

Ujink

Autism-Europe N°80 / December 2023

Subject	Amendments by the committee responsible -block vote		
Amendments by the...	34	committee	
Amendments by the...	37	committee	separate



European Parliament Resolution on harmonisation of autistic people's rights in the EU

Autistic people experiencing homelessness: double invisibility?

Key progress towards the future European Disability Card

Focus: Fostering access to higher education and building pathways to employment

Support AE's 'Not Invisible' campaign in the lead-up to the EU election

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More news at: www.autismeurope.org



Rue Montoyer 39, B-1000, Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32-2-675-75-05
Email: secretariat@autismeurope.org
Bank account: BLG BNP Paribas
IBAN: LU12 0030 0913 1082 3000
BIC: BGLLULLL



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Collaborators

Editorial Committee: Aurélie Baranger, Harald Neerland, Zsuzsanna Szilvasy, Marta Roca, Stéf. Bonnot-Briey, Liga Berzina, Tomasz Michalowicz.

Writing, editing & coordination: Fernanda Buriola, Etxane O. Scott, Christian Takow, Aurélie Baranger

Translation: Etxane O. Scott and Magali Vlayen

Layout & Printing: mmteam sprl – 0495523292 – Frédéric Maigret

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Edito

Dear readers,

In 2023, Autism-Europe celebrated its 40th anniversary. On this occasion, we organized a beautiful photography exhibition in the European Parliament, featuring artwork from autistic individuals, as well as families and allies. For those who were unable to visit the exhibition in person, you can explore the exhibition booklet by scanning the QR code provided below. This event was a key opportunity for us to raise visibility and shed light on the experiences of autistic people while advocating for their rights.

Throughout the year, we have been delighted to contribute to positive developments at the EU level. These include the adoption of the European Parliament's 'Resolution on Harmonising the Rights of Autistic People' and the proposal for the upcoming European Disability Card. This card will be particularly valuable in supporting freedom of movement within the EU, especially for individuals with so-called 'invisible' disabilities. Thus, it is essential that autistic people are eligible for this card.

But where does this invisibility stem from? Often, it results from a lack of awareness, understanding, and recognition. Autistic people are frequently made to feel invisible. This is even more the case for certain groups who are victims of multiple discriminations, such as autistic people experiencing homelessness as explained in this issue.

To combat this invisibility, we are launching the European 'Not invisible' campaign in 2024. We call for the removal of physical, legal, social, and attitudinal barriers to accessibility and inclusion for autistic individuals in society. Autistic people should be valued, empowered and supported to participate in all areas of life. Let's create a society where autistic people receive the understanding, acceptance, and full enjoyment of their rights that they truly deserve. We invite you to join us and support the campaign across Europe!



Best regards,

Director,
Aurélie Baranger



President,
Harald T. Neerland



European Parliament adopts Resolution demanding harmonisation of autistic people's rights in the European Union

On Wednesday, 4 October 2023, the European Parliament (EP) adopted a Resolution entitled 'Harmonising the rights of autistic people'. AE welcomes the adoption of this resolution, which calls on the European Commission and European Union (EU) Member States to address the barriers faced by autistic people across Europe. It underlines the pervasive discrimination experienced by autistic people across their lifespan while shedding light on the specific needs of autistic girls and women and other marginalised groups. The Resolution makes key recommendations, spanning key areas from access to diagnosis to eligibility for the upcoming European Disability Card (and more generally disability status). The resolution came about after AE's Spanish member Autismo España's appearance before the European Parliament Committee on Petitions in February 2023 and is based on in-depth consultation with Autism-Europe regarding the needs of the autistic community.

A catalyst for the adoption of the Resolution was AE's Full member association Confederación Autismo España's petition to the European Parliament Committee on Petitions to safeguard the eligibility of all autistic people for the upcoming European Disability Card initiative. During their intervention in the European Parliament in Brussels, Autismo España's representatives highlighted that autistic people (whether or not they have an intellectual disability) should be eligible to get recognition of their disability status in their respective countries, which is not currently systematically the case across Europe and is a mandatory condition to receive the future European Disability Card. After the ensuing debate with Members of the European Parliament and the European commission, an internal working group with MEPs from various parties was set up to draft a Resolution on this matter, and Autism-Europe was closely consulted in the process.

From the right to a European Disability Card for all autistic people to harmonising all rights of autistic people

After AE liaised with relevant MEPs during the spring 2023, it was clear that there was an opportunity to broaden the scope of the resolution and reflect the multi-layered discrimination experienced by autistic people. The final text of the Resolution adopted in the plenary session was the result of the work of several key MEPs – and incorporated Autism-Europe's input provided via an in-depth consultation process – to inform them about the concerns of the autistic community across Europe.

The resolution entitled 'Harmonising the rights of autistic people' highlights key challenges faced by autistic people during their lifetime and thus calls for action in various domains to address their needs. These areas include access to diagnosis, healthcare, education, employment, accessibility and provision of reasonable accommodation, legal capacity, lifelong support in the community and deinstitutionalisation, culture and sport, training of professionals across sectors, research, as well as fighting against violence and forced sterilisation.



Mathieu CUGNOT © European Union 2023 - Source : EP

Furthermore, the resolution recalls that autism is a spectrum and support needs differ vastly, which is why person-centred, rights-based and evidenced interventions and support are necessary. The text also highlights the right to inclusive education for autistic people and calls for individualised ongoing support, assistance, and better access to vocational education and training. This resolution also promotes inclusive employment for all people on the autism spectrum that is in line with the Employment Equality Directive 'to ensure positive action recruitment programmes and quotas lead to tangible employment opportunities' (paragraph 13). The resolution stresses that it is vital for sufficient funds to be allocated to girls and women on the autism spectrum, as they 'face particularly high levels of poverty, social exclusion and violence'. It also calls for 'making forced sterilisation punishable as a criminal offence on the basis of the crime of sexual exploitation of women and children' (paragraph 19). Finally, this resolution 'urges the Member States to actively address (other) forms of intersectional discrimination experienced by autistic persons, particularly those belonging to vulnerable groups' (paragraph 20).

The strong demands voiced by the European Parliament in this resolution echo the long-standing advocacy recommendations of Autism-Europe. AE will make sure to ask candidates for the European Parliament to support them during the 2024 European election campaign and during their ensuing mandates if elected.

Key progress towards the future European Disability Card

Just in time before the 2024 European Elections, the creation of the future European Disability Card got closer to reality. After the European Commission announced its proposal for rolling out the card across all 27 EU Member States, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU agreed on the how and when in early February 2024. Autism-Europe has long advocated for this card, highlighting its key benefits for autistic people and people with other invisible disabilities. According to the deal, the European Disability Card will be recognised as proof of disability across the EU.



Back in September 2023, the European Commission announced its legislative proposal for a European Disability Card. AE considers that this card is a crucial tool to support free movement of people with disabilities in the European Union and better recognition of disability status across Europe. It is in fact a long-standing demand of Autism-Europe and the European disability movement as a whole. Autism-Europe took part in in-depth consultations with the European Commission before the release of the proposal of the European Disability Card in autumn 2023.

Autism-Europe therefore warmly welcomes the European Commission's proposal for a European Disability Card. The European Disability Card would allow autistic people to get an easier recognition of their disability status in other EU countries, without extra hassle and long explanations. Thanks to the card, during short-term stays in other EU countries, persons with disabilities will have equal access to special conditions and preferential treatment for certain public and private services, activities, and facilities.

Autism-Europe also welcomed that the European Commission proposed an EU Directive (a legislative act that sets out a goal that EU countries must achieve), covering both the European Disability Card and the European Parking Card for people with disabilities. The cards will be made available in physical and digital formats. Compared to the current European Parking Card, the updated version would allow persons with disabilities to access the same parking rights available in another EU Member State, notably thanks to a new common binding template.

The European Parliament and the Council of the EU reached a political agreement on the initial proposal from the European Commission in record time in February 2024. Autism-Europe strongly welcomed this agreement, and in particular the fact that it includes almost all transport services as well as provisions to access support when taking part in EU Mobility programmes (like Erasmus+).

