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*Youth work
for employability
of youngsters
with autistic
spectrum*

GUIDEBOOK WITH CURRICULUM

**“EMPOWERING YOUTH WORKERS AND
EDUCATORS TO SUPPORT AUTISTIC
YOUNGSTERS IN THE LABOUR MARKET”**

TITLE:

Guidebook with Curriculum “Empowering youth workers and educators to support autistic youngsters in the labour market”

PROJECT:

“Youth work for employability of youngsters with autistic spectrum”, funded by the Agency for International Programs for Youth, Republic of Latvia

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

Project title: "Youth work for employability of youngsters with autistic spectrum"

Summary of the project:

The motivation for our project comes from a need observed across Latvia, Italy and Serbia: the integration and accessibility of autistic youth in the labour market. We want to address this issue by training educators and youth workers and preparing society and the working environment for the effective inclusion of autistic individuals. Research indicates that young autistic people have significantly lower rates of employment compared to those with physical or cognitive disabilities. In Latvia, the challenges include insufficient support in education, limited access to specialised training, and a lack of employer awareness about inclusive practices. Similarly, in Italy, the employment for young autistic people is hindered by regional disparities in services, inadequate vocational training programmes, and low employer awareness, which limit opportunities for proper employment and career growth. On the other hand, in Serbia, the situation is worse including a lack of inclusive workplace policies, limited vocational training and job coaching, and widespread social stigma, leading to high unemployment rates and dependence on family support.

These individuals are part of a vulnerable group encountering significant obstacles in societal integration at various levels. The difficulty in securing employment for autistic people can be attributed to several factors, including:

- The lack of effective policies for the employment inclusion of vulnerable people;
- The lack of training regarding the correct relational approach in relation to young autistic people;
- The lack of awareness regarding this issue in the entrepreneurial fabric and in society.

The consequence of these listed facts is that young autistic people, once they finish school, find themselves cut off from the world of work and therefore enter a state of isolation and dependence on their families or social services.

The project aims to address the following needs:

- Effective employment inclusion policies tailored to the unique challenges faced by young autistic individuals.
- The need for specialised training that equips youth workers with the skills to support autistic youngsters in navigating the labour market successfully.
- The need to raise awareness within local communities and the business sector about the potential benefits of employing young autistic people and to challenge existing misconceptions.
- The need to actively contribute to the improvement of the European Union's Diversity and Inclusion policies, ensuring that they adequately address the employment needs of autistic individuals.

By focusing on these needs, the project seeks to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for young autistic people as they transition into the workforce.

The goal of our project is to enrich the quality of youth work for the employability of youngsters with autistic spectrum and provide tools for further empowering them for better inclusion in the labour market.

The specific objectives of the project are:

1. To increase the competences of youth workers, school teachers and social workers in developing and implementing a model for inclusion of youngsters with autistic spectrum in the labour market through the innovative guidebook with curriculum and the training course.
2. To educate youngsters with autistic spectrum in practical skills for the labour market, personal branding, communication and relational skills through an innovative toolkit and the piloting workshops.
3. To increase capacities of consortium partners in the topic and disseminate project outputs with relevant stakeholders in local/international level through collection and promotion of positive practices, project online platform and national conferences.

Project activities are:

WP1 – Project Management

WP1 – Project kick-off meeting – online

WP2 – R1 Guidebook with Curriculum “Empowering youth workers and educators to support autistic youngsters in the labour market”

WP2 – R2 Training course for youth workers

WP1 – Project mid-term meeting – online

WP3 – R3 Toolkit “Empowerment of autistic youngsters on building skills for career success”

WP3 – Toolkit piloting workshops

WP4 – R4 Collection of positive practices for inclusion in the labour market

WP4 – R5 Project online platform

WP4 – International conference – IT

WP4 – International conference – LV

WP4 – International conference – RS

WP1 – Project evaluation meeting – online

Project results:

- Guidebook with Curriculum “Empowering youth workers and educators to support autistic youngsters in the labour market”
- Toolkit “Empowerment of autistic youngsters on building skills for career success”
- Collection of positive practices for inclusion in the labour market
- Project online platform

BACKGROUND OF THE GUIDEBOOK WITH CURRICULUM

The Guidebook with Curriculum “Empowering youth workers and educators to support autistic youngsters in the labour market” has been developed as a valuable resource for trainers to upskill relevant youth workers and educators’ competences on the field of work inclusion of autistic individuals. It consists of detailed session designs, practical workshops and recommendations that trainers can use in the education and empowerment of youth workers and educators. It is designed to support the organisation of a 5-day training course that empowers youth workers/educators to support the employment of autistic youngsters. To achieve this, the Guidebook with Curriculum has been designed keeping in mind the specific needs and challenges of fostering work inclusion for young autistic people. It provides a deep understanding and hands-on experience of the best practices, methods, and tools for inclusion in the labour market that youth workers can utilise in their work.

The structure of the Guidebook with Curriculum is as follows:

- An introductory section that includes the following topics:
 - A brief introductory section that provides background information on the project;
 - A section dedicated to specific recommendations for trainers who will be delivering the curriculum's training sessions in their own work;
 - A detailed 5-day training course schedule, divided into morning and afternoon sessions, including informal evening meetings and daily evaluation periods.
- A theoretical part that explores the following topics:
 - Overview of autism, characteristics, and challenges faced by autistic individuals in the labour market;
 - Key concepts and strategies for promoting the inclusion of autistic youngsters in the workplace;
 - Understanding the responsibilities and impact of professionals in supporting the employment journey of autistic youngsters;
 - Overview of relevant laws, policies, and ethical guidelines related to the employment of autistic individuals.
- The practical part includes a selection of 12 consecutive sessions, described in detail for trainers multiplying this training course for the empowerment of their youth workers. For each session, the following information is provided:
 - Session title
 - Duration
 - Background
 - Aim and objectives
 - Competences addressed
 - Methodology and methods utilised
 - Thorough description of the session flow
 - List of required materials
 - Useful links and additional reading resources

- Specific recommendations for effectively delivering the sessions

This curriculum is designed to equip youth workers with the necessary skills to effectively engage and support young autistic people in the labour market. More specifically, at the end of this training course, youth workers will be able to implement inclusive work-related activities with autistic youngsters, because of the extensive competences they will gain on a wide range of topics, including:

- Understanding autism and its implications for employment;
- Understanding the rights of autistic individuals in the workplace and advocating for their needs;
- Effective communication techniques for working with autistic individuals;
- Helping autistic individuals set realistic career goals and plan for their future;
- Supporting the development of soft & social skills necessary for successful employment;
- Preparing autistic individuals for a job interview;
- Utilising assistive technologies and tools to enhance work performance;
- Approaches to providing job coaching and ongoing support and to building partnerships with employers to support the employment of autistic individuals;
- Strategies for creating supportive and inclusive workplaces: modifying work tasks and routines and managing sensory sensitivities and behavioural challenges in the workplace;
- Assessing the progress and success of employment interventions for autistic individuals.

The specific objectives of the Guidebook with Curriculum are:

- To build foundational understanding of autism and its relevance to employment, dispel common myths, and introduce a strengths-based approach to support autistic individuals in the labour market.
- To explore and understand the international, European and national legal frameworks protecting the right to work of autistic people, and to foster participants' capacity to advocate for inclusive employment policies in their national contexts.
- To equip participants with practical tools to communicate more clearly and effectively with autistic individuals across various contexts (education, employment, social services).
- To support youth workers in guiding young autistic people through a reflective and structured process of career planning.
- To provide youth workers with theoretical and practical tools on the development of soft and social skills essential for successful employment.
- To help autistic young people understand, prepare for, and practice job interviews in a structured, supportive environment.
- To stimulate participants' ability to analyse individual difficulties and design functional, concrete, and sustainable strategies within real work contexts.
- To explore effective strategies for providing individualized job coaching and ongoing support for autistic individuals, and to develop skills for building sustainable partnerships with employers.

- To provide participants with practical knowledge and tools to adapt work tasks, routines, and environments to better support autistic employees, with a focus on reducing sensory and behavioural barriers and enhancing workplace inclusion.
- To empower participants with the knowledge, skills and tools necessary to effectively evaluate the progress and success of employment interventions for autistic individuals.

The Guidebook with Curriculum and its corresponding sessions/activities have been developed in alignment with the methodologies and principles of non-formal education. As such, the training incorporates a diverse range of interactive learning approaches, including:

- Group work activities;
- Visual presentations;
- Role-play exercises;
- Theoretical input sessions;
- Energiser activities;
- Plenary discussions;
- Reflective and evaluation periods;
- Research-based activities focused on understanding country-specific realities and deepening knowledge on relevant topics.

By adopting these non-formal educational methods, the curriculum aims to foster an engaging, participatory, and experiential learning environment for the youth workers undertaking the training course.

PROGRAMME OF THE TRAINING COURSE

Day 1 – Arrival	
PM	Arrival of participants
Evening	Welcome evening
Day 2 – Training	
AM	Introduction and group building Understanding autism and its implications for employment
PM	Understanding the rights of autistic individuals in the workplace and advocating for their needs Effective communication techniques for working with autistic individuals
PM	Reflection and evaluation of the day
Evening	Intercultural evening
Day 3 – Training	
AM	Helping autistic individuals set realistic career goals and plan for their future
PM	Supporting the development of soft & social skills necessary for successful employment
PM	Reflection and evaluation of the day
Day 4 – Training	
AM	Preparing autistic individuals for a job interview Utilising assistive technologies, tools and strategies to enhance work performance
PM	Approaches to providing job coaching and ongoing support and to building partnerships with employers to support the employment of autistic individuals
PM	Reflection and evaluation of the day
Day 5 – Training	
AM	Strategies for creating supportive and inclusive workplaces: modifying work tasks and routines and managing sensory sensitivities and behavioural challenges in the workplace
PM	Study visit
Day 6 – Training	
AM	Assessing the progress and success of employment interventions for autistic individuals
PM	Final evaluation of the training course
Day 7 - Departure	
AM	Departure of participants

PART 1: Concepts and Recommendations

1. Autism, its main characteristics and the challenges of autistic individuals in the labour market

This part of the guidebook provides an overview of autism and highlights strengths of autistic individuals and challenges they face in the workplace. It also identifies the barriers that arise for autistic individuals when entering the labour market.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a lifelong neurological and developmental condition that is characterised by differences in how an individual perceives the world around them and interacts with it. ASD affects how the person communicates with others and how they learn and behave. It is called a “spectrum” because the individual combination and expression of the challenges associated with autism varies greatly. An autistic individual may have strong verbal abilities but find it challenging to interpret non-verbal cues or social rules, while another individual may prefer to communicate in writing or using visual means. Thus, the spectrum covers a wide range - from individuals who require substantial help with their self-care to those who lead nearly typical lives and live and work independently.

