



Talent ASD

Desk and field research joint report

Executive summary



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The following is an executive summary depicting the current landscape of employment for autistic individuals across Europe (Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Germany, Lithuania, Spain and Portugal). Aiming to shed light on the unique challenges, opportunities, and support needs of autistic adults in the workforce, and the conclusions gathered after a thorough desk and field research analysis.

Desk Research

General Demographics and Employment Statistics

Autistic individuals constitute a minor portion of the workforce across various European countries, they face significantly lower employment rates when compared to the general population and with other groups with disabilities. Unemployment rates for autistic individuals often exceed 30% and have been rising since 2008. Systemic barriers to employment include inadequate support services, lack of workplace integration, and stigmatization. Despite some initiatives and reforms, there is a need for more effective policies and support systems to improve employment opportunities and the quality of life for autistic individuals.

Key Challenges Faced by Autistic Adults in the Labour Market

Autistic adults face low employment rates, high unemployment, and systemic barriers. Stigma and negative attitudes make it difficult for them to find and retain jobs. Educational and support systems are often inadequate, with application and interview processes being particularly challenging. There are some initiatives aimed at improving employment opportunities, but they often lack the necessary impact. Support services such as autism-specific coaching and workplace adaptations are insufficient, perpetuating discrimination and hindering inclusion.

Opportunities for Autistic Adults in the Labour Market

Opportunities for autistic adults are evolving but significant challenges remain. Supported and protected employment initiatives provide structured environments where autistic individuals can gain essential skills and work experience. Employment

services offer tools such as workplace adaptation advice and special equipment provision. Legislation mandating employment quotas for individuals with disabilities and financial incentives for employers are being adopted. Customized employment models aim to create job opportunities tailored to individual strengths and abilities, but more comprehensive and inclusive support systems are needed.

Learning Preferences and Training Needs

Learning preferences and training needs for autistic adults highlight the importance of tailored vocational training, inclusive education, and specialized support. Vocational schools and programs focus on social skills, job-specific knowledge, and providing structured environments with clear instructions and individual support. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools play a significant role in facilitating learning and professional development. Support initiatives provide employers with knowledge and strategies for integrating autistic workers, promoting inclusive hiring practices.

Employment Sectors and Job Types

Employment sectors suitable for autistic individuals include fields that require attention to detail, repetitive tasks, and structured environments such as STEM, writing and drafting, architecture, legal support, and computer programming. Vocational schools and training programs propose sectors like bakery, cleaning, automotive repair, gardening, carpentry, and construction. Creative fields like graphic design and skilled roles that require precision are also fitting. It is essential to recognize the varying strengths and capabilities within the autism spectrum and foster inclusive hiring practices.

Field Research

Autistic Adults

The survey gathered 30 responses from autistic individuals across several European countries, revealing common themes and preferences. Visual materials, interactive activities, and individualized coaching were favoured for learning. Teamwork posed challenges due to social communication and sensory sensitivities. Common strengths included attention to detail, honesty, and organizational skills. Challenges included social interactions, communication, and sensory sensitivities. Clear guidance and

constructive feedback were critical needs for improving job performance and satisfaction.

Family Members of Autistic Adults

The survey gathered 44 responses from family members, revealing common preferences and challenges. Effective formats for learning included interactive activities, hands-on demonstrations, and visual materials. Individualized coaching and peer support were emphasized. Common sensitivities affecting focus included noise, crowded environments, and light. Strengths included attention to detail, responsibility, and creativity. Challenges included communication barriers, anxiety, and the need for clear, structured tasks. Tailored training, workplace accommodations, and supportive measures were highlighted as essential for successful integration.

Professionals Working With Autistic People

The survey gathered 73 responses from professionals, suggesting suitable roles for autistic individuals based on strengths like attention to detail, consistency, and adherence to routines. Challenges included communication barriers, social dynamics, sensory sensitivities, and difficulty with changes. Strategies for addressing these challenges included individualized adjustments, clear instructions, structured processes, and environments adapted to sensory needs. Training programs should focus on building social skills, emotional regulation, and job-related skills. Mentoring programs, inclusive workplace cultures, and ongoing education for colleagues and managers were emphasized as crucial for successful integration.

Conclusions

The comparative study carried out in Greece, Estonia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Germany, Spain, and Portugal shows that autistic individuals face many challenges in finding and keeping jobs. They often have high unemployment rates and deal with discrimination and a lack of support. Despite efforts to promote equality, these issues remain widespread.

Using visual aids, personalized coaching, and special training programs can help autistic individuals learn and adapt better. In all these countries, there are some programs and job opportunities specifically for autistic people, but they are not enough. Laws like job quotas and financial incentives for hiring autistic individuals are helpful, but more comprehensive support is needed.

Autistic individuals prefer learning methods that include visual aids and interactive activities. They also benefit from using technology for learning. Suitable job sectors for autistic people are those that require attention to detail, repetitive tasks, and structured environments, such as STEM, writing, legal support, and computer programming. Vocational training also points to roles in bakery, cleaning, automotive repair, and creative fields like graphic design.

Feedback from autistic individuals, their families, and professionals highlights the need for clear instructions, personalized coaching, and structured support to improve job performance and satisfaction. Families stress the need for peer support and clear tasks, while professionals recommend matching jobs to autistic strengths and creating sensory-friendly environments.

Both desk and field research highlight the importance of individualized support, workplace accommodations, and ongoing education for employers to create an inclusive workforce.