unemployment, such as the promotion of reasonable accommodation, the publication of toolkits and guidelines promoting employment opportunities for disabled people as well as the development of adapted employment pathways for disabled people. ⁸

In European legislation, the main pillar in the field of anti-discrimination with regards to employment is the ‘Employment Equality Directive’



© Source: Andreas Lischka, Pixabay

or the ‘Framework Equality Directive 2000/78/EC’, which EU Member States have transposed by passing national legislation to implement it at national level. Based on the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it protects the basic rights to equal access to employment and to be protected against discrimination based on disability (among others) in the context of employment, training, wages and labour conditions. ⁹ Despite all EU Member States having adopted legislation in order to comply with the Directive, the effectiveness of the implementation of the anti-discrimination and quota measures are unequal among and within countries.

Italy signed the UN CRPD in 2007 and ratified it two years later through the 18/2009 Law. As it pertains to employment, the Convention has also had an impact on non-discrimination legislation ‘the scope of which has been evidently enlarged to encompass the failure to provide reasonable accommodation as a form of indirect discrimination’. ¹⁰ Italy’s 68/1999 Law, which seeks to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market through support services and targeted work programmes, ¹¹ recently benefitted in 2022 from changes to the fines companies must pay when infringing disability employment quotas as well as ‘Guidelines for targeted employment’. ¹²

8 European Commission online source, accessed March 2023. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1597&langId=en>

9 Danielle Bunt, Robin van Kessel, Rosa A. Hoekstra, Katarzyna Czabanowska, Carol Brayne, Simon Baron-Cohen and Andres Roman-Urrestarazu, “Quotas, and Anti-discrimination Policies Relating to Autism in the EU: Scoping Review and Policy Mapping in Germany, France, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Slovakia, Poland and Romania” in *Autism Research*, Vol. 13 (2020), p. 1410; *Autism-Europe, Autism and Work: Together we can*, p. 16.

10 Lisa Waddington and Anna Lawson (eds), *The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Practice: A Comparative Analysis of the Role of Courts* (Oxford, 2018; online edition, Oxford Academic, 19 July 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198786627.001.0001>.

11 Vivaldi and Addis, *European Semester 2022-2023 country fiche on disability equality: Italy*, p. 13.

12 Ibid.

Despite these policies to promote employment for people with disabilities, researchers point to an uneven commitment to these inclusion programmes depending on geographical location, as the southern regions have implemented fewer measures compared to the northern and central ones. Despite very recent efforts in Italy to promote accessibility in the workplace by introducing guidelines for the use of accessible technology as well as national strategies for skill development, inclusion and promotion of disabled workers in the labour market continues to fall short of the expectations set out by the 68/99 Law, as outlined by the Italian Court of Auditors in 2022.¹³

Despite the above-mentioned policies and legislation seeking to improve the employment opportunities and conditions of disabled people, the previously mentioned unemployment figures show the limited impact of these measures, both in

geographical scope and effectiveness especially for the autistic community. This is of course also the case for autistic adults in Italy, as shown by a 2021 article by Neuropeculiar, an Italian autistic-led organisation, which shows that despite some inclusion initiatives for neurodivergent people, the number of companies that promote inclusion programmes for people on the autism spectrum is incredibly low.¹⁴ The survey that Neuropeculiar carried out (with 150 respondents) also showed that almost 80% of the participants who were in employment had lower support needs, therefore illustrating the additional challenges that autistic jobseekers with higher support needs face in Italy.¹⁵ Additionally, the data points to a great need for additional awareness-raising and inclusion training, as 70% of respondents felt that they might face discrimination in the workplace based on their autism diagnosis.¹⁶

2. The strengths of autistic people in the workplace



© Source: Canva

2.1. The spectrum of skills of autistic employees and jobseekers

It is paramount to keep in mind that each autistic person will have different strengths, needs, skills and interests and therefore it is important not to over-generalise when it comes to describing the specific skills of autistic people, as the spectrum is as wide as there are autistic individuals! Indeed, understanding each candidate's strengths and needs is undoubtedly an asset when it comes to job-matching and ensuring long-term success in retaining employment (alongside support and accommodations if necessary).



© Autismo Andalucía

13 Ibid, p. 15.

14 Neuropeculiar for EUCAP, The employment situation of autistic people in Italy: Survey and recommendations by Neuropeculiar APS, (29 March 2021) <https://eucap.eu/2021/03/29/employment-of-autistic-people-in-italy/>.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

As an example, we have provided the following list, which summarises the added value that autistic people can bring to the labour market: ¹⁷

- Unique perspective and creative thinking: through a different perception of the environment that surrounds them, autistic people can show creative skills and offer a unique perspective when approaching certain tasks.
- Increased focus, efficiency and memory: autistic people can have strong memory skills and possess the ability to remain focused on certain tasks, which can be highly valuable in the workplace, especially in terms of productivity. ¹⁸
- Great attention to detail and pattern recognition: through a logical and systematic approach to problem-solving, some autistic people report a heightened ability for analysis (e.g. recognising patterns) as well as good attention to detail. ¹⁹
- Reliability: people on the autism spectrum can be very dedicated to their job and often show lower levels of absenteeism, and some may choose to remain in the same role for long periods of time. ²⁰
- Value of repetition: autistic people often value structure and predictability, which can give them an advantage when performing repetitive tasks.
- ‘Strong sense of social justice and fairness’: ¹⁹ many autistic people report feeling a strong sense of justice when advocating for a fair choice as well as reduced social pressure. ²⁰

2.2. The advantage of hiring neurodivergent employees

While the previous section outlined some of the skills and strengths that autistic employees can bring to the workplace, it is also important to focus on the impact of hiring autistic employees. Studies have shown that autistic employees – but also having a neurodivergent workforce more broadly – can result in higher productivity and profitability for the company while also making the workplace a more inclusive space overall. ²³

Research from several European countries such as the UK and Sweden has also shown that promoting employment opportunities for people on the autism spectrum (including supported employment) is a clear advantage from a purely economic perspective, as governments would save on unemployment benefits and other forms of support while also receiving a greater tax contribution as a result of a larger workforce. ²⁴ Therefore, financing employment programmes and opportunities for people on the autism spectrum is a worthwhile investment for governments, especially considering that autistic people ‘have a strong chance of becoming employed once appropriate measures are in place’. ²⁵

The next section will address what are some of these measures, accommodations and types of support that people on the autism spectrum may require when in employment.

17 Rosie Cope and Anna Remington, “The strengths and abilities of autistic people in the workplace” in *Autism in adulthood: challenges and management* vol. 4, 1 (2022), pp. 22-31; National Autistic Society – Autism at Work programme, “Benefits of hiring a diverse workforce”, online resource accessed August 2023. <https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/employment/autism-work-programme>

For an article regarding the important of taking a strengths-based approach in relation to disability, see Eric W. Carter, Thomas L. Boehm, Elizabeth E. Biggs, Naomi H. Annandale, Courtney E. Taylor, Aimee E. Looock and Rosemary Y. Liu, “Known for My Strengths: Positive Traits of Transition-Age Youth With Intellectual Disability and/or Autism” in *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 40(2), 101–119 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796915592158>.

18 Autism-Europe, *Autism and Work: Together we can*, p.15; Cope and Remington, “The strengths and abilities of autistic people in the workplace”, p. 13.

19 Cope and Remington, “The strengths and abilities of autistic people in the workplace”, pp. 12-13.

20 Autism-Europe, *Autism and Work: Together we can*, p. 15.

21 Cope and Remington, “The strengths and abilities of autistic people in the workplace”, p. 14.

22 Ibid.

23 Vincent Grimaldi de Puget, *Autisme et emploi : état des lieux et perspectives*, Agefiph (April 2023), p. 17.

24 Andrew Jacob, Melissa Scott, Marita Falkmer, Torbjörn Falkmer, The costs and benefits of employing an adult with autism spectrum disorder: a systematic review, *PLOS ONE* 10 (10) e0139896 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0139896>.

25 Ibid.

3. Supporting autistic people in the workplace: a guide

3.1. Talking about autism in the workplace: language and approaches

Autistic people continue to face discrimination and prejudice when accessing the labour market and once they are in employment. To help fight the stigmatisation experienced by autistic people, it is thus important to adopt appropriate language when talking about autism and addressing autistic people as well as increasing understanding of autism in order to highlight the strengths that autistic people can bring to the workplace. Employers will certainly benefit from taking a skills-based approach to employing autistic people in the workplace.