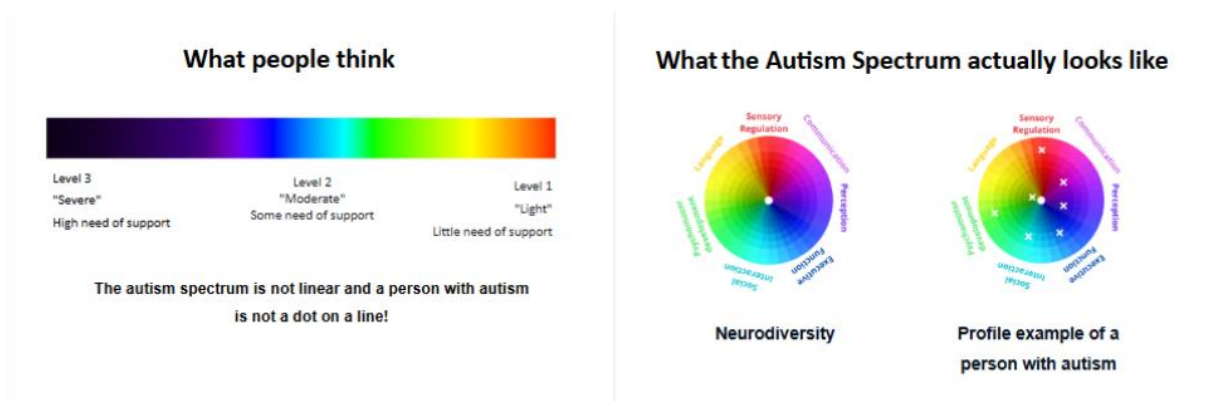
A characteristic feature of autism is the preference for predictability. Clear requirements, established routines, and advanced announcements of upcoming changes make environments more comfortable for many autistic people. Some individuals may be highly sensitive to noise, light, smells or textures, and this is making open-space offices or busy workspaces too overwhelming for them.

Autistic individuals may struggle with social interactions not because they are unwilling to communicate, but rather because they perceive social cues differently or prefer more direct communication. Another common trait that autistic people share is that they look for certain sensory experiences to comfort themselves or improve their focus. Others, in turn, may demonstrate repetitive behaviours and intense interest in specific interests. These can be valuable strengths when applied to tasks and activities that benefit from precision and consistency.

Autism is increasingly recognised as a difference in information processing rather than a collection of isolated symptoms. It cannot be referred to a single cognitive issue, for example, social skills, sensory sensitivity or communication; it is rather a distinct way in which the brain processes, organises and responds to information. This difference affects how autistic individuals perceive things, pay attention, learn, control our emotions, and interact with others.

The holistic perspective described above also aligns with the actual experiences: autistic individuals often describe their differences not as discrete deficits but as their way of being in the world.

The meaning of “spectrum”



Adapted from: Simply Psychology: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/signs-of-autism.html>, and Matt Lowry's „Autism Spectrum“ wheel: <https://www.mattlowrylpp.com/meme-gallery>

Employment challenges and misconceptions

Even though employers and the general population are more aware of autism than they were a decade ago, the unemployment of autistic individuals still remains high. Many organisations still lack the necessary understanding and support structures to effectively assist such employees.

Despite their skills and abilities, autistic people face numerous problems in getting and keeping their jobs. One of the most significant elements in this is the societal attitude and misconceptions. Employers and colleagues may have a limited understanding of autism or hold stereotypes, including the idea that autistic people cannot work in teams or lack empathy. In reality, many people can operate well in teams when they clearly understand their roles and when communication with them is straightforward. Another myth is that autistic people lack empathy. In fact, they may indeed express empathy differently; however, many people with autism do care about fairness and justice, even if they show it in different ways.

Another wrong assumption is that all autistic people have the same skills and face similar challenges. Autism is very specific to each person; no two autistic people are the same. Some of them may need significant support, while others may only require small adjustments to be successful. Employers who understand this variability are better able to create workplaces that are supportive and inclusive.

A strengths-based perspective on neurodiversity

The neurodiversity paradigm acknowledges that neurological differences, including autism, ADHD, dyslexia, are variations in human thinking and learning rather than conditions that need to be “fixed.” This perspective encourages society to perceive autism not merely as a disability but rather as a form of diversity that offers valuable contributions to both workplaces and communities.

Neurodivergence and neurodiversity are often used interchangeably; however, in reality they mean different things:

Neurodiversity	Neurodivergence
Refers to the natural diversity of human brains and minds, and it is a population-level concept, similar to biodiversity. It emphasizes that neurological variation is normal and valuable.	Refers to individuals whose neurological functioning diverges from dominant social norms.

Together, these ideas work together to support a more inclusive understanding of autism as one of the expressions of human cognitive variability.

A strengths-based approach looks at what people do well and how they can use those skills in a useful way. Many autistic people have great attention to detail, outstanding memory for facts and procedures and the ability to keep trying until they uncover a solution to a difficult problem. They frequently contribute innovative ideas by thinking creatively and identifying patterns that others may not notice. When workplaces accommodate their needs and support their strengths, autistic employees can significantly contribute to productivity, innovation and quality control.

Employers who are neurodiversity-friendly often find that the workplace changes that are needed to support autistic employees, like the use of clear communication, giving precise instructions, flexible work/home arrangements, or the availability of quiet spaces in the office, also benefit the rest of the company staff. Such employers can better find skilled and dedicated workers who may not be selected in traditional hiring processes. These employees are often more loyal to their jobs, as they feel valued and supported, and it leads to lower turnover and greater consistency.

Challenge faced by the educators, vocational trainers, and social workers, in their turn, is twofold: (1) preparing autistic individuals for the demands of the workplace, and (2) helping employers understand how to make the necessary accommodations in their organisations. This might include training employees about autism awareness, changing the recruitment processes to assess skills rather than social performance and providing constant support to both employee and employer.

When attention is shifted from deficits of autism to the strengths that it offers, this neurodiversity-informed approach in the workplace can move us closer to genuine inclusion. It is benefiting not only autistic individuals but society as a whole.

2. Key concepts and strategies for promoting the inclusion of autistic youngsters in the workplace

The transition from the structured and protective school environment to the adult world of further education, training, or employment is a challenging phase for all young people. Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, in his theory of psychosocial development, describes this stage

as 'young adulthood,' emphasising the importance of establishing a solid sense of personal identity during this phase. For young people with disabilities and on the autism spectrum, this stage can be particularly disorienting and frustrating, not only because of the psychological challenge of forming one's identity, but also because of all the practical and concrete barriers to independence, self-fulfilment and inclusive participation that exist in our society.

In this transition from school to work, young people encounter a significant difficulty: the gap between the skills they have acquired at school and their application in real life and in the job market. This barrier is even more significant for young people with autism, given that:

- They struggle to imagine how their skills can translate into career paths or further training;
- They have difficulty identifying their strengths and have often internalised a sense of inadequacy in society that hinders their willingness to actively seek employment;
- They often have fewer job opportunities than their neurotypical peers;
- Their families may have unrealistic expectations about their career path, creating a feeling of pressure that holds them back and discourages them from seeking ad hoc support.

To promote real inclusion in the workplace, it is essential to act promptly after the end of formal education by creating targeted guidance pathways and programs that develop autonomy and competencies. These are not static attributes but dynamic capabilities that must be cultivated, reinforced, and sustained over time to prevent regression and social withdrawal.

Key concepts related to inclusion:

1. **Person-centered planning:** means truly understanding the person's strengths, interests, needs, and aspirations, and then developing effective strategies based on these. The planning of training and work activities must be co-designed with the autistic person and, where appropriate, with their family, in order to strengthen the voice and self-determination of the young autistic person.
2. **Soft skills development:** such as communication, time management and flexibility. Training and programmes that aim to strengthen the soft skills of young autistic people have a major positive impact on their inclusion in the workplace.
3. **School-to-work transition programs:** these are essential for supporting young autistic people during such a delicate phase. Such programmes should combine experiential learning (e.g., internships, apprenticeships) with mentoring and coaching activities, and they should be tailored to each individual's abilities and goals.
4. **Multi-functional networks and interagency collaboration:** a systemic, coordinated approach is essential. True workplace inclusion should involve a network of actors with specific skills and complementary roles, such as educators, career counsellors,

social services, healthcare professionals, employers and civil society organisations. The collaboration of these experts can open up strategic opportunities.

5. **Setting realistic goals and involving the family:** families should be involved from the beginning in the process of work inclusion for young autistic people. This involvement ensures that families are accompanied – together with the autistic person – in a process of awareness and self-knowledge, which is essential for aligning expectations with the individual's actual abilities and potential and thus ensuring genuine empowerment.
6. **Supported employment and workplace adaptation:** employers play a key role in the workplace inclusion of young autistic people as they can supervise and facilitate all the concrete and necessary steps of adaptation, such as professional coaching, reasonable accommodation and ongoing support. Colleagues within the workplace must also be informed about autism and trained to facilitate and support inclusive environments.
7. **Monitoring and sustainability:** inclusion is the result of a continuous process, which requires long-term follow-up and adaptation. The needs of a young autistic person may evolve over time and, accordingly, the support required must be flexible and responsive.

In conclusion, promoting the inclusion of young autistic people in the workplace requires a holistic, flexible and inclusive approach that puts the individual at the centre. It is therefore necessary to implement timely and coordinated action after the end of school to ensure that these young people are not left behind and that their potential is recognised and valued in the world of work.

3. Understanding the responsibilities and impact of professionals in supporting the employment journey of autistic youngsters

DISABILITY MANAGER

Today, the current approach to disability management aims to change perspectives on diversity and inclusion, seeking to overturn the common and stereotypical perception that sees disability as a deficiency, to one that values and celebrates it. When planning the employment of a person with a disability, the approach should be holistic, taking into account various aspects of the person's daily working life. It should broaden the scope of consideration beyond the immediate work environment.

Important factors include: how the person will travel to the workplace, how to raise awareness and train colleagues on disability issues, how to find or create the most suitable job role, how to ensure the work environment is accessible and free of obstacles, how to foster a sense of well-being, and how to listen to the needs of both the employee and the company. All of these must be considered when designing an inclusive job placement.

Over time, the need for a specific professional figure to manage this delicate process has become increasingly evident. This role requires a multidisciplinary background—educational, managerial, and legal—as well as a degree of creativity. Improvisation must be avoided, as there's always the risk of losing touch with reality and relying on misleading representations. This is where the **disability manager** comes in: a key figure that facilitates and supports the relationship between the worker with a disability and the company. They design targeted actions that promote diversity and remove any barriers or practices that hinder true workplace inclusion.

Although the role is not yet precisely defined by law or associated with a professional register, it was introduced in Italy in 2015 during the reform of Legislative Decree 151/2015 (*Jobs Act*). However, the first historical mention of this figure dates back to 2009, in the *White Paper on Accessibility and Urban Mobility*, the result of a technical committee formed between the Municipality of Parma and the Ministry of Labour, Health, and Social Policies. Initially, the disability manager's role was mainly related to organizing transportation from home to the workplace. Over the years, the role of the disability manager has expanded to include coordination with local stakeholders. The disability manager is therefore a key point of reference for the development of inclusive career paths.

From an operational point of view, the disability manager's duties vary between the public and private sectors.

In both sectors, however, the project manager is responsible for a number of key tasks, such as:

- coordinating with local employment services;
- coordinating with occupational physicians to plan and implement any necessary organisational adjustments;
- monitoring career paths to identify potential problems.

In the public sector, disability managers work more closely with social services and local political institutions (such as local councils), advocating for inclusive policies, ensuring equal access to public services and monitoring that government actions respect the rights of people with disabilities.

In the private sector, disability managers work more closely with human resources departments in different companies to promote inclusive adjustments from an operational and management perspective. The disability manager oversees the inclusion, adaptation, and development of employees with disabilities, promoting workplace accessibility, job retention, and career growth initiatives.

The disability manager plays a key role in building networks and connections between people with disabilities and the workplace, actively seeking to create the conditions for their real inclusion and participation in the workforce. However, this task is very complex and there is a risk that hiring a person with disability, without in-depth knowledge of the person and implementation of the necessary adjustments, will become merely a way to meet “diversity quotas” without actually building an appropriate path for the person. This could lead to the

individual leaving the position due to insurmountable difficulties or the company deciding not to renew the contract after the trial period.