According to the deal, the European Disability Card would be issued and renewed free of charge. An EU-level website in all EU official languages and national websites with information on the card have to be established. Safeguards have to be implemented to protect the European Disability Cardholders' privacy. EU Member States can decide to extend the use of the card to longer stays. The European Disability Card will have the possibility to feature the letter 'A', signaling the need for a personal assistant. This measure will undoubtedly be very useful for autistic persons with complex support needs.



Our members from Diversamente Onlus in Sardinia, Italy using their EU Disability Card in a museum during the pilot phase

The European Disability Card will also be eligible for third-country nationals with disabilities residing in the European Union, including for example Ukrainians on the autism spectrum that had to leave their country due to the on-going war.

Despite the demands of the disability movement, the agreement does not foresee temporary access to disability support and allowance when persons with disabilities move to work and study abroad. This means that autistic people might not be able to get all the support needed while undergoing the 'reassessment' of their disability when permanently relocating to a different EU Member State. The European Disability Card will also not cover all types of services.

Nevertheless, Autism-Europe finds encouraging the fact that the European Parliament and the Council of the EU committed to further exploring remaining gaps related to free movement of persons with disabilities (including the portability of disability support when moving to another EU Member State).

The European Disability Card is already a reality in eight EU Member States that participated in the pilot study since 2016. However, the deadlines for transposition and implementation of the European Disability Card across the EU are quite lengthy. EU

Member States will have 30 months to transpose the legislation into national laws and 42 months to start providing the cards. This means that the European Disability Card will only fully become a reality for all people with disabilities in the European Union in about 4 years from now.



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Invitation to Autism-Europe's 2024 Annual General Assembly

In accordance with the statutes for our organisation, we are pleased to invite you to attend Autism-Europe's Annual General Assembly on 11 May 2024. The meetings will take place in Dublin, Ireland and in hybrid format.

An Autism-Europe Council of Administration meeting as well as a study visit and a social programme will be organised in conjunction with the General Assembly. Members taking part on-site will also have the opportunity to take part in a networking session to learn about the activities and priorities of other members. The meetings will be hosted by Aslam.

All the working documents related to these meetings will be emailed to registered participants at a later date.

Agenda:

- Presentation of the Executive Committee report
- Presentation of the activity report: 2023
- Presentation of the financial report: 2023
- Presentation of the work programme: 2024

For more information,
please contact Autism-Europe's Secretariat:
secretariat@autismeurope.org



Join our new campaign 'Not Invisible' kicking off on April 2nd !

Each year, Autism-Europe works together with its member organisations and allies to conduct campaigns to raise awareness of autism and the rights of autistic people across Europe. Starting in 2024, Autism-Europe is running a new multi-annual awareness-raising campaign under the motto 'Not invisible'. We invite supporters to join us and be part of this campaign to shed light on autistic people's experiences, and to call for a society where autistic people get the understanding, acceptance, and full enjoyment of their rights they deserve.

The campaign theme 'Not invisible' seeks to draw attention to the fact that autistic people's needs are often made invisible in society. We want to raise awareness of the barriers and discrimination that autistic people face and address them in order to ensure the full realisation of their rights, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. The campaign also aims to highlight that while autism is often described as an 'invisible' disability, autistic people, their representative organisations and their support networks should be empowered and visible in all spaces and matters that concern them.

It is essential for the autistic community and its allies to advocate for visibility and inclusion across all sectors of society.

Join our campaign by sharing its messages and expressing support

In 2024, the campaign will be spreading messages covering a range of key topics – from access to education and employment to the future European Disability Card. Through these messages, we aim to raise awareness of autistic people's struggles and strengths, which remain often invisible for most parts of our societies.

AE is inviting all its members, the autistic community and supporters to participate in its campaign by sharing its visuals on social media. The community is encouraged to take pictures and share messages by tagging AE and using the hashtags #AutismDay2024 and #AutismNotInvisible. A great idea for participation is to create the infinity symbol using your hands or as a group.



Special focus on the European elections in 2024

This year, the elections for the European Parliament will take place in June. It is a crucial time to express our demands and make our voices heard.

We urge you to reach out to your local candidates and share your expectations with them. You can tag them on social media, send an email, or ask them to sign the pledge and take a photo. Let's all participate in shaping our future!

The campaign also demands to ensure the accessibility of the electoral processes and alternatives like early voting to accommodate autistic people's needs, which is essential to make their voices heard.

Follow Autism-Europe's campaign to mark World Autism Awareness Day 2024 here:



2024 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS PLEDGE FOR AUTISM



As a candidate for the European Parliament, I pledge to cooperate and support autistic people during my future mandate and to:

- Respect and promote the rights and dignity of autistic people, recognising their diversity and potential in the European Union (EU). I will build on the European Parliament resolution of 4 October 2023 on harmonising the rights of autistic persons and ensure that the EU and its Member States comply with their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities so that autistic people can enjoy their rights without discrimination.
- Support the implementation and monitoring of the European Disability Strategy 2021-2030, and I will advocate for the allocation of adequate resources and the adoption of effective measures to achieve its objectives.
- Acknowledge the expertise and voice of autistic people and their families as well as their representative organizations, and I will consult and involve them in the policy-making and legislative processes that affect them and be open to discuss their concerns. I will also promote their participation and representation in the European Parliament.
- Strive to make the EU and its Member States more accessible and inclusive for autistic people across the lifespan in all areas of life, by promoting the removal of physical, legal, social, and attitudinal barriers, and advocating for the provision of reasonable accommodation and support when needed.
- Support investment in EU initiatives that favour the social inclusion of autistic people and support for their needs at all ages.
- Foster the exchange of good practices and the development of common standards and guidelines on accessibility and inclusion for autism across the EU.
- Encourage research and innovation on autism, with the participation and consultation of autistic people and their families, in order to enhance their quality of life. I will support the dissemination and uptake of good practices and evidence-based interventions for autistic people across the lifespan. I will also foster the cooperation and coordination of research and innovation activities on autism at the EU and international levels promoting adequate participation of autistic people and their families.

By signing this pledge, I commit to cooperate and support autistic people during my future mandate in the European Parliament. I also invite other candidates and political parties to join me in this pledge, and to show their solidarity and commitment to the rights and inclusion of autistic people in the EU.

Name:

Date:



Autistic people experiencing homelessness: double invisibility?

Autism is often described as an invisible disability, and people experiencing homelessness may be considered invisible members of society. Autistic people face widespread discrimination and lack of accessibility across different sectors (in employment, health, education, etc.)¹, which are major risk factors for homelessness. While the links between autism and homelessness have been previously established², they continue to be under-researched. There is still much to uncover regarding how many autistic people are homeless, how homelessness among people on the spectrum can be prevented, and crucially what can be done to better support autistic people who currently find themselves in any form of homelessness.

How many autistic people are homeless and why?

Establishing a data overview is already challenging as there are no official figures on the number of autistic people per European country. Instead, we must rely on prevalence studies and local research – an issue shared by the homelessness sector. This problem is further compounded by the fact that many autistic people remain undiagnosed, especially adults, women, and minorities³. Estimates suggest that around 1% of the global population is autistic, although recent studies point to a significantly higher percentage⁴. Among the homeless population however, this prevalence rate increases at least twelvefold – a 2019 peer-reviewed paper found that over 12% of people experiencing homelessness from the study had screened positive for autism⁵. The same percentage was identified by a National Autistic Society survey over a decade ago⁶, while a 2019 study revealed

that 18.5% of homeless participants were found to have autistic characteristics⁷. However, the prevalence of autism among rough sleepers might be even higher than this, as a small local research project in England from 2010 pointed to one in two rough sleepers being autistic⁸. While this evidence regarding rough sleepers is anecdotal, it is nonetheless revealing of autistic experiences. It also underlines the urgent need for additional research and greater focus on autism in support services. At the very least, these figures suggest that autistic people are over-represented among the homeless population, which is unfortunately unsurprising.