Although language to describe autistic people is subject to cultural and linguistic differences, the preference of each person on the autism spectrum should always be upheld, whether this be by using the term ‘autistic’, ‘with autism’ or ‘on the autism spectrum’. Indeed, certain people and languages prioritise an ‘identity-first’ approach by using the term ‘autistic’ – such as the English-speaking communities as shown by research – but others may prefer using a ‘person-first’ approach. It is also worth noting that the use of language continues to evolve. People on the autism spectrum continue to be discriminated against, so it is important to use terms or expressions when talking about potential autistic candidates or employees that are not offensive. For instance, the following terms should be avoided as they are stigmatising and discriminatory: ‘suffers from/ is a victim of autism’, ‘autism is a disease/illness’, ‘Asperger’s is a rare/mild form of autism’, ‘retarded/mentally handicapped’, etc.²⁶



© Source: Pexels

3.2. How to adapt the recruitment process to attract neurodivergent talent

Oftentimes autistic people face difficulties when accessing employment as they might struggle at varying levels with certain soft skills that are needed for the application process, such as communication and social interaction.²⁷ How to adapt the recruitment process in order to attract autistic candidates very much depends on the type of work and programme in question. If autistic people enrol in an employment programme designed for employees on the autism spectrum (such as Specialisterne, Auticon or WorkAut), then the recruitment process will likely already be adapted and these already established services can be used as inspiration on how to effectively promote inclusivity for autistic people in the workplace.²⁸

However, there are certain practices that companies that wish to expand their hiring pool can adopt in order to make their recruitment process more inclusive of autistic jobseekers:

Job advertisements:

- They should indicate clearly the role that is available as well as the qualifications and experience needed without using abstract or unclear terms. The recruiter should carefully consider what skills or experience are listed as a “must” because autistic jobseekers might interpret it literally and not apply if they do not fulfil all of the requirements.²⁹
- Whenever possible, job offers should be available in easy-to-read format in order to include autistic people with varying communication needs in the selection process.
- Job postings should also include information about the type of accommodations that are provided during the recruitment process.
- Job advertisements should include a note specifying that they welcome autistic/neurodivergent candidates to apply when the organisation actively supports neurodiversity in the workplace.³⁰
- Job openings can be posted on inclusive hiring platforms and neurodiversity-friendly job boards to ensure the posting reaches the intended audience.

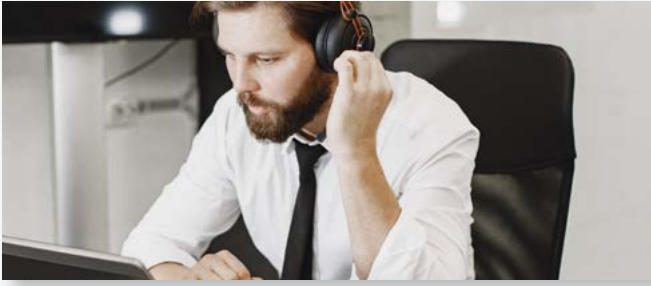
26 Autism-Europe’s acceptable language guideline <https://www.autismeurope.org/about-autism/acceptable-language/>; there is an Italian translation of this guideline provided by Gruppo Asperger onlus https://www.asperger.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Linea-guida-Linguaggio_accettabile.pdf

27 Stéf Bonnot-Briey, *Autisme et emploi : état des lieux et perspectives*, Agefiph (April 2023), pp.18-19.

28 <https://www.dk.specialisterne.com/>; <https://auticon.com/>; <https://www.workaut.org/>. See also the following sections of this compendium.

29 Ashlea McKay (edited by Autumn O’Connor), “How to be inclusive of autism in recruitment”, *Autism at Work* (17 July 2019), <https://www.autismatwork.org/latest-news/how-to-be-inclusive-of-autism-in-recruitment-practices1772019>, accessed August 2023.

30 Ibid.



© Prostooleh freepik.com

Interviews: some autistic people struggle with interviews as they rely heavily on social skills and communication. They can also be a sensory challenge in which the candidate is expected to keep eye contact and experience an unfamiliar environment with new people. Some considerations to take into account would be:

- The interviewee may be provided with precise information on where the interview will take place, instructions on how to get there and who will be conducting the interview as well as a breakdown of the expected phases of the interview (introduction/presentation, questions and eventually a test for instance).
- The candidate can be asked what accommodations may be needed during the interview such as different lighting or seating arrangements (to prevent acoustic overstimulation for example), the presence of a support person or job coach, the option of conducting the interview online, etc.³¹
- Enable the candidate to take breaks during the interview.
- Alternatively, the interview may be conducted in written format in order to reduce anxiety as well as unconscious bias.³² If the type of job allows it, a trial run would be preferred in lieu of an interview as it often better assesses a candidate's suitability for the job.
- Questions should be clear and concise without abstract language or hypothetical questions, they may also be sent in advance for the candidate to have time to prepare. Open-ended questions may also be difficult for some, and therefore what type of information and how long the response should be may also be provided to the candidate in order to avoid any confusion.³³

3.3. Reasonable accommodations in the workplace

As mentioned above, each autistic person has different needs and strengths, and while some may only require minimal to no accommodations, others may require some or substantial support in certain areas. Adopting a tailored approach is therefore key with regards to reasonable accommodation in the workplace.

The following diagram provides a summary of some of the most common types of accommodation requested and provided for people on the autism spectrum as found by Autism-Europe's own research. These have been divided into different sections in order to address the main areas of support such as social interactions, executive functioning, hyper-sensitivity to sensory stimuli, work tasks, communication, etc. Reasonable accommodations should be considered throughout the person's time at a company as needs may evolve overtime.



© Source: PxHere



© Photo from the IVEA project

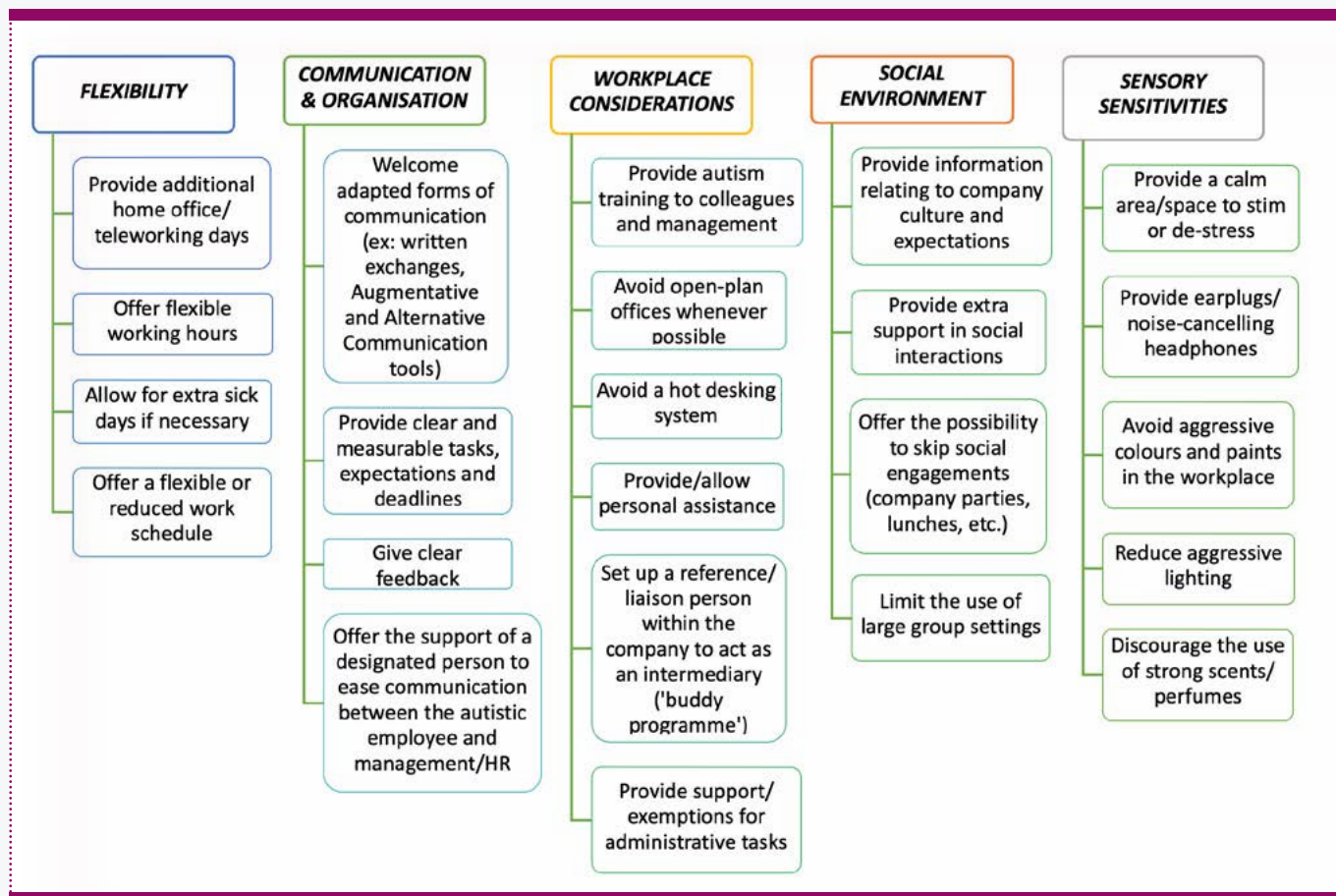
31 Autism-Europe, Autism and Work: Together we can, p. 28.