Such outcomes serve only to inflate statistics without achieving real success. Therefore, this role demands motivated professionals, who can also motivate companies to hire people with disabilities. They must be knowledgeable about both the world of disability and the labour market and capable of bringing the two together effectively. These professionals must support workers with disabilities and job seekers, preparing them for the job market, while also building trusting relationships with companies—not forcing them into legal obligations but creating customized, sustainable inclusion paths. As a result of this careful work, both the employee and the company can experience real benefits, thus generating long-term employment for the person with disabilities.

CAREER MAP

A career map is a very useful visual tool for defining potential career paths within an organisation. The career map shows the different roles available within an organisation, the skills required for each role and the possible career progression over time. This tool allows employees to understand what steps they need to take and what training or experience is necessary to advance towards a desired role.

The disability manager can use the career map to personalise development plans for employees with disabilities, ensuring that growth opportunities are in line with their abilities, goals, and support needs. In addition, this tool helps to ensure continuous career development by offering training and redefinition of tasks, thus seeking to limit situations in which employees with disabilities feel “stuck” in fixed roles. The career map, especially when used in synergy with a company's human resources and management departments, is therefore a fundamental tool for developing a holistic career development strategy and thus encouraging long-term employment.

4. Overview of relevant laws, policies, and guidelines related to the employment of autistic individuals

The inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace, particularly those on the autism spectrum, is one of the greatest cultural, social and economic challenges facing our society. Although the right to work is recognised as a fundamental right, in Europe and around the world, access to decent, fair and inclusive employment continues to be systematically denied to millions of people with autism¹. Below, we will analyse some of the fundamental legal, political and ethical frameworks that enshrine and protect this right.

¹ Employment Policy. (2022, September 16). European Disability Forum. <https://www.edf-feph.org/employment-policy/>

International Frameworks

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) is a milestone in the rights of persons with disabilities at the international level. Article 27 of the Convention recognises “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 realisation of the right to work.”

Furthermore, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development promotes (through Goal 8) “inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all” emphasising the need to enable persons with disabilities to participate fully and actively in the labour market.

European Union Legislation and Policies

Within the European Union, the Employment Equality Directive (Directive 2000/78/EC) serves as a foundational legal instrument prohibiting both direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of disability in employment and vocational training. Article 5 of the Directive introduces a legal obligation to provide reasonable accommodation, requiring employers to make adjustments—unless this would cause a disproportionate burden—to ensure disabled persons can access and advance in the workplace.

The EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030 reaffirms the right to work of persons with disabilities, emphasising the importance of ensuring access to employment, inclusive workplaces and the enforcement of anti-discrimination measures. However, the implementation of these measures in the various Member States remains partial, and there are significant disparities in terms of both employment rates and the support structures available in the different Member States.

It is estimated that around 7 million people with autism live in Europe, and recent studies reveal that between 75% and 90% of adults with autism remain unemployed². Many of these people with autism, despite being willing and able to work remain unemployed due to numerous structural barriers, ranging from widespread stigmatisation and lack of awareness about autism to discriminatory hiring practices. Furthermore, the lack of adequate training and professional pathways, the scarcity of competent and trained staff to support the employment of people with autism, as well as the lack of flexibility and capacity for inclusive adaptations in many workplaces make it almost impossible for people with autism to be employed on a long-term basis.

² Bridging the autism employment gap in europe: a compendium of current practices and initiatives (2023): https://www.autismeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ENG_INFUSE-Compendium-of-best-practices.pdf

This situation highlights that, despite existing legislation, there is still a profound gap between the legal provisions protecting autistic people and the reality they face on a daily basis, as they continue to be systematically excluded from the workforce.

National Legislation and general guidelines

Although each country has its own legal provisions on disability rights, most national laws are in line with the CRPD and EU directives. Some countries also have specific action plans for autism or workplace inclusion programmes. However, achieving truly inclusive employment is a major challenge, covering several aspects. The right to work extends, indeed, to all forms of work, including open labour markets, supported employment and social enterprises, and inclusive employment must be implemented at all stages of work: from recruitment, training and career progression to termination of employment. Moreover, inclusive employment does not only mean the absence of discrimination, but also the active promotion of a work environment where neurodivergent people can thrive, where their strengths are valued and where the work culture is based on the principles of flexibility, support, equity, dignity and participation³.

³ Fasciglione, Marco. (2014). Article 27 of the CRPD and the Right of Inclusive Employment of People with Autism.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282185335_Article_27_of_the_CRPD_and_the_Right_of_Inclusive_Employment_of_People_with_Autism

Recommendations for using this Guidebook with Curriculum and organising similar training courses

This Guidebook with Curriculum has been created to be replicated in different contexts. To facilitate its replicability, in each session of the Curriculum, we present additional relevant recommendations to the session's elements. These recommendations might be useful for trainers who are to organise and lead the training courses based on this Curriculum. In addition, we present here some stages and common recommendations that should be considered for quality organisation of the training courses based on this curriculum:

Stage 1: Before the training course

- Participants have to receive related information to their involvement and contribution through the info pack. This involves logistics, travel, arrangements and relevant information connected to the local context where the training course is being organised.

Stage 2: During the training course

- Timing of the activities can depend on the group energy, participants' knowledge and understanding, as well as productivity and needs. The trainer should be flexible when it comes to timing and adapt accordingly in order to achieve the set goals and objectives.
- A short session on reflection and evaluation of the working day should take place after each working day. This session should consist on the evaluation of activities, methods of work, trainers' performance and recommendations for the next days in order to adapt the programme to the needs of participants.
- Besides daily evaluation/reflection there should be a session on final evaluation, after the completion of all programme sessions. This is of high importance and should be designed with different activities that answer to the needs of all participants and respect their anonymity.
- As far as possible, it is highly recommended to always include some autistic people in the training: this adds value in terms of participation and inclusion and can be a valuable resource for improving the understanding of all participants.
- During group work, consider that some participants may have difficulties in actively interact in group work: therefore, think about support tools such as visual aids (PPT presentations) and allow for a division of roles within the groups according to each person's disposition (spokesperson, PPT developer, mainly listener, etc.).
- All sessions and activities should be designed using inclusive approaches so that participants do not experience any sort of exclusion while attending the programme.

Stage 3: After the training course

- After the completion of the training course, participants should be contacted by the organisers and the trainers regarding eventual follow-up activities they designed and they should provide feedback and report on their developed actions.

PART 2: Developed sessions of the training course: “Empowering youth workers and educators to support autistic youngsters in the labour market”

1. Introduction and group building

Session Title: Introduction and group building

Duration: 90 minutes

Background: Getting familiar with the objectives of the course and getting to know the other participants is a crucial step for creating a pleasant atmosphere and a supportive working space for the entire course. The educators/trainers start the session with presenting themselves, and presenting the objectives of the course, as well as the detailed agenda of the course and of the first training day.

Aim of the session: To introduce the programme and the background of the course to the participants, as well as to create space for getting to know each other.

Objectives of the session:

- To familiarise participants with the programme, the background of the course and the topics that will be covered;
- To encourage participants to get to know each other.

Competences addressed:

- Communication skills;
- Teamwork;
- Creativity;
- Active listening;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:

- Input on the programme;
- Group work;
- Work in pairs;
- Group discussion;
- Individual work.

Session flow:

I. Introduction of educators and of the programme (10 minutes)

The session begins with a warm and informal introduction by the trainers, who share their professional backgrounds, personal motivations, and experiences related to workplace inclusion. This moment is designed to create an open and welcoming atmosphere, encouraging participants to feel comfortable and engaged. Following this, the trainers present the course programme, explaining the background of the project, the research that informed its development, and the structure of the training. The agenda is shared both on screen and in printed form, and also displayed visually in the room to remain accessible throughout the course.

II. Expectations, fears, contributions (10 minutes)

This activity can be done using post-it papers. After presenting the programme, according to what was discussed during the presentation, the participants are asked to share their expectations, fears and contributions for the programme. The educator shares post-it papers in three different colours, one for each category. Participants have 5 minutes to write down on the post-it notes their expectations, fears and contributions and stick them on a poster on the wall - prepared beforehand by the educator. After all the participants have stuck the notes, the educator leads a discussion for each category, reads the notes and groups them by similarity. These notes are kept until the end of the course and are revisited at the end of the course to see if the expectations and fears were met / avoided and the contributions fulfilled. For this part of the session also online tools can be used, such as Padlet or Mentimeter.

III. "Who Am I at Work?" – A Visual Identity Poster (70 minutes)

The trainer proposes an activity to foster self-awareness, empathy, and connection among participants by exploring personal and professional identity through creative expression.

Part 1: Create Your Identity Poster (30 minutes)

Instructions for Participants:

Create a visual poster that represents "Who you are" with a focus on your identity in the workplace. You can include: images or words cut from magazines/newspapers, drawings, symbols, or colours that represent your values, strengths, background, aspirations, or challenges, keywords or short phrases that describe your professional journey or what inclusion means to you.

Part 2: Pair Sharing (15 minutes)

Participants are randomly paired. Each person takes up to 7 minutes to present their poster to their partner, explaining the choices they made and the story behind their visual identity. The trainer should encourage active listening and curiosity.

Part 3: Plenary sharing (25 minutes)

Back in the main group, each pair introduces their partner to the group. The focus is on presenting the other person's story, not their own. This helps build empathy and encourages deeper listening.

Materials needed: printed agenda for the participants, markers, paper, pens, flip charts, post-it notes in three colours (or lap top, projector and prepared board on Padlet or Mentimeter), sticky tape, magazines, newspapers, scissors, glue, coloured pens, stickers, large sheets of paper or cardboard.

Recommendations for future trainers multiplying this session:

- This first session is very important to create a collaborative and trusting atmosphere among the participants, which will be crucial to the success of the entire training. The trainer must therefore pay close attention to ensuring that an atmosphere of mutual respect is created in which all participants have a chance to speak, and if necessary, more time can be dedicated to some parts of the session.

2. Understanding autism and its implication for employment

Session Title: Understanding autism and its implication for employment

Duration: 120 minutes

Background: Autism spectrum conditions present unique cognitive, sensory, and social characteristics that influence individuals' experiences in the labour market. While traditional employment systems often present barriers for autistic individuals, a neurodiversity-affirming, strengths-based approach can significantly enhance inclusion and workplace success. This session provides participants with a foundational understanding of autism, helps them challenge misconceptions, and introduces how societal and sensory barriers can be addressed in employment contexts.

Aim of the session: To build foundational understanding of autism and its relevance to employment, dispel common myths, and introduce a strengths-based approach to support autistic individuals in the labour market.

Objectives of the session:

- To familiarise participants with core traits of autism and how they manifest in employment contexts;
- To understand the concept of neurodiversity and shift toward a strengths-based perspective;
- To explore common barriers autistic individuals face in gaining and maintaining employment;
- To identify and challenge misconceptions and stigma associated with autism.

Competences addressed:

- Autism awareness and inclusive mind-set;
- Critical thinking;
- Teamwork and collaborative problem solving;
- Communication skills.

Methodology and methods:

- Interactive presentation with visual aids;
- Group discussion and myth-busting activity;
- Case study analysis and small group work;
- Reflection and short plenary.

Session flow:

I. Interactive introduction to autism spectrum conditions (30 minutes)

The trainer provides a short, interactive presentation covering the following:

- What autism is (clinical vs. social models);
- Core traits of autistic individuals (social and communication difficulties, repetitive behaviours, sensory sensitivities, etc.);
- Variability and heterogeneity within the spectrum;
- Identity-first vs. person-first language.

The trainer asks participants to share any previous experiences with autistic individuals in educational or employment settings. The trainer uses a whiteboard or flipchart to collect responses. The use of respectful language and a non-judgmental atmosphere needs to be created. This is the responsibility of both, the trainer as well as the participants.