Researchers have shown that many risk factors for homelessness – such as social isolation, reduced access to education, unemployment, mental health conditions, poverty, etc. – are found disproportionately among the autism community. In fact, 75-90% of autistic people are estimated to be unemployed⁹, and over 70% have a co-occurring mental health condition – such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, depression, or other conditions¹⁰. The widespread lack of support

for autistic people and exclusion across sectors contribute greatly to the high prevalence of mental health conditions among the autistic community. Autistic people also continue to be institutionalised across the EU¹¹, directly violating their right to live independently and be included in the community as stated in Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is legally binding across the EU.

It is also crucial to highlight that the autistic community has higher rates of victimisation, as studies show that 44% of autistic individuals have been victims of violence such as 'bullying (47%), child abuse (16%), sexual victimisation (40%)' and others¹². Gender-based violence has long been established as a risk factor for homelessness, and research has shown that autistic women might be at an even higher risk of homelessness than other women who are victims of abuse¹³. Considering the extensive barriers autistic people have to face when accessing services – such as potential communication challenges, lack of accommodations and discrimination – the harmful effects of this violence on both their physical and mental health are undoubtedly profound and long-lasting.

What is the mental health impact of homelessness on autistic people?

Based on the estimates presented above, at least one person out of ten that homelessness services encounter is autistic. Shelters, outreach programmes and housing solutions are already in high demand and underfunded as it is, but they are also widely non-

adapted to the needs of autistic people. These services can be overwhelming for people on the spectrum from a sensory and functional point of view, as they heavily alter routines and can trigger or worsen certain mental health conditions, not least because these services are highly populated¹⁴. Autistic people in homelessness services have also reported the need to mask autistic behaviours (such as stimming or intense interests) which research has shown to be exhausting and detrimental to their mental health¹⁵.

Additionally, these resources are often not adapted to the communication needs of autistic people, as they might have to face confusing administrative procedures without the possibility of using their preferred form of communication. The fact that many adults remain undiagnosed aggravates this situation, as neither they nor frontline staff might be aware of the accommodations needed to access these services.

Increasingly worrying however are the reports of autistic people being denied support when approaching homelessness services as their disability or mental health condition is not seen as qualifying them for assistance¹⁶. Researcher Beth Stone notes that these situations are 'concerning, given that participants' substance use escalated, and their mental health deteriorated, during periods of street homelessness. It illustrated a damaging approach to eligibility; meaning that participants' conditions had to worsen before they were helped'¹⁷.

Autistic experiences of homelessness also point to the fact that navigating the rejection from social services, the administrative hurdles and the difficulties experienced when accessing social housing sometimes impacted their mental health more significantly than other factors¹⁸.



Centre for Homelessness Impact

What measures should be implemented at homelessness services to support autistic people and their mental health?

While structural solutions aiming at preventing homelessness are of course needed – such as legally binding policies tackling access to education, unemployment, and financial support – immediate action is required to avoid the homelessness and housing exclusion cycle. It is essential to raise awareness on autistic experiences of homelessness and develop tools for identifying and better meeting their needs. This can be done by developing autism awareness trainings, research, and adapted housing solutions, which should be co-produced with autistic people who have lived experience of homelessness in order to truly be effective. In 2015, Homeless Link prepared a briefing on autism for frontline staff and in 2019 the *Autism and Homelessness Toolkit* (co-created by Autism-Europe member the National Autistic Society) was published¹⁹. This guide is a positive step forward as it provides an overview of autism, information on how to recognise it and crucially how to adapt outreach and working strategies to better support the autistic community. These accommodations are a first step towards improving the mental health of autistic people experiencing homelessness and pave the way for the implementation of individualised mental health support. Unfortunately, guidelines like these are rare and not easily available in other European languages.

At a time when the European Commission has identified mental health as being a key priority for the Union, targeting specific actions and funds for autistic people is imperative. As it stands, the widespread lack of support for autistic people and their mental health needs only perpetuates homelessness and exclusion from society.

Note: This article was initially written for FEANTSA's Homeless in Europe winter issue magazine 'Beyond Shelter - Europe's dual crisis of homelessness and mental health' published in January 2024. It has been slightly edited for this publication.



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Urgent issue of access to healthcare: AE members and allies exchange in the framework of its 'Afternoon of Good Practices'

The *Lancet Regional Health – Europe* journal recently published a study about the reduced life expectancy of autistic people in the UK, compared to the general population, with researchers saying it highlights an urgent need to address inequalities to prevent premature death for people on the autism spectrum. On this occasion, AE Director Aurélie Baranger talked to Euronews and reiterated the autistic community's call to tackle discrimination and improve accessibility for autistic people in the field of healthcare. In December 2023, AE also organised an 'Afternoon of Good Practices' online session dedicated to access to healthcare where AE members and experts shared current inspiring initiatives.

People diagnosed with autism and a learning disability are more likely to die prematurely in the UK compared to those without those conditions, according to the *Lancet Regional Health – Europe* journal's new study. In her interview with Euronews, AE Director Aurélie Baranger underlined the importance of implementing a public health plan for autism that includes accommodations in healthcare for autistic people as well as systematic training for healthcare workers in autism.

She also highlighted the recent adoption of the European Parliament's Resolution on 'Harmonising the Rights of autistic people' (see page 5). This resolution is a strong call for action both at the European level and at the national level for policymakers to take further action to address the discrimination experienced by autistic people and promote systematic reasonable accommodation, including in healthcare.

To this end, identifying the needs of autistic people and developing tools and practices to foster accessibility in the healthcare system is essential. This topic was the focus of the 'Afternoon of Good Practices' session held by Autism-Europe in December 2023.

'Afternoon of Good practices' dedicated to the accessibility of health services for autistic people

During this session, Guillermo Benito Ruiz first presented the results of a study conducted by Confederación Autismo España about the barriers and facilitators to accessing healthcare for autistic people in Spain. He also introduced a set of recommendations to enhance the accessibility of the healthcare system.



Coactis – SantéBD

To this end, it is crucial to adapt the environment to be more autism-friendly and predictable. The general healthcare system should take into account cognitive accessibility and all medical procedures should be adapted to suit autistic people's needs. It is also essential to ensure access to mental health services and systematic training for healthcare professionals.

Aitana García and Cristina Couto continued the discussion by presenting the work of the Galician Autism Federation regarding healthcare accessibility. The organisation actively promotes cognitive accessibility and the humanisation of healthcare assistance. It involves implementing measures to foster the availability of specialised and specific care for autistic patients and promoting the training and education of healthcare professionals in collaboration with the Galician Health Service.

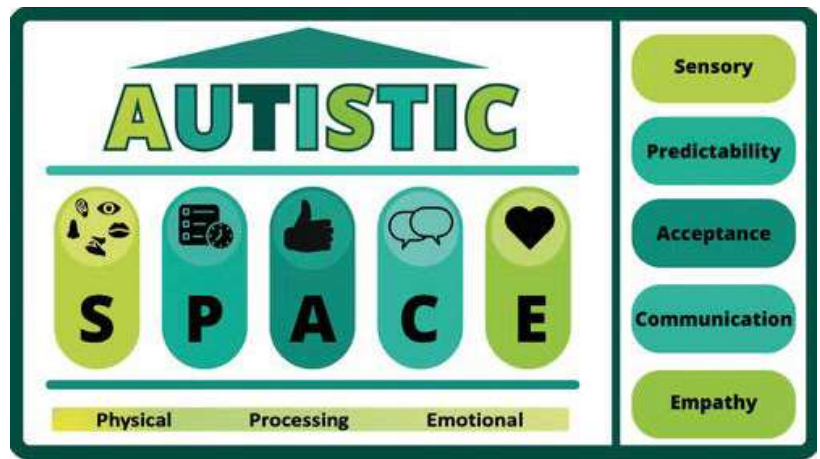
Mary Doherty – from the University College Dublin School of Medicine in Ireland and founder of Autistic Doctors International – then explained more specifically how healthcare environments can be challenging for all patients but specifically for autistic

Autistic SPACE: a novel framework for meeting the needs of autistic people in healthcare settings

people, who may require individual accommodations to allow equitable access. She presented a simple framework which may facilitate equitable clinical services at all points of access and care, using the acronym 'SPACE'. This encompasses five core autistic needs: Sensory needs, Predictability, Acceptance, Communication and Empathy. Three additional domains are represented by physical space, processing space and emotional space.