32 Autism-Europe, "AE called for promoting an inclusive society at the European Parliament", AE website (30 March 2023), <https://www.autismeurope.org/blog/2023/03/30/ae-called-for-promoting-an-inclusive-society-at-the-european-parliament/>.

33 Autism-Europe, Autism and Work: Together we can, p. 29.

34 Autism Spectrum Pathways' webpage on Autism-Europe's website: <https://www.autismeurope.org/blog/what-we-do/utism-spectrum-pathways-2023-2025-inclusivity-beyond-formative-education-and-in-the-workplace/>

Figure 1: Examples of reasonable accommodations based on the feedback of autistic participants and employers in the focus groups and questionnaires conducted by Autism-Europe in the framework of the Autism Spectrum Pathways project.³⁴



The examples provided above also demonstrate that oftentimes, accommodations for autistic people can be relatively inexpensive. Crucially, the changes may also benefit all employees: such as communicating in concise language; setting specific tasks or rearranging tasks based on different strengths; regular follow-ups; providing training on inclusion and raising awareness of autism, etc.³⁵

It is essential to tailor reasonable accommodation to each individual, by assessing precisely their needs in order to provide adequate support. For instance, if the worker has trouble with organisation skills and remembering instructions, then the correct solution might be to print out written or visual instructions for them to be able to follow in addition to providing desk organisers or timers. If another person struggles with in-person interaction then maybe communicating by email could be an alternative solution.³⁶

Other types of support that autistic employees and jobseekers may benefit from include:

- Peer support networks and services, some of which relay job opportunities as well as tools to support the person through the application process in addition to being a safe space for autistic individuals to feel understood and supported when accessing and entering the labour market.
- Traineeships and job trial opportunities in order to test which sector or type of job is best suited for each person.
- Job coaching services: job coaches can provide support with the job search as well as interview and communication skills and may also continue their services once the person is in employment in order to support the person through the transition. Additionally, job coaches can also help the autistic jobseekers in identifying their skills, strengths and needs in order to find a job path or position that best suits their abilities.

35 Job Accommodation Network on low cost accommodations, <https://askjan.org/blogs/jan/2022/9/don-t-break-the-bank-low-cost-accommodations-do-exist.cfm>, accessed August 2023.

36 The Job Accommodation Network has dedicated a section on accommodations for employees on the autism spectrum with detailed examples of accommodations that can be provided according to varying needs, <https://askjan.org/disabilities/Autism-Spectrum.cfm>, accessed August 2023.

4. Employment Lexicon

Job coaching: a job coach specialised in autism will provide support to the jobseeker in a range of tasks, such as assessing their strengths and needs, preparing for the recruitment process (such as applying for a job or with the interview process), supporting the employee's onboarding as well as ongoing support once in employment. A job coach usually works on a one-on-one basis which allows for a personalised support service.

Open labour market: this term is generally used when discussing employment in the context of disability. It is used to differentiate the regular labour/job market in which public and private companies, organisations and administrations operate as opposed to facilities and institutions that offer sheltered or segregated employment reserved for people with disabilities.

Segregated employment: this type of employment encompasses sheltered workshops or other types of facilities where almost exclusively people with disabilities work. These workshops usually involve people with disabilities working in manual

labour jobs. They can take various forms, such as day care centres where people with disabilities participate in occupational therapy programmes that involve producing goods and services for non-profit purposes, or where people with disabilities participate in employment activities from which they receive an income. In order to be UNCRPD compliant, they should consider their workers' transition to the open labour market as one of their main goals.

Supported employment: this type of employment generally refers to programmes in which people with disabilities are provided with ongoing and personalised support (such as support with communication, executive functioning, workplace adaptations, etc.) in the open labour market..

Vocational training: vocational education and training (VET) focuses on teaching and developing practical skills that can be used in the labour market in a wide range of sectors (such as IT, hospitality, landscaping, agriculture, services, etc.)

5. Compendium of good practice in the field of employment for autistic people: international examples

5.1 Examples of public and non-governmental services dedicated to awareness raising and supporting recruitment

The following examples are public and non-governmental services focusing on fostering the recruitment of autistic people as well as raising awareness of how to support their participation in the labour market.

Pôle Emploi (France)



The Pôle Emploi of Nouvelle-Aquitaine (the Regional Employment Office) offers a scheme that provides tailored support to autistic jobseekers during a 12-month period.

Each autistic person is provided with two support workers: one employment advisor and one social work advisor. The former supports the jobseeker by providing information about benefits and assessing them with regards to skills and strengths in the job market, job applications and supporting communication between employer and employee. The latter assists the individual in relation to everyday life by helping with budgeting, housing, healthcare and family matters.

Ultimately, the Pôle Emploi initiative has six objectives:

- To create a multidisciplinary network and bring expertise together;
- To develop an adapted and articulated service;
- To experiment with specific support methods;
- To bridge the gap between typical ways of working for autistic people and the neurotypical working environment, and to work together to develop solutions for entering the labour market;

- To ensure feedback and reasonable accommodation are available during the implementation of the initiative;
- To evaluate the system by setting up quantitative and qualitative indicators.

Please find more information here:

www.pole-emploi.fr/region/nouvelle-aquitaine/candidat/accompagnements-et-prestations-s/emploi-des-personnes-autistes.html

“My farming job is going well. I was recently renewed for 4 months at the organic farm (part of an employment network). I like the place and the organisation of the collective work with daily tasks assigned by our technical supervisors, to be done alone or in small groups. The tasks are varied and allow me to work on understanding the entire growth cycle of the various crops, as well as on the preparation of baskets/orders and sales/delivery to customers. I find the organisation of these at the Jardins de Cocagne network to be interesting, and it is in this type of local solidarity and cooperative economy that I wish to continue working in the future.”

Davide from Vienne,
a participant of this recruitment scheme

Diversicom (Belgium)

DiversiCom pursues the mission of fostering diversity and inclusion in the job market by facilitating job application processes for persons with disabilities, including autistic people, so that they can be hired based on their competences. DiversiCom’s mission revolves around three core points:

- To increase the rate of disabled employees in Belgium;
- To support a diverse work team through an open recruitment process for disabled candidates;
- To encourage companies and employees with disabilities to advocate for other organisations to also foster diversity.

Additionally, DiversiCom cooperates directly with high schools, such as the École des 4 Vents, by organising traineeships for autistic students in companies to prepare them for the future. The companies involved, then, ensure continuity of the support provided by high schools to autistic adolescents, by facilitating their access to the

labour market after they have completed their training.

Please find additional information here:

www.diversicom.be/

ContrataTEA (Spain)

The contrataTEA project was created in 2017 to improve the unfavourable situation faced by autistic people trying to access the labour market. Three confederations representing autistic people in Spain joined forces – namely Confederación Autismo España, FESPAU and Confederación Asperger España – and began to work together on this common goal. Since then, the project has been further developed thanks to funding from Fundación ONCE.

Since its origins, contrataTEA has positioned itself as an intermediary that facilitates communication between autistic people and companies, nurturing relationships that benefit both the community and the business sector. To achieve this, contrataTEA works on several lines of action:

- First, providing autism **training to the professionals** of the employment services of social federations, associations and foundations working with autistic people;
- Secondly, **raising awareness of autism within companies** to promote labour inclusion and facilitate inclusion at the workplace of autistic people.
- Finally, **finding innovative solutions** to address the high rate of unemployment and the lack of job stability for adults on the autism spectrum.