II. Neurodiversity and Strengths-based perspectives (20 minutes)

The session continues with a short presentation with real-life examples highlighting the following:

- The concept of neurodiversity;
- Common strengths (e.g., attention to detail, pattern recognition, loyalty, honesty);
- The value of neurodiverse teams in the workplace.

During and after the presentation the trainer poses thought-provoking questions like:

- “Why do we often focus more on deficits than strengths?”
- “What does inclusion look like when we rethink ‘normal’?”

III. Barriers to employment: Societal, Sensory, Cognitive (20 minutes)

After the discussion on neurodiversity the trainer continues with a short lecture segment that introduces:

- Societal barriers (discrimination, inaccessible hiring processes, lack of onboarding);
- Sensory barriers (lighting, noise, open-plan offices);
- Cognitive/processing barriers (multi-tasking expectations, ambiguous communication).

The trainer is using slides with visual examples (e.g., photos of inclusive vs. non-inclusive environments).

IV. Group exercise: Debunking myths (30 minutes)

The main objective of the exercise is to equip participants with the arguments concerning autism.

Part 1: Discussion on the myths (10 minutes)

Participants are divided into small groups. Each group receives one common myth, e.g., “Autistic people don’t want to work,” “Autistic people lack empathy (cognitive and/or emotional),” “All autistic people have intellectual disabilities”, “Only children are affected by autism”, and the trainer asks the group to discuss it and collect arguments why it is false.

Part 2: Reinforcing the arguments (5-7 minutes)

The trainer shows and explains the “Autism Myth Buster” fact sheet (ANNEX 1) with evidence-based counterarguments and asks the participants to reinforce their opinion with the new ideas.

Part 3: Plenary discussion (10 minutes)

Each group shares one myth and its debunking. The trainer adds insights and reinforces key learning points.

V. Case study comparison: Employment scenarios (15 minutes)

Participants are divided into small groups and given two short, contrasting case studies:

- One showing a non-inclusive hiring/workplace situation;
- One illustrating an adapted, supportive, neurodiversity-informed approach.

In small groups, participants analyse and compare outcomes. Questions to consider:

- What barriers existed?
- What could have been done differently?
- How did support change the result?

VI. Wrap-up and Key takeaways (5 minutes)

In order to conclude the session the trainer gives a short summary and encourages the participants to share one insight or reflection they'll take into their practice. The summary should highlight the following:

- Autism is not a deficit, it is a disability and a different way of experiencing the world;
- Barriers are often created by systems, not individuals;
- Inclusion starts with understanding and valuing differences.

Materials needed: slides with visuals (projector or screen), “Autism Myth Buster” fact sheet printed or digital (ANNEX 1), printed case studies, flip chart/whiteboard and markers, pens and paper for group work.

Background documents and further reading:

- What is autism: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism>
- Diagnostic criteria for autism: <https://www.autismeurope.org/about-autism/diagnostic-criteria/>
- Autism and work. Together we can: https://www.autismeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Report-on-autism-and-employment_EN.pdf
- Case study on strength-based employment: <https://dk.specialisterne.com/en/case-copenhagen-airport/>

Recommendations for future trainers multiplying this session:

- Trainers need to familiarise with the myth-busting factsheet prior to the training and tailor examples to their country or sector. It is important that they are emotionally and

intellectually prepared to model respectful language and inclusive attitudes throughout the session.

- Trainers need to be sensitive to the fact that participants may have different levels of knowledge about autism and different relationships to autism. It is important to leave space for reflection and ask open questions like “What was new for you?” or “How might this help you in your role?”

3. Understanding the rights of autistic individuals in the workplace and advocating for their needs

Session Title: Understanding the rights of autistic individuals in the workplace and advocating for their needs

Duration: 120 minutes

Background: Employment inclusion of people with disabilities is one of the major cultural and social challenges of our time. In particular, people on the autism spectrum face high rates of unemployment and underemployment compared to the general population and other groups with disabilities. This session addresses this issue from a rights perspective, with particular reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the European Union Directive 2000/78/EC.

Aim of the session: To explore and understand the international, European and national legal frameworks protecting the right to work of autistic people, and to foster participants' capacity to advocate for inclusive employment policies in their national contexts.

Objectives of the session:

- To learn about international and European frameworks protecting the right to work for autistic individuals.
- To compare how different countries implement inclusive employment measures.
- To understand key concepts such as reasonable accommodation, accessibility, discrimination, and universal design.
- To reflect on and create a shared definition of “reasonable accommodation” to guide advocacy initiatives.
- To foster an inclusive mindset in participants' future professional and community roles.

Competences addressed:

- Citizenship competence;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence;
- Cultural awareness and expression;
- Critical thinking and legal literacy;
- Communication and advocacy skills;
- Collaboration and teamwork.

Methodology and methods:

- Input presentations;
- Group work;
- Peer teaching and country-level research;
- Collaborative definition-building;
- Interactive definition-matching exercise;
- Plenary discussion.

Session flow:

I. Introduction (20 minutes)

The trainer introduces the topic of the session and presents the key principles envisioned by Article 27 of the CRPD. It is important to briefly explain what Article 27 is and why it is relevant to the session. Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) focuses on the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others. It outlines States' obligations to promote inclusive employment, ensure fair working conditions, and remove barriers that limit participation in the labour market.

By presenting Article 27 at the beginning of the session, the trainer helps participants understand the human rights framework that guides the entire training. It provides the foundation for discussing inclusive employment, workplace adjustments, and equal opportunities:

“Article 27 of the Convention guides States parties in the implementation of the right of persons with disabilities to work by setting forth some basic rules:

- A. **non-discrimination**, as the persons with disabilities have the right to work on an equal basis with others;*
- B. **accessibility**, as the right of persons with disabilities to work includes the opportunity to gain a living in a work environment that is accessible to persons with disabilities, identifying and removing barriers that hinder persons with disabilities from carrying out their work on an equal basis with others;*
- C. **reasonable accommodation**, as with a view to facilitating access of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others, States parties must ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities who request it, and should take effective steps, including through legislation, to ensure that the denial of reasonable accommodation constitutes discrimination;*
- D. besides a duty to impose obligations on private-sector employers, States should adopt **positive measures** to promote employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.”*

II. Match the definitions (20 minutes)

Participants are divided into small groups. Each group receives a set of key terms and a set of legal definitions (cut into individual slips). They must match each term to the correct definition. The trainer specifies that these definitions are taken from the following official documents: CRPD, Directive (EU) 2016/2102, European Commission CSR Strategy and the Italian Legislative Decree 151/2015.

After completing the task, the trainer facilitates a brief plenary recap, clarifying any misunderstood terms. Also, if time allows, the trainer may ask participants to reflect briefly on the following questions:

- What challenges do you see in implementing these rights?
- Is there a difference between legal recognition and practical enforcement?

Term	Definition	Source
Discrimination	Any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.	CRPD – Article 2
Reasonable Accommodation	Necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.	CRPD – Article 2
Accessibility	Principles and techniques to be respected in the design, construction, maintenance, and updating of spaces, both physical and digital (e.g., websites and mobile applications), in order to make their content more accessible to the widest range of people.	Directive (EU) 2016/2102 (amended)
Universal Design	The design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. It does not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where needed.	CRPD – Article 2
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	The responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society. Companies should have in place a process to integrate social, environmental, ethical, human rights and consumer concerns into their business operations and core strategy in close collaboration with their stakeholders.	European Commission CSR Strategy
Disability Manager	A professional responsible for managing the full process of social and work inclusion of persons with disabilities in companies: from planning, recruiting, and onboarding to job retention and development. Also promotes inclusive culture in organizational policies and practices.	Italian Legislative Decree 151/2015 (amended)

III. National Law Research and Share (50 minutes: 30 group research + 20 presentations)

In the next activity the participants are grouped by country. Each national group researches laws, regulations and practices in their own country related to:

- Employment rights for autistic individuals
- Application of the concept of *reasonable accommodation*
- Existing or lacking support systems (e.g., disability managers, accessibility policies)

Handout template for the research:

Country: _____

Main national law(s) on disability & work:

How is reasonable accommodation defined/applied?

What challenges or gaps exist?

Any recent improvements or good practices?

Each group presents their findings in plenary, followed by clarifying questions from peers and the trainer.

IV. Discussion and Collective Definition Building (30 minutes)

Building from the group presentations, the trainer facilitates a discussion around these guiding questions:

- How is “reasonable accommodation” understood across contexts?
- How is “not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden” understood across contexts?
- Are there cultural/legal ambiguities in these concepts?
- According to you, what elements are *non-negotiable* for a truly inclusive workplace?

Starting from these questions, the trainer invites the group to collectively create a **shared working definition** of “reasonable accommodation”. To start the discussion, the trainer could ask:

- What are all those essential features that need to be considered when talking about reasonable accommodation? Are they related exclusively to space? To workload management? Could you give an example?

The aim of the activity is to construct together a definition that is as comprehensive as possible and respects the views of all the participants. This process of collective definition building is important both for the individual awareness of the participants and also in the perspective that it can be used to create future advocacy actions in different local contexts. The definition is then written on a flipchart and remains visible throughout the training.

Materials needed: printed definitions and terms (cut into strips), flipchart and markers, pens and notebooks, laptops or smartphones for research, word-format handout templates for country research, tape or magnets to display flipchart papers, projector (optional, for showing legal articles).

Background documents and further reading:

- United Nations. 2006. "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities." *Treaty Series* 2515 (December): 3. Available at: <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>
- Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation. <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2000/78/oj>
- The Italian National Disability and Employment Agency (ANDEL) collects a number of bibliographic and normative resources on the topic of disability/employment, available at the following site: <https://www.andelagenzia.it/pubblicazioni/>
- Fasciglione, Marco. (2014). Article 27 of the CRPD and the Right of Inclusive Employment of People with Autism. 10.1007/978-3-319-13791-9_6. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282185335_Article_27_of_the_CRPD_and_the_Right_of_Inclusive_Employment_of_People_with_Autism

For Italy:

- Legge 12 marzo 1999, n. 68 "Norme per il diritto al lavoro dei disabili"
- UNI ISO 30415 Gestione delle risorse umane - Diversità e inclusione
- Montanini, M. (2022). *Work and disability: a possible combination?* (Undergraduate thesis). Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Faculty of Education, Piacenza Campus. Supervisor: Prof. Elena Zanfroni; Co-supervisor: Prof. Roberta Sala. <https://www.andelagenzia.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Lavoro-e-disabilita-un-binomio-possibile-Mattia-Montanini.pdf>
- UNI (2024). *UNI/PdR 159:2024 – Inclusive work for people with disabilities: Operational guidelines*. Milan: Ente Italiano di Normazione (UNI). <https://www.andelagenzia.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Lavoro-inclusivo-delle-persone-con-disabilita-Indirizzi-operativi.pdf>

For Serbia:

- Law on Prohibition of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, Official Gazette of RS No. 33/2006 and 13/2016.

- Law on ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006, Official Gazette of RS, International Treaties, no. 42/2009.
- Labor Law, Official Gazette of RS, no. 113/2017 and 95/2018.
- Law on Social Protection, Official Gazette of RS, no. 24/2011 and 117/2022.

For Latvia:

- Law on ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2010): <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/205248-par-konvenciju-par-personu-ar-invaliditati-tiesibam>
- Disability Law (2010): framework law on disability status, rights and support measures: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/211494-invaliditates-likums>
- Labour Law (2002): <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/26019-darba-likums>
- Plan for Promoting Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2024–2027 (2024): https://likumi.lv/ta/id/352154-plans-personu-ar-invaliditati-vienlidzigu-iespeju-veicinasanai-20242027-gadam?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Recommendations for future trainers multiplying this session:

- Trainers should have a thorough knowledge of the CRPD (Article 27), European legislation (Directive 2000/78/EC) and national laws on the employment rights of people with disabilities, particularly those related to autistic people. Participants do not need technical training, but it is helpful if they already have a general background in social inclusion and human rights issues.
- Trainers should be flexible with timings and allow a fruitful discussion to develop since it is very important that all participants have a common understanding of the key terms. The discussion should not be skipped, rushed or interrupted.