This simple yet memorable framework encompasses commonalities shared by autistic people and we hope that it becomes widely known in the healthcare communities, which is why translation in various languages is now underway. She also highlighted the various publications in relation to access to healthcare published by the Autistic Doctors International organisation.

Finally, Stéphanie Baz presented the work of Coactis Santé, an association founded in 2010 to promote access to treatment and healthcare for people with disabilities by creating effective and user-friendly tools. SantéBD is a website that hosts booklets in easy-to-read explaining a range of medical procedures to facilitate interactions between patients and healthcare professionals.



Mary Doherty, Sue McCowan, and Sebastian CK Shaw - British Journal of Hospital Medicine 2023 84:4, 1-9

Currently, there are more than 60 booklets covering a wide range of health topics, available in 4 languages (English, Romanian, Spanish, German) and a multilingual site will soon be available. Another initiative launched by Coactis Santé is the HandiConnect Platform, which offers remote training for healthcare professionals to help them better address the needs of patients with disabilities.

Access the link to the various practices via this QR code:



What are the 'Afternoon of Good Practices'?

The 'Afternoon of Good Practices' are informal networking and information exchange sessions organised bi-monthly online for Autism-Europe's members and partners to promote mutual learning.

They are addressed to AE members and relevant stakeholders in order to share good practices across Europe that support and promote the rights of autistic people as well as their quality of life.

These roundtables also offer the opportunity for participants to network and share experiences on the topic of the session.



Themes of the upcoming 'Afternoon of Good Practices' sessions in 2024

- **15/03/2024:** Inclusive advocacy practices in associations (initiatives to represent the diversity of the autism spectrum, working in partnership)
- **18/04/2024:** Support services and initiatives for independent living
- **13/06/2024:** Accessibility of higher education
- **26/09/2024:** Autism and ageing
- **Date tbc:** Emergency services and crisis

If you are interested in receiving further information about the 'Afternoon of Good Practices', please send an email to secretariat@autismeurope.org.

Focus: Fostering access to higher education and building pathways to employment

The Scuola Futuro Lavoro (Italy): a personalised approach to learning

Access to higher education is a right, however for autistic people, finding a university or vocational school that understands their challenges and accommodates their needs can be difficult. In Milan, Italy, the Scuola Futuro Lavoro was funded in 2019 by the ‘Un futuro per l’Asperger’ foundation and designed to be fully accessible to students diagnosed with autism.

Today, 75% of the students of Scuola Futuro Lavoro are on the autism spectrum. The main objective of Scuola Futuro Lavoro is to offer autistic people an easier pathway towards post-diploma specialisation and employment. Courses cover a range of digital disciplines such as filmmaking, digital animation and visual effects, which are all in demand in today’s labour market.

The school’s approach is based on an intelligent, environmental and educational structure, particularly designed for autistic students and their needs. With a special emphasis on the multicultural perspective, the school chooses to be inclusive by promoting social cohesion and permeability among students of different backgrounds.

During the orientation stage, students receive a personalised assessment regarding their strengths and weaknesses, in order to benefit from a tailored educational strategy.

Teachers’ training in autism

The project provides training courses and hands-on activities to teachers and staff members to improve their knowledge and understanding of autism. This enables teachers to implement appropriate teaching methodologies that are tailored to the interests and learning styles of their students. The course is closely monitored, and regular self-training meetings are conducted to facilitate the exchange of information among teachers and staff members.

Autism-friendly design

One of the most important aspects of Scuola Futuro Lavoro is their emphasis on an autism-friendly environment. The building and general organisation of the school aim at minimising stress and simplifying the sensorial environment to foster positive sensory experiences. Educational and recreational activities are strictly separated, and materials are carefully chosen to accommodate the sensory sensitivities that autistic students may have.

Classrooms are equipped with micro-perforated wooden panels that provide sound absorption and indoor heating, resulting in

better acoustic comfort and an environment free of distractions that enhances learning. The decoration includes green walls and harmonious arrangements, giving a more welcoming sensation to the classroom and school as a whole. In the event that students may feel overwhelmed, a ‘pressure-relief room’ is available, allowing them to develop self-regulation and autonomy skills.

Cooperative learning

The year starts with the teachers outlining the topics to be studied throughout the year, enabling students to gain a better understanding of the syllabus and expected results, therefore avoiding cognitive overload.

Scuola Futuro Lavoro does not believe in passive learning where students sit quietly and listen to lectures. Instead, they use active teaching methodologies that put students at the centre of the learning process and encourage everyone to participate.

Cooperative learning is a key part of this approach, where students work in groups and share responsibility for the success of a project. This helps to promote positive interdependence ensuring that everyone contributes to the learning process.

Working in small groups can enhance social skills and interpersonal relationships, which are essential for a good level of cooperation, preparing students for their professional lives. Learning by doing is another helpful teaching practice. It allows students to use direct experiences to solve problems and understand concepts more easily.

Preparing for the workplace

The course’s ‘final workshop’ assesses the skills acquired throughout the year. Supplementary courses aim to enhance soft skills necessary for the workplace such as autonomy, organisational skills, and adaptability.

Scuola Futuro Lavoro signed a collaboration agreement with various local employment agencies. Together they create multidisciplinary pathways and methods for developing talents



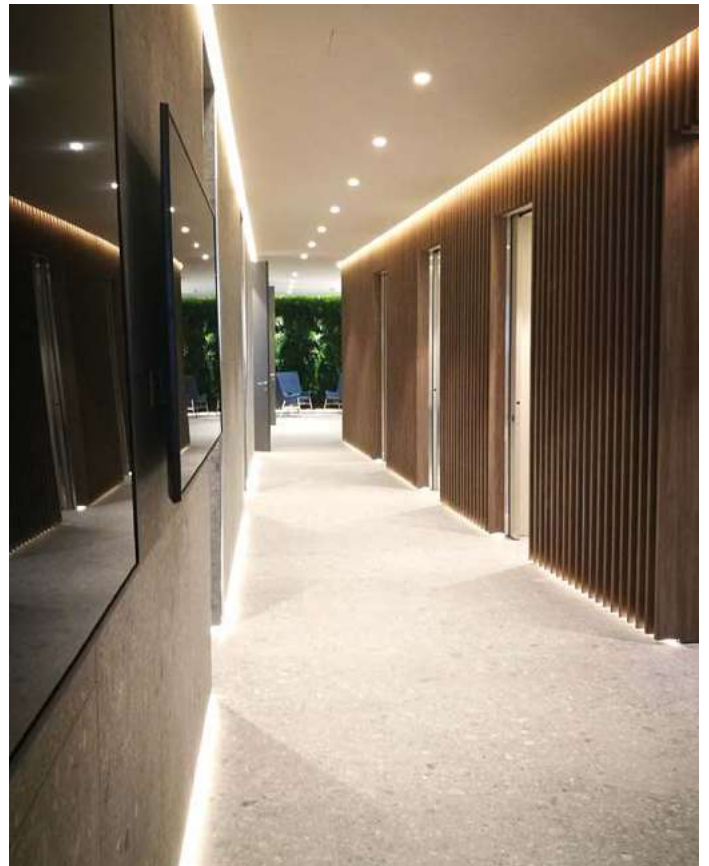
Courtesy from Scuola Futuro Lavoro

and entrepreneurship. Training meetings are organised for the companies who will welcome the students, but also for foundations and employment agencies.

The aim is to provide companies with the required resources to establish a workplace that embraces diversity and accommodates the individual needs of each employee. The objective is to enable the students to use their skills and knowledge in a secure and supportive atmosphere. Students and aspiring professionals can then flourish and advance in their careers while their unique way of doing things is respected.