In relation to this first objective, since 2021 contrataTEA has launched the ‘Job coach specialised in Autism’ training programme. With this programme, contrataTEA wants to offer practical and functional tools for associations to develop support units for the employment of autistic people in the open labour market, as well as training professionals in the field of autism to design programmes and methodologies for inclusion in employment. Also, this methodology offsets a common theoretical framework for labour inclusion in all organisations providing support to autistic people.

Concerning the second objective, different awareness-raising materials and resources can be found on the contrataTEA website, such as tips, videos, infographics, etc.

Finally, contrataTEA tries to find new solutions and innovative ways of raising the interest of companies in meeting people on the autism spectrum. Specifically, in 2022, contrataTEA participated in a ‘Design thinking’ process, along with professionals from associations working with autistic adults, representatives from companies and autistic people who already have a job or are looking for one. ‘Design thinking’ is a method for generating innovative ideas that focuses its effectiveness on understanding and providing solutions to people’s real needs.

Please find more information here:
www.contrataTEA.es/

Employment Autism (United Kingdom)

Employment Autism’s vision is for all autistic people to have opportunity in work and fulfilment in life. Their mission is to support autistic people to have fulfilling and productive working relationships in inclusive and positive environments.

Employment Autism is accomplishing this mission by:

- Enabling autistic people to find and be successful in suitable work;
- Encouraging providers of work to employ autistic people and recognise the benefits they can bring to the workplace.

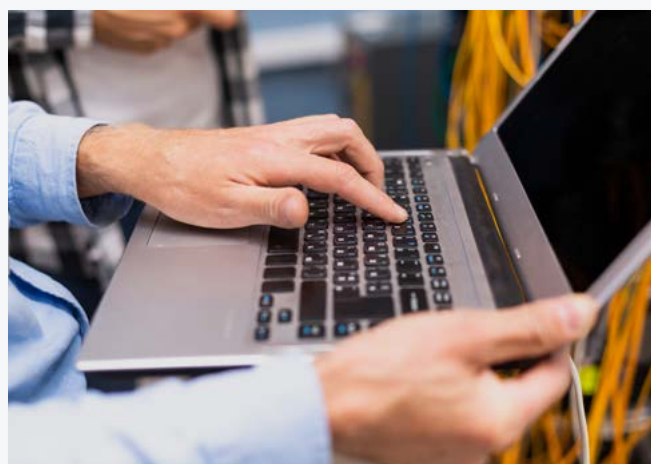
Employment Autism is sharing values such as inclusivity, impact, responsiveness and autonomy. Their approach is to provide evidence-based practical guidance on all aspects of autism and the workplace, drawing where appropriate on validated academic research, verifiable good practice, and relevant legal obligations.

Employment Autism’s strategic imperative is to improve employment outcomes for autistic people. The key priorities are:

- Helping more autistic people enter meaningful work – whether through employment, internships, volunteer work or others;
- Helping more autistic people succeed in their workplace and realise the personal fulfilment that meaningful work can bring;
- Building confidence and raising awareness amongst employers of the benefit of employing autistic people, and that good practice for supporting autistic employees benefits all employees;

- Supporting employers in identifying which roles could match with the particular strengths of each autistic person;
- Supporting employers in adapting their workplace so that autistic individuals can succeed in their work;
- Providing evidence-based methods, approaches and tools for improving employment outcomes.

Please find more information here:
www.employmentautism.org.uk/



© Source: freepik.com

5.2 Job coaching

Job coaching is intensive, individualised support to help people find and keep a job. Support is tailored to a person’s needs.

Specialisterne



Specialisterne (“The Specialists” in Danish) is a Danish socially innovative company where the majority of employees are on the autism spectrum. Specialisterne aims to enable autistic people to gain meaningful employment and to achieve their full potential. Employees work as business consultants on tasks such as software testing, programming and data entry for the public and private sectors.

Specialisterne harnesses the special characteristics and talents of autistic people and employs them as a competitive advantage.

Across Specialisterne's experience to date, the company has noted four factors which can support the inclusion of autistic people in the labour market:

- Firstly, preventative supports to reduce the likelihood and duration of disengagement from the labour market can be helpful. As such, early intervention to support employment opportunities or internships while at university, or post-graduate programmes once they have graduated, can be effective in bridging the gap to employment.
- Secondly, the use of mentors or 'buddies' within a workplace. By pairing an autistic employee with a peer mentor/ 'buddy', both individuals will benefit. The employee on the autism spectrum will feel better supported in the workplace to be successful and the 'buddy' will be further engaged in their role.
- Thirdly, the use of specialised recruitment agencies, such as Specialisterne, in hiring and supporting the continued employment of individuals on the autism spectrum so that managers and employees alike can feel better supported and more likely to be successful.
- Finally, the development of strong relationships with candidates and employers is key to success. Through providing ongoing individualised support to candidates, they can develop relationships with their managers, helping to ensure open, honest and constructive communication. Participation in all stages of the recruitment process, from interview development to on boarding, can also be beneficial.

Please find more information on Specialisterne in the world here:

<https://specialisterne.com>

Specialisterne has established branches worldwide, including in Ireland.

In Ireland, 1.5% of the population are on the autism spectrum with 85% of these being unemployed or under-employed, while 1500 individuals on the autism spectrum achieve third level qualifications annually. As such, a highly talented pool of qualified individuals are available for employers, and some may only need support to secure a position that aligns with their unique skills and talents.

Since its establishment in 2013, Specialisterne Ireland have partnered with over 30 companies with the aim of supporting 5,000 autistic individuals towards employment in 20 years. For example, since 2013, Specialisterne Ireland have been successful in helping 250 candidates secure an employed position and have worked with 800 individuals to support their interview or work skills.

Specialisterne Ireland works with colleges and universities across Ireland to identify individuals who might need support in obtaining employment or an internship, and works with them in successfully navigating the application, interview and employment process. In addition, Specialisterne Ireland works with autistic individuals who need support in obtaining or maintaining employment that matches their unique skills and talents.

Candidates are supported in recruitment through an autism and neurodivergent-friendly process, achieved through a freely available, intensive interview skills programme. Following a multi-stage assessment process, candidates may be placed in a partner company and paid a competitive wage for their work. On-going employment supports for the employee are provided to ensure a successful placement. For employers, ongoing monitoring and support of employee performance is provided. Specialisterne works directly with employers supporting them in diversifying their workforce by advising them on how to develop more accessible interview processes and by aiding management, human resources and other staff in supporting the needs of neurodivergent colleagues.

Please find more information on Specialisterne Ireland here:

www.specialisterne.ie/

What people say about Collaborating with Specialisterne's coaching programme in Ireland:

"Specialisterne's support for our autistic students has been life-changing."

Judy Murphy, Careers Advisor, IT Carlow

"Specialisterne has enabled me to work in a job I love. The people here are very friendly, and I really enjoy the work here."

Nick Rankin, SAP, following a period at Microsoft

Auticon

As an autistic-majority global company, Auticon succeeds because of its neurodiversity. Most of the company's team members are hired after 2 years of unemployment so the value that a career adds to their life is significant.

In fact, estimates suggest less than 29% (ons.gov.uk) of autistic people are in any form of meaningful employment which aligns with their educational achievements. Auticon taps into this potential by employing autistic adults as technology consultants. Autistic employees are supported by job coaches and project managers, producing a win-win-win situation for clients, consultants and society.

Auticon also provides different 'Neuroinclusion Services' for businesses and organisations:

- **Advisory Services:** Advice on how to create, develop and improve their teams and processes into being neurodiverse. Auticon helps clients transform HR practices, managers become neuro-confident, promote a business-wide understanding of neurodiversity and, most importantly, transforms careers and provides thriving opportunities to neurodivergent talent globally.
- **Neurodiversity Training:** Organisations may wish to support their own neurodivergent talent but are unsure on how to approach this. Auticon's teaching professionals carry out neurodiversity training with decades of clinical and applied experience in autism and neurodivergent conditions. This is of particular relevance to leaders, human resources, legal departments, recruiters and managers.
- **Job Coaching:** Auticon's consultants and clients are supported by job coaches who ensure that the consultants' work environments enable them to deliver to their full professional potential. Auticon's talented job coaches promote inclusion and wellbeing and are integral to making sure consultants feel supported in their assignments. Most importantly, they provide clients with support and information regarding autism in the workplace and can convey feedback between the client and the consultant.