4. Effective communication techniques for working with autistic individuals

Session Title: Effective communication techniques for working with autistic individuals

Duration: 120 minutes

Background: Effective communication is essential for meaningful interaction and support of autistic individuals. However, traditional communication styles often rely on abstract language, implied meaning, and non-verbal cues – areas that can pose challenges for autistic people. This session focuses on understanding these differences and developing concrete, autism-friendly communication strategies through practical activities. It is important to stress that **not all autistic individuals struggle with figurative expressions**, especially if they have no intellectual or language impairment. Many learn idioms and metaphors over time, and they may not pose a major barrier in adulthood. However, **communication difficulties more often arise from vague, unspecific, or socially nuanced language**, which can lead to misunderstandings—not because of figurative complexity, but due to **lack of clarity or specific expectations**.

Aim of the session: To equip participants with practical tools to communicate more clearly and effectively with autistic individuals across various contexts (education, employment, social services).

Objectives of the session:

- To understand the difference between literal and abstract language;
- To develop skills for adapting verbal, written, and visual communication;
- To recognise the role and limitations of non-verbal communication;
- To practice rewriting unclear instructions using autism-friendly formats.

Competences addressed:

- Communication skills;
- Empathy and active listening;
- Creativity and problem-solving;
- Social and learning to learn competence.

Methodology and methods:

- Demonstration with role-play and examples;
- Partner-based practice and feedback;
- Interactive group discussion;
- Use of communication cards.

Session flow:

I. Introduction to communication and autism (20 minutes)

The trainer uses an interactive slide presentation with examples (idioms, ambiguous commands) in order to give a brief explanation of:

- How communication differences are one of the features of autism;
- Examples of literal vs. abstract interpretation;
- Importance of clarity and structure.

II. Demonstration and practice: Literal vs. abstract language (60 minutes)

Part 1: Demonstration

The trainer introduces this activity by explaining that seemingly simple and well-intentioned instructions can cause confusion for autistic individuals if they are abstract, vague, or based on implied social expectations. Even when individuals understand idioms or metaphors, the real challenge often lies in **lacking clarity about what is expected, when, and how**.

To illustrate it, the trainer acts out or reads examples of unclear instructions, explains the reasons for confusion and suggests their autism-friendly alternatives:

Instruction: “Give it a shot.”

Why it is confusing: It is an idiomatic expression, which lacks specific instructions or criteria for success.

Clear version: “Please try to complete the form. You don’t need to get everything perfect—just fill it in and ask if something is unclear.”

Unclear instruction: “Act professionally.”

Why it’s confusing: Very subjective; unclear what behaviour is expected.

Clear version: “Please arrive on time, wear your name badge, and avoid using your phone during work hours.”

Part 2: Practice

Participants are divided into pairs and each pair receives two communication cards with an instruction printed on each of them (instructions listed in the “Unclear instruction” column in the table below). The trainer instructs the participants to read the instruction, identify what in it may cause confusion and suggest a clearer version of the instruction.

The table below is an aid for the trainer in case the participants need support with interpretation of the instructions they have received:

Unclear instruction	Why it may be confusing	Autism-friendly alternative
“Do it to the best of your ability.”	What is “best”? What does success look like?	“Complete the task by doing A, B, and C. Aim for X% accuracy.”
“We will figure it out.”	No clear timeline or plan; stressful without structure.	“We will decide what to do after the meeting at 3:00 PM.”
“Put your heart into it.”	Emotional expression is vague and subjective.	“Focus fully on the task. Try not to get distracted.”
“How are you?” (in casual greeting)	Is a real update expected? What is the social rule here?	“Hi! Good to see you!” (instead of asking, offer a greeting).
“Act more appropriately.”	What is appropriate? Needs context and clear behavioural guidance.	“Please speak in a quieter voice when we're in the library.”
“Think outside the box”	Metaphorical; unclear what kind of thinking is required.	“Try a different method than the one we usually use.”
“Take the initiative.”	Abstract; unclear expectations.	“If you finish early, please organise the documents in folders.”

Part 3: Feedback and discussion

Each pair of participants is asked to present the result of their work by reading the initial instruction, explaining the possible confusion or misunderstanding and suggesting an autism-friendly alternative.

For the discussion the trainer may use the following questions:

- What made the original instruction unclear?
- How did you decide what to change?
- Could visuals help here?

III. Visual and written communication tips (30 minutes)

In a presentation the trainer introduces additional tools that can be used to support communication. The presentation includes sample visuals, good practices and written examples of:

- Use of visual schedules, icons, and communication boards
- Structuring written information clearly (bullets, bold text, headings)
- Avoiding ambiguity in emails and notes

IV. Wrap-up and takeaways (10 minutes)

The trainer summarises the session in a short presentation including the following key points:

- Key differences in communication preferences
- Benefits of adapting styles
- Value of simplicity and clarity

After the presentation the trainer asks participants to share one thing they will change in their practice based on the new knowledge gained.

Materials needed: slides, communication cards (printed or digital), flipchart/whiteboard, pens, paper, sample visual materials (visual schedules, boards, icons).

Background documents and further reading:

- Figurative language comprehension:
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1362361316668652?icid=int.sj-abstract.similar-articles.1>
- Autism support strategies: <https://autism.org.au/about-autism/autism-support-strategies/>

Recommendations for future trainers multiplying this session:

- When delivering the training in the national language, the instructions and idioms in English presented in this session materials need to be replaced with those in the language used for the training and adjusted to the local circumstances.
- If available, the examples of the tools and instructions from the local context can be used, replacing the examples in the presentations.
- It is essential that this session is practice-oriented. The trainer has to encourage participation and reflection of the participants instead of overloading them with theory.

5. Helping autistic individuals set realistic career goals and plan for their future

Session Title: Helping autistic individuals set realistic career goals and plan for their future

Duration: 160 minutes

Background: This session is focused on helping young autistic people to build greater self-awareness and to begin planning their professional future. The first part of the session is dedicated to exploring the desires, needs, expectations, strengths, and challenges of young autistic individuals through structured interviews and guided conversations. The second part explores some practical tools that youth workers can use to support career planning for autistic individuals such as “personal branding and career map”. These activities aim to support participants in setting realistic and meaningful career goals, while also fostering a deeper understanding of their personal identity and potential.

Aim of the session: The general purpose of this session is to equip youth workers with the skills and tools to guide young autistic people through a structured and reflective career-planning process, supporting them in exploring their identity, understanding their interests, and defining realistic professional goals that foster autonomy and empowerment.

Objectives of the session:

- To develop self-awareness in young autistic people through structured reflection.
- To help participants identify and articulate their strengths, interests, needs, and challenges.
- To introduce youth workers to effective tools for career guidance, such as the personal branding profile and career map.
- To support young autistic people in setting realistic and meaningful career goals.
- To promote inclusive career planning practices tailored to neurodivergent individuals.

Competences addressed:

- Self-awareness;
- Communication skills;
- Career planning and goal-setting;
- Empathic listening and person-centered support;
- Use of structured tools in youth work and career guidance;
- Ability to facilitate reflection and self-expression in neurodiverse individuals.

Methodology and methods:

- Individual reflection and writing;
- Guided conversation / structured interview;
- Group discussion;
- Presentation of tools and frameworks;
- Practical application through worksheets;
- Debriefing and feedback.

Session flow:

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

The trainer introduces the themes of the activity and explains that to support autistic people in their career path, it is important to start from a **person-centered approach**. Supporting young autistic people in their employment journey means to recognising and valuing their unique perspectives, preferences, and aspirations. Rather than fitting individuals into pre-defined roles or expectations, the focus is on co-creating pathways that reflect who they are and what they want. This approach empowers individuals to take an active role in shaping their future and ensures that support strategies are respectful, relevant, and truly inclusive.

PART 1: COLLECTING INFORMATION

II. Theoretical Introduction (10 minutes)

The trainer explains that in order to develop a truly person-centered approach, it is essential to start by gathering information about the autistic individual who is being considered for a professional inclusion pathway. Depending on the individual's level of difficulty, there are several ways to collect this information:

- **Interview** – This can be conducted with the autistic person and/or their family (ANNEX 2).
- **Visual support** – Information can also be gathered using images and tools that help the person express themselves and reflect on their identity through visual means.
- **For individuals with severe autism, observational methods and sensory-based interaction** can be used (ANNEX 3).

These information-gathering tools can be used both individually (e.g., interviews, observational methods) and in group settings (e.g., visual support). The trainer explains that two in-depth worksheets on the two methods will be provided (interview and observational method - ANNEX 2 and ANNEX 3), while in the next section, a concrete example of an information-gathering activity using visual support will be explored.

III. Collecting information: Visual support - practical activity (40 minutes)

The trainer introduces the idea that not all autistic youth are able or comfortable expressing themselves verbally, especially in structured or evaluative settings like interviews. To understand their values, goals, and self-perception, youth workers must sometimes rely on visual, symbolic or alternative modes of communication. These approaches not only support more inclusive expression, but also offer valuable insights into soft skills such as creativity and decision-making.

The trainer explains to participants that one possible activity to support the self-expression of autistic individuals that don't feel at ease talking about themselves or struggle with abstract language is:

- **Using DIXIT CARDS to Reflect on Emotions and Identity**

Participants are asked to choose a card that represents something about themselves, in response to a series of guided questions. Each question should be asked one at a time, allowing time for reflection and sharing.

Example prompts:

- “Choose a card that represents you when you're under stress.”
- “Choose a card that shows how you see yourself in the future.”
- “Choose a card that represents what you're good at.”
- “Choose a card that represents a difficulty or challenge you face.”

Once the card is chosen, the participant is invited (with support if needed) to explain the choice — or, if verbal expression is difficult, they can point, draw, or use another card to elaborate.

Note: If the task of choosing Dixit cards proves too abstract and complex for autistic individuals, an alternative activity (which mainly relies on memory) for reflecting on soft skills is available in ANNEX 4 - Skill card game.

IV. Debrief in plenary (10 minutes)

The trainer brings participants back together to reflect on the use of visual tools. It is possible to photograph or photocopy the cards selected by the participants to keep track of the activity and allow them to organise it again in their local contexts.

The trainer can ask participants the following debrief questions:

- What did you observe or feel during these activities?
- How might these tools help you better understand the young people you work with?
- What adaptations might you need to make based on the communication style of each individual?
- Can you imagine other contexts in which these tools would be useful?

PART 2: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

V. Theoretical explanation of personal branding and video resumes (20 minutes)

The proposed activities below serve as a foundation for creating the young person's professional presentation tools, such as personal branding and video résumés, which will be explored in this session. A sort of draft or script of what will be said or written in the personal branding or video résumé can take the form of a poster like the one attached. On this poster, participants can paste, draw, and write in a more hands-on way the information that will later be included in their personal branding page or video resume.



The trainer explains to participants what a personal branding page and a video resume are, using real examples. The trainer can start by showing one or two **simple, visual examples** of personal branding pages created by or for young people with similar profiles. The trainer explains that this tool allows autistic individuals to present their **personal and professional identity** clearly and creatively. Personal branding pages typically include strengths, passions, values, and goals and they can be useful for internships, job interviews, or introductions to new contexts.

Example of a personal branding page:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAGXM1j0_s/AZC40jbADnjg9DexVj_ODQ/edit

For the **video resume**, the trainer shows one or two **short video examples**, and explains that they can even be recorded with a smartphone. The trainer explains that the goal is not perfection, but authenticity — and that video resumes are especially helpful for those who struggle with written CVs or want to highlight their personality and communication style.