For more information:

<https://scuolafuturo lavoro.it>



Courtesy from Scuola Futuro Lavoro

Inclusion in French Universities for Neurodivergent Students: the 'Atypie-Friendly' Programme

The 'Atypie-Friendly' programme started in 2018 under the name 'Aspie-Friendly'. Initially focusing on making higher education inclusive for autistic students without intellectual disabilities, it was renamed in 2023 to include students with other neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, etc. The programme is available in over a third of all French universities and over 500 students have already received support.

Now entering its sixth year, the 'Atypie-Friendly' programme will run until 2028. It was developed within the framework of the French national autism strategy with the aim of increasing accessibility and inclusion in higher education. It was extended in 2023 to other conditions following the objectives of the current 5-year French national strategy for neurodevelopmental conditions (including autism, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysorthographie, dyspraxia, dysphasia, attention deficit disorder with and without hyperactivity as well as intellectual disability).

Participating universities provide students with individualised support as they enter and settle into university life. The campuses strive to be neurodivergent-friendly spaces where sensory sensitivities are taken into account. Universities are encouraged to use the materials and training developed by the programme to provide holistic support for their neurodivergent students, offering tailored accommodations to the curriculum and academic requirements as well as training their staff on autism and other conditions. Every participating university has at least one 'Atypie-Friendly' contact person who is responsible for the implementation of the programme. It is important to note however that in many French universities, the support provided for students with disabilities continues to be coordinated by the university's disability support services.

The added value of the programme is that it goes beyond educational accommodations, as it also offers social activities – such as online 'Atypie cafés' for neurodivergent students from all around the country to meet and share their experiences – and professional counselling. Universities involved in the programme are encouraged to partner with 'Atypie-Friendly' companies (such as Microsoft, IBM or AutoCon) with the aim of supporting students into finding traineeships and professional experiences.

The 'Atypie-Friendly' programme certainly addresses inclusive education from a comprehensive and structural perspective, which is needed to adequately support autistic students. In many European countries however, not least of which France, full access to education for autistic people is far from a reality, as autistic children, teenagers and adults continue to be excluded from the education system.

While access to education for autistic people should be ensured at all levels and throughout life, it is very encouraging to see such large-scale programmes being rolled out at national level. The importance of initiatives like this one cannot be understated, particularly because higher education does not often provide autistic people with adequate support, especially when considering the social and functional challenges university life can bring. However, to ensure these programmes have long-lasting impact beyond their end dates, the resources and practices developed should be integrated into the university's existing support services and made accessible to all students.

More information:

<https://atypie-friendly.fr/>





The WIN-WITH-U project: bridging the gap to access employment

Autism-Europe (AE) together with its partners from Italy, Denmark, and Bulgaria successfully carried out the Erasmus+ project 'Workplace Inclusion and employment opportunities for youth WITH autism' (WIN-WITH-U). The project ran from 2020 until 2023 and concluded with two main events at the European Parliament in Brussels and at the LUISS Business School in Rome, attracting a large crowd on-site and online. These events were an opportunity to present the online WIN-WITH-U training developed for autistic jobseekers and potential employers.

Employment inclusion for autistic people is a pressing issue which is high on the advocacy agenda of Autism-Europe. That's why AE joined the consortium led by LUISS Business School, together with Campus Bio Medico University of Rome, Specialisterne Denmark (a coaching company supporting autistic people towards employment), and ECQ (a quality assurance company from Bulgaria).

The WIN-WITH-U partners developed a learning methodology and a set of learning modules to improve the employment inclusion of young autistic adults, which are freely available on an e-learning platform. A training package was also created and delivered in the five languages of the project consortium, which are English, French, Bulgarian, Italian, and Danish.

On May 24 2023, under the theme '**Building inclusive education and employment for autistic people**', AE organised a side-event to the European Parliament of Persons with Disabilities (EPPD). During this conference hosted by Member of European Parliament (MEP) Chiara Maria Gemma from Italy, WIN-WITH-U project coordinator Nunzio Casalino, Professor at LUISS Business School, presented the main project results. He was joined by Specialisterne CEO Carsten Lassen who presented their job coaching programme for autistic people. AE's board member Vincent Grimaldi de Puget shared his insights into current trends and hiring practices for autistic people.

Visit the WIN-WITH-U project website in English, French, Italian, Danish and Bulgarian:

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



BİRGƏ VƏ SAĞLAM
İCTİMAİ BİRLİYİ



'Together and Healthy' Public Union: transforming the lives of young autistic people in Azerbaijan

'Together and Healthy' Public Union is an organisation founded in Azerbaijan in 2013 to improve the lives of young autistic people. The group collaborates on various projects and initiatives, seeking to learn from other countries and implement programmes that promote health and awareness.

'Together and Healthy' is led by Aytan Eynalova, who is the mother of an autistic son and is driven by her connection to autism and dedication to making a difference. The organisation is involved in many projects and initiatives that aim to promote societal inclusion, employment, and quality of life for autistic people. They organise courses, seminars, meetings, and exhibitions to promote the inclusion of autistic people in society.

An important milestone was the establishment of the Autism Centre in 2021. It is an affiliated entity that provides support to nearly a hundred children in two different cities of Azerbaijan, Baku and Ganja. The Autism Centre works with a team of 37 experts, offering rehabilitation services and education guidance.

The Public Union also established an 'Inclusive Development Support Centre', which is an educational hub that provides structured support for the professional advancement of staff in relevant fields. Since its inception, the centre has conducted numerous successful professional development workshops and educational seminars in collaboration with the Ministry of Science and Education, UNICEF Azerbaijan, various private schools, and both public and private institutions.

Kashalata Café, located in the heart of the capital city of Baku, is a project run by Public Union since 2017. The café employs 20 people and provides a unique opportunity for young autistic individuals to develop their professional skills in a nurturing environment. The goal is to bring positive change to their lives and create a supportive workplace for all employees. This pioneering project is the first inclusive catering service in the country, with staff that includes both autistic and neurotypical people.

Another remarkable initiative by Together and Healthy is the 'Blue Hearts' choir and rhythm group. This group serves as an

artistic outlet and talent discovery platform for autistic youth. With a repertoire of vibrant compositions, the group adds a special dimension to Public Union by fostering creativity and self-expression.

In the future, Together and Healthy aims to promote employment opportunities by creating specific models, supporting families, and providing training to specialists and medical professionals. The organisation also plans to collaborate with international institutions to gain knowledge and status. It envisions a world where inclusive education and equal opportunities are accessible to all.

Together and Healthy's main goals and objectives are:

- Transferring international knowledge to the country, obtaining international accreditation and certificates;
- Supporting families in their caregiving roles;
- Organising and developing rehabilitation centres in various regions of the country;
- Raising awareness about autism through educational campaigns and initiatives;
- Organising international and national conferences on autism;
- Promoting inclusive education and social inclusion for all.

'Together and Healthy' Public Union is an affiliated member of Autism-Europe.

Website: birgesaglam.az



Federació Catalana d'Autisme: Improving the quality of life of autistic people

Established in 2009, the Catalan Federation of Autism has been dedicated to providing extensive support and services to 45 entities across Catalonia (Spain). Their primary goal is to enhance the quality of life for autistic people in the region.

Functioning as a crucial point of reference and comprehensive resource centre, the Federation aims to address and tackle the distinctive challenges encountered by the autism community, specifically their financial concerns. Made of a board of six dedicated individuals and a proficient team of highly specialised experts, the team of the Catalan Federation of Autism offers an array of services:

- Institutional talk and negotiation (advocacy, awareness-raising of key issues for all members) ;
- Legal support (free advice and guidance on legal concerns) ;
- Accounting and tax support ;
- Communication support, including advice and training ;
- Technical support ;
- Training ;
- Network empowerment ;
- Personal assistance

With the overarching mission of enhancing the quality of life of autistic people, the Catalan Federation of Autism actively engages in diverse initiatives. Among these is the Rumbo project, designed to pioneer unexplored approaches to independent living through innovative design solutions. This project aims at providing individuals with disabilities with greater autonomy and comfort, thus fostering improved quality of life.