Please find more information here:

<https://auticon.com/>

Autimatic (Belgium)

Autimatic connects employers and talented autistic people in the administration, automation, and artificial intelligence fields by matching tasks within companies to the strengths of autistic people. Thanks to Autimatic, autistic people get assisted access to interesting jobs: the company provides technical, soft skills and emotional support.

Please find more information here:

www.autimatic.be/

Passwerk (Belgium)

Passwerk is a cooperative company with a social dimension with a focus on testing software and performing diverse quality assignments in the context of support processes. Since 2017, Passwerk has been recruiting and hiring autistic software developers. Afterwards, their services were further expanded with business intelligence (BI) and managed business process services (MBPS).

Passwerk focuses on the unique and valuable qualities of autistic people. Providing an individualised approach to autistic people's needs and competence management are the core values of the company. In practice, Passwerk supports autistic employees in recruitment processes with clients with continued support.

Please find more information here:

www.passwerk.be/?lang=en

Salva Vita Foundation (Hungary)

Salva Vita Foundation is the first not-for-profit organisation in Hungary to provide specialised support to promote the inclusion of autistic people in the open labour market. The foundation launched a specific support programme for autistic people in 2011, after realising that their needs were not accommodated suitably by using existing services designed for people with mental or learning disabilities.

The programme offers a flexible approach to assess the support needs of autistic individuals and match them with adequate jobs. The level of assistance and accommodation required by each autistic person is assessed by a multi-disciplinary team, via a three-phase process:

- **Interview phase:** general questions about the person's desires and needs, their medical and educational history and their interests.

- **Comprehensive skills assessment:** reading, writing, maths skills, but also social interaction, time management and orientation.
- **Trial work experience:** assessment of the person's abilities in the work environment, including their communication and interpersonal skills in different work placements, for a maximum of four hours per session. This phase can be repeated if needed.

Matching autistic people with the right job also involves confronting prejudice and stigma about autism and creating a network of potential employers. The Foundation raises awareness among employers and trains them to provide tailored support for autistic people's needs.

Since its creation, the programme has supported the inclusion of at least eleven autistic people in the labour market, and ten of them are still employed.

Please find more information here:

www.salvavita.hu/en/

PRO.PIL.E.I. by ANFASS Foundation (Italy)

Dedicated to persons with cognitive disabilities and autistic people, the PRO.PIL.E.I. project by ANFASS Foundation includes the activation of job-seeking and training services, together with professional internships, aiming at social inclusion, financial independence and rehabilitation.

Based in Cagliari, in the Sardinia region, the project offers a system of training activities including seminars on issues related to the job market, guided workshops for the improvement of technical, relational and soft skills as well as support in making career choices.

Please consult the website for more information and contact details:

www.anffasonlussardegna.it/fondazione/2020/10/22/pro-pil-e-i-progetto-1/

Autismo Andalucía (Spain)



In the South of Spain, Autismo Andalucía works with a wide range of local companies to create job opportunities that are individually suited for autistic people, from small local businesses to local offices of multinational companies.

The programme provides autistic people with individual support, such as specially trained job coaches, to help them develop the skills required for their jobs, and to provide them with support in communication with their managers and colleagues. The support is gradually withdrawn when the presence of the job coach is no longer necessary and can be replaced by natural supports, such as colleagues who can understand and support the needs of the autistic individuals within the workplace.

The programme – the first of its kind in the south of Spain – was launched in 2006. Since then, it has supported the access of 120 autistic people, aged between 17 and 50 years old (most of them with very low levels of education), into employment. The programme has contributed to the creation of 100 work contracts and 36 professional training experiences in companies within the open labour market of the region. The jobs were matched according to individual skills and interests, including kitchen assistants in restaurants, shop assistants, laundry workers and cleaners.

The positive role that these companies play in including autistic people in society is acknowledged by awarding their action and media campaigns to draw attention to the positive examples they set for others. This acknowledgement contributes to raising awareness among new companies that can, in a virtuous circle, start hiring autistic people.

Please find more information here:

www.autismoandalucia.org

The following testimony is from Autismo Andalucía, explaining how to use the supported employment model to help autistic people find suitable work in their local area:

“The first experience of Autismo Andalucía Employment Service with supporting autistic people in our community, was initiated in 1998 by one of our associations (Autismo Cádiz) financed by EU Horizon funds.

After the success of the programme, our objective was to consolidate a permanent regional service. Autismo Andalucía is a federation of associations, so, together with its entities it agreed to approach employment with a common strategy.

The objective of Autismo Andalucía is to create an Employment Service for autistic people which will coordinate the member associations to provide guidance for autistic people in their job search and labour market integration. The mission of the Autismo Andalucía Employment Service is to improve the inclusion of autistic people in companies throughout our region. Autistic people are confronted with serious employment issues, but they can succeed in the workforce with the support of employment mediators, following the methodology of supported employment having previously carried out tasks of evaluation, guidance, information and advice.

We exclusively opt for supported employment, excluding other formulas of protected employment, since this model reports results associated with standardised employment, improvement of quality of life, development of self-determination, full participation and orientation to the community. It is a comprehensive permanent and stable regional programme (not subject to temporary funding) that is developed with a small number of participants, which, together with the protocol implementation, ensures a person-centred approach.

Characteristics that we consider good practices include it being free and accessible, completely personalised, positions are only sought after knowing the candidates and according to their preferences, continuous support is offered, and we commit ourselves to maintain the support. Additionally, the support provided is specialised in autism, we follow a management process where the procedures are GDPR compliant in all the phases and the decisions are taken by the autistic people and their families.

In terms of specific aspects, we would like to mention that it is a service of proximity and inclusion and, therefore, the orientation sessions

are developed in the community environments or even in the home of the autistic person. Visits to ordinary companies are organised for jobs. Support is provided on site, directly on the job to companies involved. All of our experience is available in different public resources which are free to access without charge. We are open to all types of visits, internships, etc. and all our material is shared with professionals who request it.”

Autismo Andalucía, Spain

The following testimony is from an autistic person who has been an effective employee at a supermarket in Spain which provided supported employment through the job coach provision and a successful hiring programme:

“I have been diagnosed with autism, and I have a vocational training degree in retail. I work at ‘Supermercados SuperSol’. My tasks are to restock incoming goods, tidy up and clean the shelves, set up the home orders in racks and attend to customers. My relationship with my colleagues is very good and I can always count on them when I need something.

I got this job through the employment service of the Federación Autismo Andalucía. My job coach accompanied me at the beginning of my contract and gave me guidelines on how to best perform the tasks assigned in the shortest possible time and in the most effective way.

Over time, the support was gradually reduced and now they only come every 15 days to do follow-ups. If I had to pick out one of my talents or skills, I would highlight my ability to work in a team and my ability to deal with a client which is something I like very much (although at the beginning it was what I found most difficult at the company). At the moment, I feel very good about my job, although I would like to increase my working hours to have more income since work makes me more autonomous and independent, and with that comes a feeling of fulfilment.”

Palacios, 28, Spain



© Cascina Rossago, Fondazione Genitori per l'Autismo

5.3 Examples of work inclusion programmes in the agricultural and handicraft sectors

In recent years, an increasing number of social farming initiatives have been developed in Italy and other countries to promote social inclusion as well as support access to vocational training and transition to employment for autistic people, including people requiring a high level of support. We are listing below a few examples.

Cascina Rossago (Italy)

Cascina Rossago is a residential support service for people with disabilities located in the countryside in the province of Pavia, in the Lombardy region. It was founded in 2002 and is a structure accredited by the Lombardy Region with resolution VII/16780 of March 19, 2004. It is a pilot structure specifically dedicated to fostering access to employment for autistic adults based on the model of farming communities.

Inclusion in a suitable environment and the support of specialised staff offer autistic people the opportunity to develop their skills and achieve higher levels of autonomy while respecting their autistic identity. A carefully planned social inclusion programme is implemented after a period of observation and evaluation by a multidisciplinary team.

In Cascina Rossago, autistic people are also involved in structured work activities, organised under the name of 'the Cascina Rossago's workshops' that cover a range of domains from farming to weaving.

Please consult the website for training tools and more information:

www.fondazionegenitoriautismo.it/cascinarossago.php

Casa di Gello by Agrabah association (Italy)

Based in the province of Pistoia, in the Tuscany region, the starting idea of Casa di Gello was to support autistic adults, in a suitable environment, to develop the skills necessary to implement the 'community farm' project. The proposed activities, therefore, have specific features of floricultural work training, with different areas of work (carpentry, cooking, secretarial work, and so on) together with activities (theatre, sports, expressive workshops, hippotherapy) customised for each person.