Example of a video resume:

<https://www.ableopps.com/video-resumes>

After showing the examples, the trainer explains the benefits and possible adaptations of these tools, highlight why these tools are particularly effective for autistic youth:

- They help clarify self-identity and goals;
- They give visibility to non-academic or informal skills;
- They provide visual and alternative ways of communication;
- They can complement or even replace a written CV.

The trainer also explains how these tools can be simplified or adapted using visual supports, templates, guiding questions, or assisted recording, depending on each individual's needs.

VI. Group activity (60 minutes)

The trainer splits participants into small groups or pairs and asks them to choose between creating a personal branding page or preparing a video resume.

Option A – Personal Branding Page:

Using a guided worksheet or blank template, participants create a one-page document with:

- Name and photo
- Likes / Dislikes
- Key skills
- What they are looking for
- A phrase or sentence that represents them

They can do this on paper or digitally, using simple tools like Canva which, in addition to offering a simple and creative tool to build personal branding, also allows for assessing the student's digital skills.

Option B – Video Resume Simulation:

Participants create a short **script** for a 1–2 minute video, answering questions like:

- What's your name?

- What do you like doing?
- What are you good at?
- What kind of job would you like?

They can either **record the video** using a phone or **simulate it** in front of the group or the facilitator.

Tips for Creating a Winning Video Resume

1. Start Early

- Begin recording at age 14 or as early as possible.
- Early job experiences may be unique and hard to re-create later.
- Waiting until the final years of school may mean missing key footage.

2. Document All Experiences

- Include school-based jobs (e.g., delivering reports, cleaning, stocking).
- Record both independent and supported work.
- Highlight strengths in job tasks and broader skills (e.g., communication, social, mobility).

3. Highlight Independence & Interdependence

- Show independent work where possible.
- Also show successful use of job supports (e.g., job coaches, service providers).
- Effective use of support is a valuable skill.

4. Voice Key Information During Recording

- State date, location, and task details while filming.
- Explain how the task supports the company's mission.
- This ensures clarity if future editing isn't possible.

5. Store the Video Safely

- Keep original footage secure.
- Expect the resume to evolve over 7–8 years with multiple edits.

6. Label All Footage Clearly

- Mark content and dates on each tape or file.
- Avoid accidental overwrites—always back up important footage.

7. Include Testimonials from Professionals

- Ask teachers, job coaches, or other professionals for video testimonials.
- These can replace or supplement written references.

8. Be Creative!

- Use storytelling, visuals, music, or captions to make it engaging.
- Tailor the video to reflect the individual's personality and strengths.

VIII. Sharing and discussion in plenary (10 minutes)

The trainer gives participants time to share what they created and then leads a group reflection by asking the following questions:

- How did it feel to present yourself this way?
- What part was the easiest or most difficult?
- Based on your experience with autism, what difficulties might autistic individuals encounter in creating these tools?
- What adaptations would help make the activity more inclusive?

Materials needed: flipcharts and markers, printed fictional profiles, list of questions for assessment, soft skills cards or Dixit cards, computers or laptops, printed ANNEXES 2, 3 and 4.

Background documents and further reading:

- Video resume training:
https://dds.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dds/page_content/attachments/AO%20Video%20Resume%20Training.pdf
- Webpage on Personal Branding:
https://diversityglobal.com/web/Article?id=Personal-Branding-Leveraging-Disability-as-a-Can-Do-3253&utm_source=chatgpt.com

Recommendations for future trainers multiplying this session:

- In case the trainers do not have the Dixit game, alternatively another visual tool can be used, for example cards that focuses on skills.
- During the Dixit Cards activity or the alternative option, the trainer should be supportive, open, and avoid pushing for “correct” interpretations. The aim is emotional insight and connection, there are not right or wrong answers.
- It is useful to keep a record of these self-reflection activities as part of the young person's journey. It is important to emphasize that this is a process.

6. Supporting the development of soft & social skills necessary for successful employment

Session Title: Supporting the development of soft & social skills necessary for successful employment

Duration: 80 minutes

Background: In today's inclusive and increasingly skills-driven job market, the ability to demonstrate a well-rounded set of competencies is essential for all job seekers, including persons with disabilities. While technical knowledge (*hard skills*) remains important, employers are placing growing value on *soft skills* such as communication, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, which are critical for workplace integration, collaboration, and career advancement.

Through interactive role-playing exercises, such as simulated job interviews, participants will have the opportunity to practice communication, self-presentation, and emotional regulation in a safe and supportive environment. These activities are designed not only to build practical skills, but also to reinforce individual awareness and confidence.

Aim of the session: This session aims to provide youth workers with theoretical and practical tools on the development of soft and social skills essential for successful employment.

Objectives of the session:

- Recognize the importance of soft and social skills in the context of inclusive employment;
- Apply selected soft skills through interactive activities;
- Reflect on individual and group challenges in developing soft skills;
- Gain practical strategies to support young people with disabilities in building soft skills relevant to real work environments.

Competences addressed:

- Personal, social and learning to learn competence;
- Communication;
- Critical thinking and analysis;
- Active listening.

Methodology and methods:

- Role-playing;
- Guided reflection;
- Group discussion;
- Presentation of real cases.

Session flow:

I. Icebreaker (10 minutes)

In this activity, participants are shown a series of images, each representing a different soft skill through symbolic or everyday scenes, they must guess which soft skill every image represents.

https://www.canva.com/design/DAF_3Ls28dM/PD3gtzchg1FSsv1UilrEbg/edit

II. Theoretical introduction (20 minutes)

After the first icebreaker activity, the trainer provides a theoretical introduction to soft skills, based on the following content:

Difference between hard and soft skills

Hard skills are technical abilities or job-specific knowledge that can be measured, taught, and certified. Examples include programming, accounting, data analysis, or foreign language proficiency. These are typically learned through formal education, training, or on-the-job experience.

Soft skills, on the other hand, are interpersonal, cognitive, and emotional abilities that affect how people work and interact. These include communication, problem-solving, adaptability, empathy, and teamwork. Unlike hard skills, soft skills are harder to quantify but are increasingly critical in today's dynamic and collaborative work environments.

Most In-Demand Soft Skills (According to World Economic Forum 2025⁴ and Recent Sources):

1. Cognitive Skills

- Critical thinking
- Complex problem solving
- Analytical skills
- Active and continuous learning
- Creativity and innovation

2. Interpersonal Skills

- Emotional intelligence
- Effective communication
- Active listening
- Empathy
- Collaboration skills

3. Leadership and Management

- Transformational leadership
- Conflict management
- Negotiation
- Decision-making

⁴ <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/>

- Coaching and mentoring

4. Self-Management

- Resilience
- Stress management
- Flexibility/adaptability
- Time management
- Proactiveness

5. Ethics and Mindset

- Responsibility and sense of duty
- Growth mindset
- Work ethic
- Curiosity
- Inclusivity and respect for diversity

III. Exploring different activities that foster the development of Soft Skills (40 minutes)

There are many soft skills, and just as many ways to develop them. The trainer presents a summary table of key soft skills relevant to the employment of autistic individuals, along with suggested activities to help strengthen them. If time allows, the trainer may choose an activity for the group to carry out.

SOFT SKILLS	ACTIVITIES
Self-management Organizational skills	Ask the person to think of and write down 3 commitments, both work-related and personal, and add them to their calendar.
Cognitive skills Problem solving	Organising a Day Trip Scenario: You are helping a young autistic person prepare their backpack for a one-day school trip to a nature park. They will be away from 9:00 to 17:00. Objective: Pack the backpack with everything they might need for the day, considering the weather, activities, and personal needs. Constraints: The backpack can only hold 6 items. The weather forecast says: sunny in the morning, possible rain in the afternoon. The young person has sensory sensitivity to noise and prefers familiar food. Available Items (choose from): - Raincoat - Sunglasses - Sandwich - Water bottle - Headphones - Notebook - Extra T-shirt - Snack - Sunscreen - Umbrella - Toy or comfort object - Map of the park - Phone charger - Book - Wet wipes Instructions: Choose 6 items and explain why they are important. Think about how you would help the young person make this decision. Use visual aids or step-by-step reasoning if needed.

Interpersonal skills Effective communication	Role playing: Simulate workplace situations involving interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and clients. EXAMPLE 1: You are a waiter, and a slightly annoyed customer calls you over because they had asked for a rare steak, but it was served well done. EXAMPLE 2: Your colleague at the desk across from you spends the whole day on their phone, even though they're supposed to be collaborating with you on a project assigned by your manager. EXAMPLE 3: Your boss asks you to do something that you don't know how to do, and you're not even sure you fully understood what they're asking for.
Cognitive skills Analytical skills	Fake news Hunt: Part 1: I write or say 3 facts about myself—2 true and 1 false. The others have to guess which one is false. Note: It's helpful to include a true fact that's a bit unusual, like a unique passion or experience, so that it might be mistaken for the fake one. Part 2: Several news items are shown, many of which are actual fake news stories that have circulated online. Participants are asked to identify which ones are false and discuss what elements help distinguish them.

IV. Debrief (10 minutes)

After the presentation and the optional testing of one of the activities described above, the trainer moderates a group reflection session based on the following questions:

- Why do you think it is important to work on the soft skills of young autistic people?
- Which of the activities described would you implement in your work with young autistic people?
- Do you know of any other activities for developing soft skills that you would like to share with the group?

Materials needed: laptop and projector to show the Canva presentation for the icebreaker, activity sheets on soft skills to print and distribute to participants.

Background documents and further reading:

- ILO Project “Jobs and Skills for Persons with Disabilities (ICT-based)”: <https://www.ilo.org/projects-and-partnerships/projects/jobs-and-skills-persons-disabilities-focus-ict-based-solutions-phase-i>
- OECD (2023), Disability, Work and Inclusion in Italy: Better Assessment for Better Support, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dc86aff8-en>

Recommendations for future trainers multiplying this session:

- If needed, for the theoretical part, the trainer can prepare a PowerPoint presentation describing soft skills to facilitate participants' learning.

7. Preparing autistic individuals for a job interview

Session Title: Preparing autistic individuals for a job interview

Duration: 100 minutes

Background: In today's competitive labour market, preparing autistic individuals for job interviews is crucial to promoting equal opportunities and meaningful employment. Autistic individuals may face challenges in social communication and may experience anxiety and sensory overload before and during job interviews. This is why job interview preparation and feedback activities may be extremely beneficial to build their confidence and support them to develop coping strategies. Such interventions not only enhance practical competencies but also foster greater self-confidence, helping individuals present their strengths more effectively and engage with potential employers in a positive, authentic manner.

Aim of the session: The general purpose of this session is to help autistic young people understand, prepare for, and practice job interviews in a structured, supportive environment.

Objectives of the session:

- To increase awareness of the purpose and structure of a job interview;
- To recognize common interview questions and appropriate ways to respond;
- To develop strategies for managing anxiety and sensory overload before and during interviews;
- To practice verbal and non-verbal communication in simulated interview settings;
- To build confidence through preparation and feedback.

Competences addressed:

- Communication skills (verbal and non-verbal);
- Self-awareness and self-presentation;
- Emotional regulation and coping strategies;
- Social interaction and active listening;
- Practical understanding of professional contexts.

Methodology and methods:

- Icebreaker activity
- Group discussions

Session flow:

I. Icebreaker (15 minutes)

The trainer shows a job interview and asks the participants to pay attention while watching it to what works and what doesn't work in the interview. After the video is over the trainer

starts a discussion by asking participants what struck them the most. The trainer then emphasizes the difference between formal and content-related aspects. It is pointed out that the film is based on a true story and that, at the end of the interview, the protagonist is hired. It is important that participants identify which aspects of his personality led to this outcome, despite the lack of some key formal elements (and explore what those might be, in their opinion).