Another noteworthy initiative involves educating families, students, and educators to combat bullying in schools, which is particularly vital to ensure a safe environment for autistic students. Additionally, the Autism Friendly Spaces project concentrates on enhancing sensory perception through the implementation of visual cues and cognitive support, with the ultimate objective of promoting universal accessibility.

The long-term vision of the Catalan Federation of Autism is to change the current societal paradigm so that diversity is embraced and celebrated. The ultimate goal is to enable the full participation of autistic people in all aspects of society, while also ensuring that associations representing the autistic community are given a voice in all important matters.

Thanks to the collective dedication of the Catalan Federation of Autism, its members find the ideal support necessary to carry out their projects and fulfil their mission.

**Federació Catalana d'Autisme
is an affiliated member of Autism-Europe.**

Website: fedcatalanautisme.org



SOS Autism Public Association in Moldova: 'All we do is for autistic people'

Founded in May 2008, the SOS Autism Centre in Moldova was established by a group of parents of autistic children. Assisting and caring for autistic people is the core of the SOS Autism Public Association. Through different spheres of knowledge and expertise, they work closely to improve the quality of life of autistic children, teenagers, and their families. Today, the center serves 75 children and 20 young adults every day.

The SOS Autism Public Association operates as a Social Centre that provides psychology services for autistic children and their families. They have a team of 24 psychologists who offer speech therapy, physiotherapy, courses and training for parents. Additionally, they have been accredited as a medical centre since 2018, which allows them to employ eight doctors who are authorised to conduct diagnostic tests for autism.

In 2014, the SOS Autism Public Association began conducting widespread campaigns to raise public awareness about autism. Since 2015, the organisation has been working closely with the Moldovan government to prioritise the needs of autistic children. One major achievement was the development and approval of the Framework Regulations, which is a set of guidelines and rules established in cooperation with the government of Moldova that operates medical centres offering services to autistic individuals. The purpose is to provide a formal structure to ensure consistent and regulated care for autistic individuals. The initiative is supported by the National Medical Insurance Company.

The Parents Resource Centre is one of the most crucial services provided by the association. It educates parents on how to assist

their autistic children and meet their needs. Since 2021, the organisation has been offering social services to 16 beneficiaries in their homes. The association is also involved in initiatives to include autistic children in schools and kindergartens. Their future goal is to establish a framework that will enhance the quality of life of these children.

In order to effectively improve the quality of life of autistic children and young adults in Moldova, the SOS Autism Public Association has initiated 19 projects that were funded internationally. The association remains committed to staying up-to-date by learning from specialists from other countries.

SOS Autism Public Association
is an affiliated member of Autism-Europe.

Website: autismmoldova.md

Member Associations of Autism-Europe

FULL MEMBERS

National associations of autistic people and parents

ANDORRA

AUTEA
Carrer Prada Casadet, núm. 2
AD500 Andorra la Vella
Tel: +376 321 190
E-mail: correuautea@gmail.com
Website: <https://www.autea.org>

BELGIUM

Association Pour l'Epanouissement des Personnes Autistes (A.P.E.P.A.)
Rue du Fond de Malonne 127
5020 Malonne
Tel: +32-81-74.43.50
Fax: +32-81-74.43.50
E-mail: apepa@skynet.be
Website: www.ulg.ac.be/apepa

Vlaamse Vereniging voor Autisme (V.V.A.)

Groot Begijnhof 14
B - 9040 Gent
Tel: +32.78.152.252
Fax: +32.9.218.83.83
E-mail: vva@autismevlaanderen.be
Website: www.autismevlaanderen.be

CZECH REPUBLIC

Národní ústav pro autismus, z.ú. (NAUTIS)
V Holešovičkách 593/1a
182 00 Praha
Tel: +420 775 195 328
E-mail: nautis@nautis.cz
Website: www.nautis.cz
FB: www.facebook.com/nautis.cz

CROATIA

Croatian Union of Associations for Autism
Ljudevita Posavskog 37
10000 Zagreb
Tel: +385 1 8896 527
Fax: +385 1 8896 507
E-mail: suzahriv@gmail.com
Website: www.autizam-suzah.hr

DENMARK

Landsforeningen Autisme
Banestrøget 19-21
2630 Taastrup
Denmark
Tel: +45 70 25 30 65
E-mail: kontor@autismeforening.dk
Website: www.autismeforening.dk

FINLAND

Finnish Association for Autism and Asperger's Syndrome
Pasilanraitto 9 B
00240 Helsinki
Tel: +358.10.315.2800
E-mail: info@autismiliitto.fi
Website: www.autismiliitto.fi

FRANCE

Autisme France
1175 Avenue de la République
06 550 La Roquette sur Siagne
Tel: +33.4.93.46.01.77
Fax: +33.4.93.46.01.14
E-mail: autisme.france@wanadoo.fr
Website: www.autismefrance.org

Sesame Autisme

53, rue Clisson
F - 75013 PARIS
Tel: +33.1.44.24.50.00
E-mail: contact@sesame-autisme.fr
Website: <https://sesameautisme.fr>

GERMANY

Autismus Deutschland
Rothenbaumchaussee 15
D - 20148 Hamburg
Tel: +49.40.511.56.04
Fax: +49.40.511.08.13
E-mail: info@autismus.de
Website: www.autismus.de

GREECE

Greek Society for the Protection of Autistic People (G.S.P.A.P.)

2, Athenas Street
GR-10551 Athens
Tel: +30.210.321.6550
Fax: +30.210.321.6549
E-mail: gspap@autismgreece.gr
Website: www.autismgreece.gr

HUNGARY

Hungarian Autistic Society (HAS)
Fejér György u. 10. I./23.
1053 Budapest
Tel: +36 1 301 9067/354 1073
Fax: +36 1 302 1094
E-mail: autist@interpont.hu
or info@esoember.hu
Website: www.esoember.hu ;
www.autista.info.hu ; www.aosz.hu

ICELAND

Einhverfusamtökin
Haaleitisbraut 11-13
IS - 108 Reykjavik
Tel: +354 562 1590
E-mail: einhverfa@einhverfa.is
Website: www.einhverfa.is

IRELAND

Irish Society For Autism (I.S.A.)
16/17 Lower, O'Connell Street
IRL - 1 Dublin
Tel: +353.1.874.46.84
Fax: +353.1.874.42.24
E-mail: admin@autism.ie
Website: www.autism.ie

Autism Spectrum Information Advice and Meeting Point (AsIAM)

17-21 Temple Road
Blackrock / Co Dublin
A94DN40
Email: info@asiam.ie
Website: <https://asiam.ie/>

ITALY

ANGSA APS Onlus
Via Casal Bruciato 13
00159 Roma
E-mail: segreteria@angsa.it
Website: [angsa.it](http://www.angsa.it)

LITHUANIA

Lietaus vaikai (Rain Children)
Pylimo str. 14A/37
01117 Vilnius
Tel: +370 620 206 65
E-mail: info@lietausvaikai.lt
Website: www.lietausvaikai.lt

LUXEMBOURG

Fondation Autisme Luxembourg
68, route d'Arlon
L-8310 Capellen
Tel: +352-26 91 11 1
Fax: +352-26 91 09 57
E-mail: autisme@fal.lu ;
communications@fal.lu
Website: www.fal.lu

MALTA

Autism Parents Association (APA)
P.O.BOX 30
Marsa
MTP 1001
Website: <http://www.autismparentsassociation.com/>
Email: autismparentsassociation@gmail.com

THE NETHERLANDS

Nederlandse Vereniging voor Autisme (N.V.A.)
Weltevreden 4a
NL 3731 AL De Bilt
Tel: +31.30.229.98.00
Fax: +31.30.266.23.00
Email: info@autisme.nl
Website: www.autisme.nl