In 2011, the 'community farm' project was implemented thanks to a fruitful collaboration between the Agrabah association and the Adult Mental Health Department of Pistoia's Asl 3, and also thanks to the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Pistoia e Pescia (Caript Foundation), which provided the premises where the centre is located.

At Casa di Gello, the floricultural activity is proposed as a different way of life where agricultural work, craft, expressive activities and rehabilitative spaces are not separate dimensions, but work together to provide a global approach to care.

Please consult the website for more information and contact details:

www.fondazioneraggioverde.it/i-nostri-centri/casa-di-gello-per-leta-adulta/

ALI project by ASCOT Service Centre (Italy)

Ascot Service Centre SRL in Florence, in the Tuscany region, is a service dedicated to supporting adults with psycho-cognitive and socio-relational difficulties. The main ALI (Autonomy Work Integration) project focuses on implementing a model of training and employment involving catering and reception activities, tourism services, animal breeding and gardening.

The team operates in a café and a small hotel where the autistic young people benefit from job trainings and are recruited as employees. The project aims more globally to achieve an effective inclusion of autistic people in the job market by cooperating with existing networks, notably high schools and public local administration.

Please consult the website for more information and contact details:

www.serviziascot.it/

The European Therapeutical Centre (CTE) by Social Cooperative in Rignano sull'Arno (Italy)



© Centro Terapeutico Europeo soc coop a r.l.

The Social Cooperative in Rignano sull'Arno, an association located in the Tuscany region, with its 40 hectares of land and forest, is a residential

centre for autistic individuals, where they can stay short or long term. The European Therapeutic Centre (CTE) managed by the association includes various forms of social enterprises (Cooperatives A and B, according to the Italian system) and a farm.

The main aim of the CTE is to increase the well-being of autistic guests by promoting innovative therapeutic paths and experiences of social participation, ensuring a stable, loving and stimulating living environment. The activities, guided by professional staff, focus on providing access to vocational training in the agricultural sector as well as promoting the social inclusion of autistic people.

The Tuscany Region supports the funding of CTE that operates mainly thanks to the sales of its production. The CTE works, when possible, in collaboration with local companies and institutions to facilitate the work placement of autistic people.

Please consult the website for more information and contact details:

www.ctecoop.it/

Godega4Autism by Oltre il Labirinto Foundation (Italy)

Godega4Autism is a project which aims to provide supported living and vocational training in the agricultural sector for autistic adults in need of a high level of support, in view of developing their social inclusion and future employment opportunities in the open labour market. The project is managed by the not-for-profit organisation Oltre il Labirinto Onlus Foundation.

At Godega4Autism, autistic people work with the support of a supervisor and each task is explained through visual instructions. The agricultural products are fully organic and respectful of the environment. Vocational activities also include assembling 'hug bikes' (tandem bicycles designed to enable an autistic person in need of a high level of support to ride a bicycle safely with the support of another rider), recycling cork and carrying out projects for local organisations, such as packaging wine.

You can read more about this initiative here:

www.oltrelabirinto.it/1672_0/it/default.ashx

Casa Solidale by L'Ortica (Italy)



© Associazione L'Ortica APS

L'Ortica is an association established in 2010, based in Milan, in the Lombardy region. Since then, it has been working with autistic children, pre-adolescents, adolescents and adults, as well as people with other cognitive and sensory disabilities. L'Ortica offers them rehabilitative paths, with an inclusive orientation that facilitates the building of meaningful human relationships.

In Milan, L'Ortica operates at Casa Solidale: a space shared by the Municipality of Milan since 2016 with five associations working with vulnerable and marginalised groups. The aim is to improve the quality of their life, and to enhance – or at least safeguard – their autonomy and to foster social inclusion.

At Casa Solidale, autistic people develop skills in various workshops dedicated to hand weaving, gardening, handcrafting, painting and wool dyeing. These workshops are educational spaces, but also foster meaningful peer relationships, dignity, inclusion, continuous learning, and social living in adolescence and beyond. Manual and artistic artefacts are sold at dedicated times and places. Social interaction with the local community is fundamental for the promotion of inclusion and awareness of autism.

Please consult the website for more information:

<https://lnx.ortica.org/>

Associazione Aiutismo (Italy)

The Associazione Aiutismo was founded in 2007 by a group of parents of autistic children in the province of Padua, in the Veneto region. The aim is to support families and raise awareness of autism. The association's objective is to promote and create opportunities for inclusion in society and in the labour market for autistic children/young people/adults.

Among the different activities organised by Aiutismo, there's lavender cultivation, along with a biscuit-making workshop and a small social farm. Recently, the association bought a food-truck to participate in village festivals and sell food and drinks.

The association collaborates with local institutions and organisations with the same aim of valuing the abilities of each autistic person. With the right resources, Aiutismo will be able to support autistic people in fulfilling their potential and improve their lives.

Please consult the website for more information and contact details:

www.aiutismo.org/

'Chi Semina Raccoglie' farm by Ca'Leido (Italy)



© Ca'Leido, Società Cooperativa Sociale Sonda

The 'Chi Semina Raccoglie' farm is embedded in the Ca'Leido project, a specialised autism centre by Sonda onlus, a social cooperative based in the province of Treviso, in the Veneto region. This teaching farm is a place where autistic children feel more at ease and autistic adults experiment with handicrafts. The farm also sells the tasty products grown by autistic people.

Please consult the website for more information:
www.ca-leido.it/caleido-fattoria/

Officina del Mosaico by Cascina San Vincenzo (Italy)

Cascina San Vincenzo is an association established in 2008. Since then, it has sought to offer autistic people and their families an environment in which they 'feel at home', where no one is left behind. This has been made possible thanks to the experience and expertise of an integrated professional team of psychologists, educators, speech therapists and psychomotricity experts who shape the rehabilitation paths in the respect of the characteristics of each autistic person and their families. The association is also a stable home to two families who contribute to the welcoming of other autistic people's families.

Since 2016, Cascina San Vincenzo has organised a mosaic workshop, a project called 'Tanti piccoli pezzi' ('Many tiny pieces'). Mosaic art is a very structured work technique: it has precise, compulsory steps and it works on repetition. Concepts of rhythm, sequence and composition are inherent in mosaic art, which is made up of tesserae to be composed with absolute precision. During the workshop, autistic users make objects ranging from frames to boxes, from party favours to vases, from Christmas decorations to flower boxes and tableware.

The project is a true craft workshop to foster professional pathways. The main objective is to promote individual well-being and autonomy, increasing the autistic person's self-esteem and motivation, in a process consisting of various production phases, up to the sale of the product itself.

Please consult the website for more information:
www.cascinasanvincenzo.org/

TERLAB by Autisme La Garriga (Spain)

For autistic adults who are in need of a high level of support, it can be very difficult to find suitable employment. TERLAB is a sheltered workshop located near Barcelona, in Spain, which is creating meaningful roles for these autistic adults through activities such as farming, gardening and recycling paper. TERLAB is a not-for-profit initiative by the organisation Autisme La Garriga to promote the social inclusion of the participants in the local community.

Most adults who go to TERLAB usually arrive with very limited skills. TERLAB staff make detailed assessments of each individual's cognitive

abilities and functional skills to create plans for a therapeutic intervention tailored to their needs and a work path according to their abilities.

There are currently 42 adults who participate in TERLAB. Specialised staff work with each participant to improve their skills in relation to interpersonal relationships, communication, behaviour problems, personal autonomy, work activities, physical activities and community involvement, through both therapy and work. TERLAB staff include professionals in the fields of medicine, psychiatry, psychology, teaching, social work and occupational therapy. The participants benefit from the assistance of approximately one staff member for every four participants.

Please find more information here:

www.autisme.com

Green Bridge Growers (United States)

Green Bridge Growers is a small business in the United States that was founded to create a job for an autistic young man with the passion and skills for organic farming. After graduating from college, Chris Tidmarsh gained a job as an environmental researcher, but the social challenges of being in a 'traditional' job were very hard for him. Despite his best efforts at self-advocacy, he lost his job after a few months.

Realising that unemployment was very common among autistic adults – even those who have college degrees – Chris' mother, Jan Pilarski, began to search for solutions. After two years, Chris and Jan founded Green Bridge Growers, a small business growing organic vegetables using a method called aquaponics, where fishes and vegetables grow in harmony. They found that aquaponics was a great match not only for Chris' skills but for other autistic adults' skills. The farming method requires precision and attention to detail as well as routine.