Link to the job interview video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZKJSCt3FKY>

II. Group discussion (15 minutes)

The trainer divides the participants into 3 groups and asks them to discuss which elements are important to consider when an autistic individual has to attend a job interview, such as:

Formal aspects (the “how” of presenting oneself):

- Appropriate clothing
- Tone of voice
- Eye contact
- Personal space
- Posture and gestures
- Punctuality
- Greeting and initial introduction
- Non-verbal communication

Content aspects (the “what” of communication):

- Soft skills
- Motivation
- Past experiences
- Strengths
- Coping with difficulties
- Questions for the interviewer (showing interest by asking about the company or the role)
- Clarity and conciseness (being honest, without exaggerating or minimizing one's abilities)

After discussing in groups, each group presents the points they have identified to the others. The trainer takes notes on the flipchart about the key concepts that emerge.

III. Theoretical input (15 minutes)

In this part of the session, the trainer shows participants the following video:

Do's and Don'ts When Interviewing an Autistic Job Seeker:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTAC3DC3JPw>

The trainer invites the participants to take notes while watching the video on what the **don'ts** and **do's** are. After watching the video the trainer asks participants to share their thoughts and key take away. After this activity, the trainer distributes a document that outlines

appropriate and inappropriate questions to ask during a job interview. It is important to emphasize that this is a document intended to raise awareness on the topic of inclusive employment, but it should not be used as a guideline for questions to ask during a job interview with a person with a disability.

Link to the document:

<https://employeedisabilities.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/343/2017/09/Job-Interview-Questions.pdf>

IV. Group activity (45 minutes)

The trainer explains that there are different ways to conduct a job interview with young autistic people, and that each way may be more or less congenial depending on the preferences and characteristics of each person. In particular, a job interview can be conducted:

- **In person, without preparing the questions** to be asked in advance (this may be suitable for some autistic individuals, but this method could cause a lot of anxiety in individuals who need to know in advance how the interview will unfold);
- **In person, but with questions agreed in advance** with the interviewer (in this case, the job coach should request the questions from the employer ahead of time, explaining that the candidate needs to prepare in advance.);
- **Online via video call** (some people prefer interaction via a screen, especially for such a sensitive activity).

The trainer then suggests that participants divide into three groups, with each group trying out one of these job interview methods.

- Group 1 will simulate an improvised interview, with no prior preparation.
- Group 2 will simulate a structured interview, where the questions are shared in advance.
- Group 3 will simulate an online interview, conducted via video call.

Participants can use the following set of questions for the interview.

Theme	Sample question
Experiences	Can you tell me about your experience in which you collaborated with other people?
Skills	What are the tasks in which you feel most confident and competent?
Motivation	What prompted you to apply for this job?
Labour Management	How do you organize yourself to complete an important task?
Needs and adaptations	Is there anything we could do to help you work better in our environment?
Communication	Do you prefer to receive written, verbal, or visual instructions?
Self-evaluation	What are your main qualities that could be useful in this role?
Interest	Is there anything you'd like to know more about this company or the job?

V. **Debrief (10 minutes)**

To finalise the session the trainer starts a short discussion by asking the following questions:

- How did you feel in the three different interview situations?
- Was it easy to apply the tips and strategies you identified earlier?
- Now put yourself in the shoes of an autistic person: what additional challenges might they face? Or what unique strengths might they bring to the interview?

Materials needed: computer, projector, internet connection, flip chart, markers, printed copies of the document that outlines appropriate and inappropriate questions to ask during a job interview, printed copies of the table “questions for the interview”.

Recommendations for future trainers multiplying this session:

- The trainer emphasises to participants that the interview simulation exercises done during the session can be very helpful if replicated with young autistic people in their local contexts.

8. Utilising assistive technologies, tools and strategies to enhance work performance

Session Title: Utilising assistive technologies, tools and strategies to enhance work performance

Duration: 90 minutes

Background: The job inclusion of people with disabilities requires careful and flexible planning, which must respond to specific difficulties through personalized tools and strategies. Professional educators, job coaches, and company tutors play a key role in facilitating this process. In this session, participants will experience a hands-on approach to analyse real or realistic situations and design concrete solutions, in order to strengthen their observation, adaptation, and educational problem-solving skills.

Aim of the session: The general purpose of this session is to stimulate participants' ability to analyse individual difficulties and design functional, concrete, and sustainable strategies within real work contexts.

Objectives of the session:

- To recognize and analyse specific difficulties faced by people with disabilities in the workplace;
- To design tailored support tools and operational strategies;
- To strengthen critical thinking and educational problem-solving skills;
- To promote a person-centered approach focused on individual strengths.

Competences addressed:

- Observation and context analysis;
- Personalized educational planning;
- Task adaptation in the workplace;
- Effective communication with colleagues and employers;
- Teamwork and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Methodology and methods:

- Group work;
- Brainstorming;
- Case study analysis;
- Simulation;
- Guided discussion;
- Final debriefing.

Session flow:

I. Introduction and session goals (10 minutes)

The trainer provides a theoretical introduction on relevant tools, technologies and strategies that could be used to enhance work performance for autistic individuals, based on the following content:

TOOLS are practical resources—either physical or digital—that help with specific tasks or challenges. They are usually tangible and easy to apply. For example:

- **Visual checklists** to guide the steps of a work task and support independence.
- **Weekly planners** to help structure time and reduce anxiety related to unpredictability.
- **Social stories** to prepare for common workplace scenarios like job interviews or team meetings.

TECHNOLOGIES refer to digital systems or software that enhances communication, organization, or performance. These often involve assistive or adaptive features tailored to the user's needs. For example:

- **Speech-to-text software** for individuals who struggle with written communication.
- **Time management apps** with visual timers and reminders.
- **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) apps** for non-verbal individuals to express themselves.

STRATEGIES are planned methods or approaches used to support learning, behaviour, or adaptation over time. They involve human interaction and are often customized to the individual. For example:

- **Job carving**—modifying a job role to match the strengths of the individual.
- **Peer mentoring**—pairing the autistic employee with a trained colleague for support and guidance.
- **Gradual exposure**—introducing the person to the work environment in steps to build comfort and familiarity.

II. Presentation of 8 case studies (10 minutes)

The trainer presents the aim of the next activity and explains that participants will now work on **8 real-life case studies** and they will have to identify the potential challenges and the tools / technologies / strategies that they could use as a support solution for each case study.

To help them in their task, the trainer may ask the following guiding questions:

- What are the most common difficulties you've observed in your work settings?
- What strategies have you already tried or seen applied?

Before the trainer distributes the 8 cases which may be printed on cards or individual handouts, an example is presented.

Example of a solution sheet:

ANNA: A 22-year-old with mild intellectual disability, employed in a kitchen. She is motivated and enjoys hands-on tasks but has difficulty remembering the correct order of operations (e.g., food prep steps, cleaning routines) and can become confused when asked to switch tasks quickly.

Potential Challenges:

- Forgets multi-step procedures, such as preparing a recipe or sanitizing equipment in the correct order.
- Struggles to switch tasks smoothly, especially if interrupted or if instructions change midway.
- Becomes anxious or frustrated when unsure of what to do next.
- Difficulty working independently when tasks are not broken down clearly.
- Makes mistakes when required to multitask (e.g., cooking while cleaning or setting up another station).

Tools, technologies and strategies:

1. Visual and Written Aids

- Use step-by-step visual checklists with photos/icons for each task (e.g., how to make a sandwich, how to clean a surface).
- Post laminated instruction cards at workstations (e.g., next to sink, fridge, or prep table).
- Color-coded systems (e.g., red cutting board for meat, green for vegetables) to reinforce routines.

2. Task Breakdown and Routine

- Break each task into small, repeatable steps with clear start and end points.
- Assign one task at a time, allowing completion before introducing the next.
- Use consistent routines every day to build memory through repetition.

3. Reminders and Prompts

- Use digital timers or alarms to manage time-sensitive steps (e.g., oven timers, handwashing durations).
- Provide gentle verbal prompts or point to visual guides when the person seems unsure.
- Encourage the person to repeat instructions back before starting.

4. Supportive Environment

- Reduce environmental distractions (e.g., turn off radio, assign quiet prep zones).
- Ensure supervisors or coworkers are trained to give simple, direct, and encouraging feedback.
- Use positive reinforcement (e.g., verbal praise, visual progress chart) when routines are followed correctly.

5. Gradual Skill Building

- Practice tasks during quieter hours or in simulated settings before doing them at full speed.
- Slowly introduce more complex sequences once the person has mastered basic ones.
- Use paired working (shadowing a coworker) for new or unfamiliar tasks.

Presentation of the 8 case studies:

1 - MARTINA, INTERN AT A BEAUTY STUDIO

Personal Profile:

Martina is 22 years old, a cheerful and highly motivated young woman. She has complete paralysis of her left arm due to an accident that occurred during her teenage years. She has no cognitive impairments and communicates effectively. Martina has a strong passion for wellness and personal care and has recently started a training internship at a beauty studio.

Workplace Context:

The beauty studio is medium-sized and offers services such as manicures, pedicures, facial and body treatments, hair removal, massages, and make-up. The team consists of three beauticians and one receptionist.

Tasks Assigned to Interns:

- Welcoming clients and managing appointments;
- Preparing the workstation (tools, materials, sanitization);
- Assisting during treatments (handing over tools, applying products);
- Performing simple treatments under supervision (e.g., basic manicure, facial masks);
- Tidying and cleaning the workspace.

Potential Challenges for Martina:

Tools, technologies and strategies:

2 - GIOVANNA, INTERN IN A NURSING HOME

Person Profile:

Giovanna is 20 years old, a very reserved young woman with moderate intellectual disability, marked shyness, and difficulty taking initiative. She is fairly independent in practical tasks but struggles to interact with new people, ask for help, or volunteer for tasks.

Work Context:

The nursing home hosts about 40 elderly residents. The staff includes health care assistants (OSS), nurses, and recreation staff. Interns assist operators in daily and recreational activities.

Expected Tasks:

- Accompany residents to common areas;
- Participate in recreational activities (bingo, reading sessions, workshops);
- Help distribute meals;
- Engage in conversation to stimulate socialization.

Potential Challenges for Giovanna:

Tools, technologies and strategies:

3 - ENRICO, WORKER IN AN ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATIVE

Person Profile:

Enrico is 24 years old, very competent in manual and outdoor work, but highly dependent on his smartphone. He checks it frequently during work, which affects attention and productivity.

Work Context:

The cooperative deals with waste collection, green maintenance, and cleaning of public areas. Teams include 3–4 workers and a supervisor.

Expected Tasks:

- Grass cutting, hedge trimming, leaf gathering;
- Waste collection and bin emptying;
- Sidewalk and park cleaning;
- Loading/unloading equipment.

Potential Challenges for Enrico:**Tools, technologies and strategies:**

4 - IRINA, WORKER IN A FRESH PASTA SHOP

Person Profile:

Irina is 21 years old, meticulous and eager, with mild intellectual disability and difficulty with working/sequential memory. She struggles with multi-step tasks and gets bored easily.

Work Context:

The shop makes and sells handmade fresh pasta, with activities in both the lab and at the sales counter.

Expected Tasks:

- Prepare pasta (e.g., tortellini, tortelloni: dough, shaping, packaging);
- Clean and store utensils;
- Load dishwasher and manage materials;
- Serve at the counter.