NORWAY

Autismeforeningen I Norge (A.I.N.)
Wergelandsveien 1-3
0167 Oslo
Tel: +47- 23 05 45 70
Fax: +47- 23 05 45 61/51
Email: post@autismeforeningen.no
Website: www.autismeforeningen.no

POLAND

Autism Poland Association
Ul. Ondraszka 3
02-085 Warszawa
Poland
Tel: 48 602 359 430
E-mail: mwokacz@poczta.fm
Website: <https://autyzmpolska.org.pl/>

PORTUGAL

Federacao Portuguesa De Autismo
Rua José Luis Garcia Rodrigues
Bairro Alto da Ajuda
P-1300-565 Lisboa
Tel: +351.21.3630040
Fax: +351.21.361.6259
Email: fpda@fpda.pt
Website: www.fpda.pt

RUSSIA

Autism Regions Association
90 Dubinskaya str.
115093 Moscow
Email: info@autism-regions.org
Phone: +7 913 905 6322
Website: autism-regions.org/

SERBIA

Serbian Society for Autism
Knez Milešina, 43
11 000 Belgrade, Serbia
Tél : +381 11 3392 683
Fax : +381 11 3392 653
E-mail: autizamsrbija@sbb.rs
Website : www.autizam.org.rs

SLOVAKIA

Spoločnosť na pomoc osobám s autizmom (S.P.O.S.A.)
Namestie 1.mája 1.
POBOX 89
810 00 SK- Bratislava 1
Phone + 421 915 703 708
E-mail: spona@changenet.sk
Website: www.spona.sk

SPAIN

Asociación de padres de niños y niñas autistas de Bizkaia (APNABI)
Sabino Arana, 69
E -48012 Bilbao
Tel: +34.94.475.57.04
Fax: +34.94.476.29.92
Email: autism@apnabi.org
Website: <http://www.apnabi.org/>

Autismo Burgos

C/ Valdenunez, 8
E - 09001 Burgos
Tel: +34.947.46.12.43
Fax: +34.947.46.12.45
Email: autismoburgos@autismoburgos.es
Website: www.autismoburgos.org

Autismo-España

C/ Garibay 7 3º izq
E - 28007 Madrid
Tel: +34.91.591.34.09
Fax: +34.91.594.18.31
Email: confederacion@autismo.org.es
Website: www.autismo.org.es

Federacion Española De Autismo (F.E.S.P.A.U.)

c/ Garibay 7, 3º Dcha.
28007 Madrid
Tel: +34.91.290.58.06/04
Fax: +34.91.290.58.10
Email: comunicacion@fespau.es
Website : www.fespau.es

Gautena

P.O. Box 1000
E - 20080 San Sebastian
Tel: +34.943.21.53.44
Fax: +34.943.21.52.39
Email: info@gautena.org
Website: www.gautena.org

SWEDEN

Autism- och Aspergerförbundet
Bellmansgatan 30
S- 118 47 Stockholm
Tel: +46 8 420 030 50
Fax: +46.86.44.02.88
Email: info@autism.se
Website: www.autism.se

SWITZERLAND

Autisme Suisse
Association de Parents
Neuengasse 19
2501 Biel
Tel: 032 322 10 25
Email: sekretariat@autism.ch
Website: www.autismesuisse.ch

UNITED KINGDOM

National Autistic Society (N.A.S.)
393 City Road
London EC1V 1NG
Tel: +44.20.7833.2299
Fax: +44.20.7833.9666
Email: nas@nas.org.uk
Website: www.nas.org.uk

Scottish Autism

Hilton House, Alloa Business Park Whins Road
Alloa FK10 3SA - SCOTLAND
Tel: +44.1.259.72.00.44
Fax: +44.1.259.72.00.51
Email: autism@scottishautism.org
Website: www.scottishautism.org

AFFILIATED MEMBERS

Regional associations of people with autism and parents

BULGARIA

Autism Today Association
1738 Sofia
2 Vitoshka Street
Tel: +359 896699274, +359 88 736 6067
Email: autismtodayaba@gmail.com
Website: www.autismtoday-bg.eu

CYPRUS

Autism Support Famagusta
P.C. 30190
5341 Ayia Napa
CYPRUS
Tel: +357 99 454009
Email: autismfamagusta@gmail.com
Website: <https://www.autismsupportfamagusta.com/>

ESTONIA

Estonian Autism Alliance
Rahu 8
EST - Tartu 50112
Tel: +3725119685
Email: info@autismiliit.ee
FB : <https://www.facebook.com/EestiAutismiliit>

FRANCE

Abri Montagnard
F - 64490 Osse-en-Aspe
Tel: +33.5.59.34.70.51
Fax: +33.5.59.34.53.21
Email: ritathomassin@neuf.fr
Website: <http://fratrieabri.free.fr/>

Union Régionale Autisme-France

Poitou-Charentes
Maison des Associations
12 Rue Joseph Cugnot - 79000 Niort
Tel: +33.06.52.65.41.61
Email: urafpc@autisme-poitoucharentes.fr
Website: www.autisme-poitoucharentes.fr

Dialogue Autisme

BP 248
45162 Olivet Cedex
Tel: +33 02 38 66 34 75
Fax: +33 02 38 66 34 75
Email: dialogueautisme@orange.fr
Website: www.dialogueautisme.com

Association de préfiguration de la Fondation 3A

36, la Feuivrais
44110 Erbray
Tel: +33 6 85 73 58 10/ +33 6 37 38 31 12
Email: association.fondation3a@gmail.com
Website: <http://fondation3a.fr/>

ITALY

Associazione Nazionale Genitori Soggetti Autistici Lombard (ANGSA Lombardia)

Via B. Rucellai 36
20126 Milano MI
Tel: +39-02-67.49.30.33
Fax: +39-178-2282858
Email: segreteria@angsalombardia.it
Website: www.angsalombardia.it

Fondazione Oltre Il Labirinto Onlus

Mario PAGANESSI
Via Botteniga, 831100 Treviso
Tel/Fax: +39-345-5510560
Website: www.oltrelabirinto.it

Associazione Diversamente ODV

Via Caterina Segurana, 12
09134 Cagliari Pirri
Tel: 0039 (0)3338944791
Email: info@diversamenteonlus.org
Website: www.diversamenteonlus.org

Fondazione Il Domani Dell'autismo

Via Nuova 45 - 19020 - Bolano
Phone +39(0) 187 933297
Mobile +39(0) 349 3564409
Email: presidenzafondazioneautismo@gmail.com
segreteriafondazioneautismo@gmail.com
Website: www.fondazioneildomani-dell'autismo.it (under construction)

LATVIA

The Latvian Autism Association

Strelnieku 9-14, Riga 1010
Email: info@autisms.lv
Website: www.autisms.lv

PORTUGAL

Associação Portuguesa para as Perturbações do Desenvolvimento e Autismo (A.P.P.D.A. - Lisboa)

Rua José Luis Garcia Rodrigues
Bairro Alto da Ajuda
P - 1300-565 Lisboa
Tel: +351.21.361.6250
Fax: +351.21.361.6259
Email: info@appda-lisboa.org.pt
Website: www.appda-lisboa.org.pt

REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

LSPA A Good Deed. Help to People with Autism

7a-1, Kozlov lane
220037 Minsk
Tel: +375 296 527497 +375 296 279415
Email: autismhelpby@gmail.com
FB: https://www.facebook.com/dobroe.delo.pobedit/

RUSSIA

Chuvash Regional Public Organization for Helping Children with ASD 'Wings'

428003, Chuvash Republic
Cheboksary, Avtozapravochny pr. 19
Tel: +7 800 201 84 05
Email: resource.center@wings-autism.ru
Website: http://wings-autism.ru/

SLOVENIA

Zveza NVO za avtizem Slovenije (Association of NGOs Slovenia)

Ulica Ivanke Uranjek 1
3310 Zalec
Email: zveza.avtizem@gmail.com
Website: https://www.zveza-avtizem.eu/