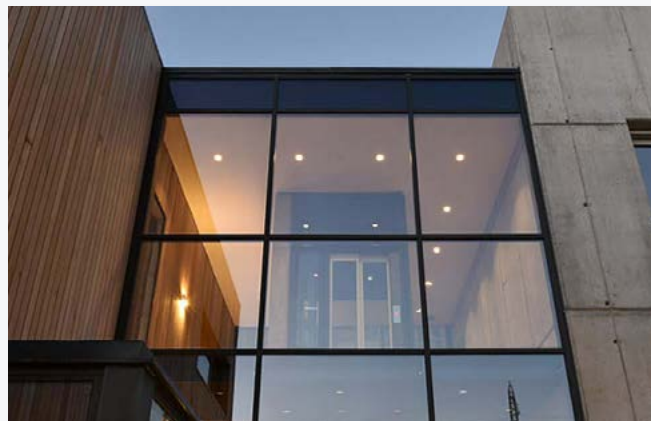
The business employed Chris and others on the autism spectrum to produce organic vegetables for local markets. Following the success of its work, the business is now taking its next step: creating commercial aquaponic greenhouses. The expansion of the business has been partially funded by a crowdfunding campaign conducted online. Each greenhouse that Green Bridge Growers builds creates five job opportunities for autistic young adults and can produce around 45,000 pounds of vegetables annually.

Please find more information here:

www.greenbridgegrowers.org

5.4 Examples of work inclusion programmes in the hospitality, food and tourism sectors

Sant'Anna Hostel and Luna Blu by the AUT AUT project (Italy)



© Fondazione AUT AUT E.T.S

AUT AUT (Autonomia Autismo, in English "Autonomy Autism") is a large training and employment project for young autistic adults in the field of hospitality located in La Spezia (Liguria region). Established in 2017 by the Carispezia Foundation, A.G.A.P.O. Onlus and Autism-Europe's member Il Domani dell'Autismo Foundation, the AUT AUT foundation was created to support the full inclusion of young autistic people. The project aims at facilitating their transition to the labour market by giving them access to vocational training in the community. The accompanying housing programme has the aim to develop their individual autonomy.

Both the Sant'Anna Hostel and Luna Blu are facilities of the project, supported by the AUT AUT Foundation. Luna Blu is a modern structure that offers hospitality for tourists. It is divided into three floors intended for different purposes: tourist accommodation (for autistic people and their families as well as holidaymakers or people on business trips), restaurant and apartments to develop the autonomy of young autistic people and prepare them to live as independently as possible. There is also an area dedicated to vocational training and food production workshops. Since 2019, Luna Blu also opened a bakery employing autistic people in the town of Lerici.

Please consult the website for more information and contact details:

www.aut-aut.eu/

SbrisolAut (Italy)

Based in Mantua, in the Lombardy region, SbrisolAut is a social enterprise that produces and markets high quality baked pastry products typical of the region, like the Sbrisolona cake, employing autistic people as production workers.

Created in 2022 with the support of [Spazio Autismo Sol.Co. Mantova](#) (a consortium of social cooperatives), the social enterprise encompasses all the key elements of social inclusion, environmental sustainability and enhancement of the local area. After SbrisolAut cakes sold out at the Festival Sbrisolona & Co. in October 2022, the enterprise aims to land in most of Mantua's supermarkets with its baked goods and Sbrisolona cakes.

For more info, please contact:

info@sbrisolaut.it

Autbnb project by GiuliaParla (Italy)

GiuliaParla is a social cooperative created in Rome, in the Lazio region, in 2010. It launched Autbnb; a tourism and real estate agency project run by and for autistic people.

Nowadays, many autistic people do not go on holiday, or go on holiday only with their family while others join holiday plans that do not take into account their specific needs. The aim Autbnb wants to achieve is to create the opportunity for autistic people to go on holiday in autonomy, have a good time and meet people outside of their families with adequate support. The project organises holidays, guided tours (of Garbatella, one of Rome's quarters, for example), medium and long term stays in Italy and abroad.

Please consult the website for more information and contact details:

www.autbnb.it/

Tortellante by Aut Aut Modena (Italy)



© TORTELLANTE APS

Tortellante is a therapeutic and rehabilitative workshop where autistic young people and adults learn to make fresh handmade pasta. The project, launched in January 2016 and supplemented

by training activities to improve autonomy, has proved to be a good practice to promote inclusion, involving an entire community in Modena, in the Emilia-Romagna region.

Tortellante has several objectives:

- To initiate individualised training paths for the job placement of autistic people;
- To improve team activities, including with people who are not trained in autism;
- To improve the participants' quality of life and autonomy;
- To support families with autistic relatives transitioning into adulthood;
- To encourage and facilitate the inclusion of autistic people, and raise awareness of autism in the community.

Tortellante was launched by Aut Aut Modena, an association that promotes and coordinates training, assistance and fundraising projects to support families of autistic persons in the province of Modena.

In 2018, Tortellante became a Social Promotion Association (APS in Italian), with the inauguration of its new headquarters in the centre of Modena, renovated and equipped thanks to the commitment and funding of families and private sponsors. The initiative, born as an educational therapy, now represents a concrete pathway to work for autistic young people, and an opportunity to further their autonomy.

Please consult the website for more information:

www.tortellante.it/

L'Abbarrato brewery and Farfood restaurant by Il Desiderio di Barbiana (Italy)

Il Desiderio di Barbiana is an association and social cooperative based in the province of Rome, in the Lazio region. The organisation operates for children, adolescents and young adults, with a focus on autism, mental health issues and cognitive disabilities. Il Desiderio di Barbiana's mission focuses on groups at risk of social exclusion.

The association implements work and social farming experiences in which young people can find work opportunities. As a social enterprise, the aim is therefore to promote care paths and work activities that foster inclusion and emancipation of autistic people thanks to a range of support services.

Over the years, Il Desiderio di Barbiana has opened a farm, L'Abbarrato craft brewery, and the Farfood social agrotourism restaurant nestled in the beautiful Tiber nature reserve. Both L'Abbarrato and Farfood employ autistic young people involved in the cooperative.

Please consult the website for more information and contact details:

www.desideriodibarbiana.com/

5.5 Inclusion projects in private companies

Andros (France)



The “Vivre et Travailler Autrement” (VETA) initiative was set up by Jean-François Dufresne, former Managing Director of the multinational Andros Food Group. Dufresne is a successful entrepreneur, and father of an autistic son, Luc, who is almost entirely non-verbal and has complex needs. Jean-François was told by professionals that Luc was ‘unemployable’. Jean-François disagreed with this and responded appropriately. His initiative employs autistic people with complex needs to work in one of their Novandie factories, in the region of Eure-et-Loir.



Jean-François Dufresne

The factory currently employs 12 autistic people on part-time permanent contracts. Autistic employees work and develop their skills thanks to professional support. Strengths such as attention to detail, highly developed visual and auditory memory and concentration on a particular task are particularly useful in this workspace.

At the Novandie factory, visual aids help to sequence activities and clarify the work to be done. A spatial and temporal structuring has been set up to ensure clarity/avoid confusion, provide a sense

of security to avoid stress. The ergonomics of the workstation are studied with the plant's team leaders. The company does not finance the support. It is provided by the public authorities through the association “Vivre and Travailler autrement” that provide daily support for autistic employees.

Adequately supervised, the autistic workers can perform the same jobs as their colleagues. However, this requires a high level of concentration. Their working hours have therefore been adjusted to half-time, i.e. every morning from 9.00am to 13:00 (17:00 per week).

The Maison Departementale du Handicap (local regional authority for disability) and the other stakeholders involved have implemented an educational programme tailored to each individual.

Please find more information here:

www.vivretravaillerautrement.org/success-story/



© Vivre et Travailler Autrement

5.6 Self-employment activities

Laboratorio di Esplorazione Multimediale - LEM (Italy)

Based in Milan, in the Lombardy region, the Laboratorio di Esplorazione Multimediale (Multimedia Exploration Laboratory, LEM) offers comprehensive services in web design, graphic design, desktop publishing and translation. It was created in 2007 after its founders discovered, through their conversations on an email list for autistic people, that they all had a common difficulty to find a satisfying job, despite their technical and professional skills. Therefore, this group of autistic adults decided to create this social cooperative where they work together.

The cooperative has also translated books on autism from foreign languages into Italian to publish them, and it completed a project to train a small group of autistic people in digital archiving. Not only focused on work, LEM organises social and cultural activities for autistic people, especially after it turned from cooperative to association few years ago.

LEM has long been developing support paths (both for individuals and groups) aimed at the well-being and social inclusion of people on the autistic spectrum defined as ‘in need of non-intensive support’, also through the involvement of families. The LEM’s Family coaching project, for example, intends to offer families of autistic adults concrete and continuous support to help them improve their quality of life and avoid burnout.

More information:
www.associazionelem.org/

5.7 Traineeships or trial period employment opportunities

Work Aut (Italy)

Based in the province of Barletta, in the Puglia region, Work Aut “Lavoro & Autismo” social cooperative and its Work Aut project were established in 2021, by the Comitato Famiglia Insieme - Parents in support of neurodiversity, which has promoted action in favour of the inclusion of autistic people since 2019.

The projects implemented in recent years have addressed the areas of education, leisure and employment with the aim of improving the quality of life of autistic people.

Work Aut offers training and internship projects to support the inclusion in the labour market of autistic people. They are supervised by qualified managers who also benefit from the assistance of educational experts, so as to foster a successful experience, both from the perspective of the autistic trainees and the companies involved.



© Work-Aut Lavoro e autismo società cooperativa sociale

Please consult the website for more information:
www.workaut.org/

6. Key practical resources and tools of European projects to support access to employment for autistic people

Count Me In – For the social inclusion of people with learning disabilities in the arts and cultural sector (2013 – 2014)



Started in 2013, this two-year project aimed to improve the social inclusion of people with special needs in the arts and cultural sector and promote opportunities for them in the labour market. Count Me In was funded by the European Commission’s Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP).

The project was underpinned by the belief that art and culture are for everyone and that this particular sector has great potential as a framework for Vocational Education and Training (VET). The project also aimed at building an interdisciplinary resource on how to use the arts and cultural

sector in vocational education and training for special needs groups. This was done by exploring different practices and methodologies to be found throughout Europe and by transferring innovations from earlier Lifelong Learning projects.

The Count Me In project produced a [publication](#) featuring the good practices at Gaia Museum Outsider Art in Denmark and the art workshops at *Debajo del Sombrero* in Madrid, Spain. This publication also includes tips and guidelines for VET professionals based upon the experience of all project partners along with a variety of good practice examples of vocational training for people with disabilities in cultural organisations. These include museums, galleries, theatre, dance, media, landscaping, music festivals and public spaces. Autism-Europe was a partner in this project, among other European organisations.



Download the Vocational Training for People with Disabilities in Cultural Institutions publication:

<https://www.autismeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/cmi-web-page.pdf>

JoTraDi – Job trainers for people with intellectual disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders (2013 – 2015)



Running from 2013 to 2015, the main goal of the JoTraDi (Job Trainers for people with intellectual Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders) project was to provide training for teachers, educators, trainers and tutors to foster the development of better employment conditions for people with disabilities. This project was funded by the European Commission’s Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP).

JoTraDi included a job placement programme to provide people with disabilities with a concrete work experience, and eventually, to employ them in a company. Those who followed the programme implemented by JoTraDi became ‘Job Trainers’ and were able to support the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and autistic people in the open labour market in Europe.

Please visit the project’s website for more information and download the training materials and tool-box:

www.trainingforjob.eu/wp/

IVEA – Innovative Vocational Education for Autism (2018 – 2021)



The Innovative Vocational Education for Autism (IVEA) project aimed at fostering social inclusion for autistic people through employment by developing a European holistic guide. Running from October 2018 to March 2021, the project was funded by the European Commission’s Erasmus + Programme.

The IVEA project brought together universities, autism associations, professionals and NGOs across Europe to create a new European Guide for the effective vocational training of autistic people in order to contribute to their successful employment.

The guide was the result of two different trialled training courses: one for people on the autism spectrum and another one for representatives of potential employers (stakeholders, staff from NGO’s, administrative departments, businesses). Participants of these trainings joined together in a final internship for autistic people in the entities involved in the project.

- EN-Guide & EN-Course
- PT-Guide & PT-Course
- ES-Guide & ES-Course
- HU-Guide & HU-Course



Visit the project dedicated website:

<https://ivea-project.eu/>

WIN-WITH-U- Workplace Inclusion and employment opportunities for youth WITH aUtism (2020-2023)



The Workplace Inclusion and employment opportunities for youth WITH aUtism (WIN-WITH-U) project aims to improve the inclusion of autistic people in the labour market by providing training to employers and firms and supporting autistic people in their journey toward employment. Running for three years from September 2020 to August 2023, this project is funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ Programme.

The WIN-WITH-U project developed an innovative and open training approach, including two learning paths, one focusing primarily on autistic people and the other on entrepreneurs/managers who want to improve their knowledge about autism.

Project partners produced a Learning Methodology document to improve the inclusion of young autistic people along with a set of learning modules which are freely available on a e-learning platform. In addition, a training package will be created and delivered in the five languages of the project consortium (English, Bulgarian, Italian, Danish and French).

Visit the project's website for more information and access the resources:

<https://win-with-u.eu/>

Autism Friendly Spaces: The Employability twist



The Autism-Friendly Spaces project: The employability twist (AFS Employability) addresses Vocational Education and Training (VET) and employability of autistic people. It will run from 2022 to 2024, funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme.

The AFS Employability project focuses on the need for an integrated programme that is going to involve and train a range of relevant stakeholders (notably autistic people, their support networks and services providers). It will also influence on a transnational basis and at the European level policies supporting the employability of autistic people.

AFS Employability will implement actions in the following areas to improve social inclusion:

- Client Engagement: provide all information to enable autistic people to decide whether or not they wish to use supported employment;
- Creation of a Social Hub for autistic individuals actively searching for or interested in employment;
- Vocational Profiling and Training: Help individuals identify their skills and preferences for work;
- Job Finding: Search for a job considering the needs of all parties involved through a specific website;
- Employer Engagement and Training on the needs of autistic employees, including conditions of employment and required skills for autistic people;
- On/Off Job Support: Provide support for the client and the employer according to their needs for a period of three months after a job placement;
- Create a policy report concerning the current situation of employment of autistic people at the European and national level;
- Raise awareness for the needs of autistic people through seminars.

Eventually, the project aims to address the issue of unemployment of autistic people by providing continued support to all relevant target groups, such as employers/ businesses, autistic individuals, and their support networks.

More information on the dedicated website:

www.autismfriendlyspaces.eu/employability/home



7. Conclusion

© Autismo Sevilla

Although approximately seven million Europeans are on the autism spectrum, studies suggest that an overwhelming majority (potentially 90% or over in certain areas) remain unemployed³⁷, despite the will of many to access and stay in employment. Every autistic person is different, and this compendium has sought to reflect this fact by highlighting the wide variety of skills, interests and strengths that autistic people can bring to the labour market.

Ultimately, freely accessing employment and being protected against discrimination is the right of every autistic person, as established in international law (UN CRPD) as well as in European and national legislation and policy. However, discrimination, a lack of understanding of autism and adapted employment services and programmes mean that many autistic people are excluded from the labour market or are unable to remain in employment. A lack of adapted training and vocational education programmes for autistic people also contributes to this situation.

By adopting a skills-based approach to employment, increasing understanding of autism and implementing reasonable accommodations tailored to each individual's needs, autistic people have a greater chance of accessing and retaining employment, which not only benefits autistic people but also society as a whole by enlarging the workforce and creating economic growth.

In order to showcase not only the current state of affairs in terms of unemployment and the right for autistic people to work but also existing solutions, this compendium has shown international examples of the wide variety of employment opportunities that are provided for people on the autism spectrum. It also offers a range of practical resources and tools to support autistic people in the workplace. Despite all the work still to be done in this field to ensure that autistic people can exercise their basic right to freely chosen or accepted employment, these examples will hopefully provide ideas and approaches for developing further and ensuring the sustainability of programmes to support the transition to the labour market for autistic people.

37 Fasciglione, "Article 27 of the CRPD and the Right of Inclusive Employment of People with Autism", p. 146; Autism-Europe, "I can learn, I can work: Europe-wide awareness-raising campaign 2020-2021" (2021), accessed March 2023; Autism-Europe, Autism and Work: Together we can, p. 53.



Seeding competences and harvesting work inclusiveness for autistic people



Co-funded by
the European Union

- August 2023 -

Written by Autism-Europe for the INFUSE Erasmus+ project