SPAIN

ASPERGA CENTER-A CORUÑA

Avenida de Oza 240, 1º y Bajo,
15006 A Coruña
Tel: +34-881917318 & +34-633283164

ASPERGA CENTER-SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

Avenida de Castela N°240, Bajo, 15705
Santiago de Compostela
Tel: +34-881165157 & +34-659485011
Email: asperga@asperga.org
Website: https://www.asperga.org/
FB: AspergaAsociacion; T: @AAsperga; I: @aspergaasociacion

Asociación Navarra de Autismo (ANA)

Monasterio de Urdax 36, 1º B
31011 Pamplona
Email: info.ana@autismonavarra.com
Website: www.autismonavarra.com

Autismo Galicia

Rua Home Santo de Bonaval n° 74-bajo
E - 15703 Santiago de Compostela
Tel: +34.981.589.365
Fa: +34.981.589.344
Email: info@autismogalicia.org
Website: www.autismogalicia.org

Fundacio Congost Autisme

Ronda del Carril 75
08530 - La Garriga - Barcelona - Spain
Tel: +34-93-871.47.57
Fax: +34-93-871.48.02
Email: congostautisme@autisme.com
Website: www.autisme.com

Federació Catalana d'Autisme

Carrer Providència 42
08024 Barcelona
Tel: +34 683 158 309
Email: info@fedcatalanautisme.org
Website: fedcatalanautisme.org

Nuevo Horizonte

Avda de la Comunidad de Madrid, s/n
E - 28230 Las Rozas de Madrid
Tel: +34.91.637.74.55
Fax: +34.91.637.77.62
Email: asociacion@nuevohorizonte.es
Website: www.nuevohorizonte.es

Fundacion Mas Casadevall (FMCA)

Apartat de Correus 172
E-17820 Banyoles (El Pla de l'Estany-Girona)
Tel: +34.972.57.33.13
Fax: +34.972.58.17.12
Email: info@mascasadevall.net
Site internet : www.mascasadevall.net

Autismo Sevilla

Avda. del Deporte s/. 41020 Sevilla.
Tel: +34 954 40 54 46
Fax: 954 40 78 41
Email: asociacion@autismosevilla.org
Website: www.autismosevilla.org

UNITED KINGDOM

Autism Initiatives

Sefton House, Bridle Road
Bootle, Merseydide, L30 4XR
Tel: +44.151.330.9500
Fax: +44.151.330.9501
Email: ces@autisminitiatives.org
Website: www.autisminitiatives.org

Autism Northern Ireland (N.I. Autism/PAPA)

Donard, Knockbracken Healthcare Park,
Saintfield Road
Belfast BT8 8BH
Tel: +44.28.9040.1729
Fax: +44.28.9040.3467
Email: info@autismni.org
Website: www.autismni.org

Autism East Midlands

Mr. Philip Carpenter
Unit 31 Craggs Industrial Estate
Morven Street
Creswell
Workshop
Nottinghamshire S80 4AJ
Tel: 0044 (0)1909 506 678
Email: info@autismeastmidlands.org.uk
Website: www.autismeastmidlands.org.uk

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

ALBANIA

Fondacioni Femijeve Shqiptare

Rr. 'Deshmoret e 4 Shkurtit', Pall. nr. 30
Kati II, pas Akademise se Arteve
Tirane Albanie
Tel: +355.4.2270663
Email: info@albanianchildren.org
Website: www.albanianchildren.org

AZERBAIJAN

Together and Healthy Public Union

Kamil Balakishiyev str. 23
Baku AZ1010
Tel: +994 55 988 9049
Email: info@birgesaglam.az
Website: birgesaglam.az
Facebook: Autism-Azerbaijan-Together-and-Healthy-Public-Union

FINLAND

Autism Foundation Finland (Autismisäätiö)

Mannerheimintie 117
00280 Helsinki
Tel: +358 44 765 4300
Email: info@autismisaatio.fi
Website: www.autismisaatio.fi
Twitter: @autismisaatio

FRANCE

E.D.I. Formation

2791 Chemin de Saint Bernard, bât. F
06220 VALLAURIS
Tel: +33 4 93 45 53 18
Fax: +33 4 93 69 90 47
Website: www.ediformation.fr

Union Nationale des Associations de Parents et Amis de Personnes Handicapées Mentales (U.N.A.P.E.I.)

15, Rue Coysevox
F - 75876 Paris Cedex 18
Tel: +33.1.44.85.50.50
Fax: +33.1.44.85.50.60
Email: public@unapei.org
Website: www.unapei.org

HUNGARY

Mars Foundation

(Mars Autistákért Alapítvány)
KUBIK Közösségi Iroda
Budapest
Jászai Mari tér 5-6
Email : hello@marsalapitvany.hu
Website: https://marsalapitvany.hu/
FB: marsalapitvany
I: @marsalapitvany

MALTA

Inspire (The Eden & Razzett Foundation)

Bulebel
Zejtun
ZTN 3000
Malta
Tel: +356 21807708
Website: www.inspire.org.mt\$

MOLDOVA

AO SOS Autism Moldova

Mun. Chişinău
Str. Grenoble, 191 building G
Tel: +373 68878788, +373 79021019
Email: sosautism.rm@gmail.com
Website: autismmoldova.md
Facebook: sosautismmoldova

THE NETHERLANDS

Dr. Leo Kannerhuis

Houtsnipiaan 1 Postbus 62
6865 ZH Doorwerth
Tel: +31.26.33.33.037
Fax: +31.26.33.40.742
Email: info@leokannerhuis.nl
Website: www.leokannerhuis.nl

POLAND

Fundacja Wspólnota Nadziei (Community of Hope Foundation)

Więckowice, ul. Ogrodowa 17
32-082 Bolechowice
Tel: +48.12.378.43.58 Fax:
+48.12.378.43.59
Email: biuro@farma.org.pl
Website: www.farma.org.pl

Synapsis Foundation

Ul. Ondraszka 3
02-085 Warszawa
Tel/fax: +48.22.825.77.57
Email: fundacja@synapsis.waw.pl
Website: www.synapsis.waw.pl

JiM Foundation

Ul. Tatrzarska 105
93-279 Łódź
Tel: 0048 42 643 46 70
Email: Help@Jim.org
Website: www.jim.org
FB: https://www.facebook.com/jimhelp/

ROMANIA

HELP AUTISM

Intrarea Graurului, nr 9
Sector 3, Bucureşti
Tel: +40 371 184 067
Email: contact@helpautism.ro
Website: www.helpautism.ro

RUSSIA

Our Sunny World (Solnechny Mir)

Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children
Leskova 6B
Moscow 127349
Tel: 007 (0)499 2680206
Website: http://solnechnymir.ru

TURKEY

Denizli Autism Association (DAA)

Yenişehir Mah. Ferahevler Sitesi. 14. sok.
No:49
Merkezefendi/Denizli
Tel: +902583613005
Email: denizliotizmdernegi@gmail.com,
info@otizmzenizli.org
Website: http://denizliotizm.org

Tohum Foundation

Cumhuriyet Mah. Abide-i Hürriyet Cad.
No: 39
34380 Şişli-Istanbul
Email: info@tohumotizm.org.tr
Tel: +90 212 248 94 30
Fax: +90 212 248 94 36
Website: http://www.tohumotizm.org.tr/

UKRAINE

Child With Future

21/16, Skovorody Str.
Kyiv 04070
Ukraine
Tel: +38 (044) 585 36 08
Email: info@cwf.com.ua
Website: www.cwf.com.ua

UNITED KINGDOM

AT-Autism

20-22 Wenlock Road
N1 7GU London
Email: info@atautism.org
Phone: +44 1363 85015
Website: https://www.atautism.org/

NON EUROPEAN MEMBERS

MOROCCO

A.P.A.E.I.

Rue 9 Avril - Maârif
Casablanca
Tel: +212.(0)5 22.25.81.43
Fax: +212.(0)5 22.25.57.11
E-mail: Ass_apaei@hotmail.fr



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