Potential Challenges for Irina:**Tools, technologies and strategies:**

5 - DIEGO, WAITER IN A COMMUNITY TEA ROOM

Person Profile:

Diego is 23 years old, polite and helpful, but has communication and relationship challenges, especially in noisy or crowded settings. He gets anxious and freezes when dealing with many tables.

Work Context:

The tea room is inclusive and family-friendly. Staff is young, attentive, and welcoming.

Expected Tasks:

- Welcome and seat clients;
- Deliver menus and take orders;
- Serve and clear tables;
- Handle billing.

Potential Challenges for Diego:

Tools, technologies and strategies:

6 - LUCA, WAREHOUSE WORKER IN A SUPERMARKET

Person Profile:

Luca is 26, very tidy and precise. Diagnosed with autism, he struggles with change and implicit instructions, but performs well with clear, repetitive guidelines.

Work Context:

Mid-size supermarket. The warehouse receives goods every morning. Staff unload, sort, and restock shelves.

Expected Tasks:

- Unload goods from pallets;
- Label and organize products;
- Restock shelves;
- Report missing products.

Potential Challenges for Luca:

Tools, technologies and strategies:

7 - SARA, CLEANER IN A PUBLIC OFFICE

Person Profile:

Sara is 30 years old, very independent, with mild intellectual disability. She needs a clear routine and may become confused if tasks are not well defined.

Work Context:

Public office with several floors. Cleaning is done early in the morning before opening hours.

Expected Tasks:

- Clean desks, bathrooms, and corridors;
- Empty trash bins;
- Refill hygiene supplies;
- Report faults or anomalies.

Potential Challenges for Sara:

Tools, technologies and strategies:

8 - ELISA, SECRETARY IN A SPORTS CENTER

Person Profile:

Elisa is 25 years old, very precise and enjoys computer work. She has a hearing disability and communicates well in writing and via lip-reading, but struggles with phone calls and noisy environments.

Work Context:

A sports center with reception, offices, and shared spaces. The front office handles registrations, bookings, and client communication.

Expected Tasks:

- Welcome clients;
- Manage bookings and payments;
- Answer phone and emails;
- File documents.

Potential Challenges for Elisa:

Tools, technologies and strategies:

III. Group work (30 minutes)

After the trainer has briefly presented the case studies he/she divides the participants into small groups (2–3 people). Each group selects 2–3 case studies.

For each case, they must:

- Identify the challenge
- Propose at least one concrete and realistic support strategy, technology or tool
- Describe how the strategy increases efficiency and autonomy at work

Each group completes a solution sheet (see example above).

IV. Presentation and sharing (20 minutes)

Each group briefly presents their solutions. The trainer collects ideas on a flipchart or shared board. Groups may compare strategies for the same cases.

V. Debriefing and wrap-up (20 minutes)

The trainer leads the final group discussion by using these guiding questions:

- What helped you most in finding solutions?
- What barriers could limit the application of these adaptations?
- What external resources (services, tools, technology) could be activated?
- How can this problem-solving method be transferred into your daily work?

Materials needed: printed cards or handouts with case studies without solutions and the example of a solution sheet (number depends on the number of participants), markers, flipchart or whiteboard.

Background documents and further reading:

- Guidelines on employment and job inclusion:
https://www.anffas.net/dld/files/1_%20Inclusione%20lavorativa.pdf
- United Nations. 2006. “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.” *Treaty Series* 2515 (December): 3. Available at:
<https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>

Recommendations for future trainers multiplying this session:

- The trainer should be familiar with the concept of reasonable accommodation, task adaptation, compensatory tools, and visual strategies and should prepare examples of case studies and templates for group work before the session.
- Future trainers can adapt the case studies to their local context or to situations experienced by participants. For example, for younger or less experienced groups, the trainer should simplify the case studies or guide the simulations more closely.
- Future trainers can consider including a testimony from a person with a disability in the workplace or a short documentary video.
- If participants have different levels of experience, the trainer should encourage peer-to-peer exchanges.

9. Approaches to providing job coaching and ongoing support and to building partnerships with employers to support the employment of autistic individuals

Session Title: Approaches to providing job coaching and ongoing support and to building partnerships with employers to support the employment of autistic individuals

Duration: 120 minutes + 60 minutes

Background: Employment inclusion for autistic individuals remains a challenge due to limited awareness, lack of accommodations, and weak collaboration between key stakeholders. This session explores practical strategies and partnership models to support autistic individuals in accessing and sustaining meaningful work.

Aim of the session: The general purpose of this session is to explore effective strategies for providing individualized job coaching and ongoing support for autistic individuals, and to develop skills for building sustainable partnerships with employers.

Objectives of the session:

- To understand the role and responsibilities of a job coach in supporting autistic individuals;
- To identify key elements of effective ongoing support in the workplace;
- To explore strategies for engaging and collaborating with employers;
- To analyse real-life case studies of successful employment partnerships;
- To reflect on challenges and solutions in maintaining long-term support systems.

Competences addressed:

- Knowledge of inclusive employment practices;
- Skills in individualized support planning and job coaching;
- Communication and negotiation skills with employers;
- Capacity to build and maintain intersectoral partnerships;
- Problem-solving in complex workplace situations.

Methodology and methods:

- Interactive presentation;
- Group discussion;
- Case study analysis;
- Practical groups activity;
- Brainstorming in small groups;
- Debriefing and reflection.

Session flow:

PART 1: APPROACHES TO PROVIDING JOB COACHING AND ONGOING SUPPORT (120 minutes)

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

The trainer provides a theoretical introduction on the role of the job coach, drawing from the following inputs:

A Job Coach is a professional working within the framework of Supported Employment, who provides personalized support to individuals with disabilities or disadvantages in accessing the labour market. The Job Coach helps them:

1. Access paid employment in the open labour market, by identifying suitable job opportunities that match the individual's strengths and preferences, and by negotiating reasonable accommodations with employers.
2. Maintain employment successfully, by offering on-the-job support, structured training, organizational guidance, and by promoting positive communication with supervisors and colleagues.

According to European standards, a qualified Job Coach should act according to the following principles:

- Respect and dignity of the individual;
- Strength-based approach, focusing on capabilities rather than limitations;
- Empowerment, supporting autonomy in vocational choices;
- Inclusion, promoting full participation in mainstream work environments;
- Collaboration, acting as a liaison between the person and the employer.

II. Group work: case study (30 minutes)

In small groups, participants analyse a success story and identify the key steps involved:

- The role of the job coach/tutor
- The role of the company

The trainer asks each group to reflect on both roles to highlight what made the process successful and what can be learned from it. The trainer shares a few real-life examples of successful orientation, like the one given below.

LUCA, 28 YEARS OLD

Luca is a young man we first met in 2021. At the time, he appeared very guarded, had serious difficulties with mobility (refusing to use public transportation, which greatly limited his autonomy), and had little clarity about his career direction. However, right from the start, he demonstrated some strong personal qualities: great precision, a strong sense of responsibility, and a clear ability to be thoughtful and receptive to guidance.

Over time, he was offered several internship experiences, even in fields that seemed unrelated at first. Yet each of these experiences proved to be an important step in his personal and professional growth. At a bookstore, for example, he was able to apply his graphic design skills; later, at a car dealership, he worked on cleaning car interiors, which responded to his need for a more "masculine"

and socializing work environment. Finally, he joined an electronics company, where he was able to bring together both his existing technical skills and the soft skills developed in his earlier internships.

One of the major milestones in his journey was overcoming his fear of using public transport, which enabled him to become independent in commuting and opened up new job opportunities. He never refused any proposal, consistently showing trust, willingness to follow advice, and a cooperative, constructive attitude.

Seeing him in action in various work environments made it easy to recommend him as a valuable resource to host companies. A key element of his success has been the continuity of support and communication with the companies involved, maintained through regular follow-ups (at least three hours per month by phone, and more in complex situations), which helped monitor progress and prevent potential challenges.

Today, after two continuous years of internship, there is a strong prospect of a job offer in September—a testament to a path built with patience, mutual trust, and dedicated support.

III. Plenary sharing (10 minutes)

After the group work, the trainer asks participants to get back in plenary session and to share their reflections on the topic. The trainer can ask the following questions to stimulate the debate:

- What stood out to you?
- What worked well?
- What worked less well?

IV. Theoretical input (10 minutes)

The trainer describes the key steps that need to be kept in mind when talking about job coaching. This list outlines the key aspects a job coach should consider when supporting the work inclusion of autistic individuals. It combines practical experience from the field with European best practices, including outputs from Erasmus+ projects and the EUSE Toolkit for Supported Employment⁵. The goal is to offer a clear, actionable framework to guide effective, person-centered job coaching.

- 1. Building a relationship of trust with the employer**
 - Establish open, respectful communication
 - Help the company understand that inclusion is a process, not a quick fix
- 2. Deep knowledge of the local ecosystem**
 - Mapping of businesses, associations, cooperatives, third sector organizations
 - Awareness of volunteering and community engagement opportunities
- 3. Understanding available public transportation and accessibility**
 - Check routes, connections, travel time, and potential difficulties for the candidate

⁵ EUSE Toolkit for Supported <https://a4se.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EUSE-SE-Toolkt-2014-english.pdf>

- Consider alternative or supported transport options if needed
- 4. **Creating and maintaining a local support network**
 - Foster collaboration between schools, services, companies, families, NGOs
 - Act as a connector between different actors involved in inclusion
- 5. **Flexibility in job design – “Co-create the role”**
 - Sometimes companies are open but unsure: help **build the role together**, based on the candidate’s strengths
 - Promote **job carving** (adapting or redefining tasks to fit the individual)
- 6. **Setting realistic expectations for the company**
 - Clarify that inclusion requires **time and gradual steps**
 - Some companies expect immediate full-time productivity — explain the importance of **starting with a traineeship** or part-time role
- 7. **Using traineeships as a transition phase**
 - Less pressure for the candidate
 - Time to build confidence, autonomy, and workplace routines
 - Allows the company to gradually get to know the person and adapt if needed
- 8. **Explaining strengths and challenges in a constructive way**
 - Frame difficulties as areas for development with the right support
 - Emphasize that **understanding weaknesses implies a plan for growth and progression over time**
- 9. **Monitoring and follow-up**
 - Regular check-ins with both the worker and the employer
 - Adjust support and expectations as the person grows into the role
- 10. **Advocating for gradual inclusion**
 - Inclusion is not just about hiring- it’s about supporting long-term process
 - Reinforce the idea of gradual training, coaching and learning by doing
- 11. **Preparing the interview that the youngster will have with the company.**
 - It is essential to anticipate possible questions and practice clear, concise answers

V. **Activity: Imagine yourselves as a Job coach (40 min)**

The trainer asks the participants to divide into 4 groups. Each group will receive a fictional profile of a young autistic person (including strengths, challenges, interests, sensory preferences, and family context). The trainer introduces the activity and explains that the task of each group is to act as a **Job coach** and:

- Identify which steps they would take to support this person
- Think of what kind of job or placement could be suitable
- Define how to approach the employer, involve the family, plan transportation, etc.
- Use the “Key Aspects” checklist as a guide to cover all relevant factors

Profile 1: Luigi, 20 years old

Strengths: Excellent memory for facts and dates, strong attention to detail, punctual and reliable.

Challenges: Difficulty with abstract thinking and multitasking, struggles with open-ended instructions, he's very scared of Halloween and of aggressive situations.

Interests: Trains, logistics, organizing timetables, data entry.

Sensory Preferences: Sensitive to loud noises and fluorescent lighting; prefers quiet, structured environments.

Family Context: Lives with both parents, who are very supportive but tend to be overprotective. No siblings.

Profile 2: Sara, 22 years old

Strengths: Creative, good visual thinker, enjoys working with her hands, very focused when engaged.

Challenges: Social anxiety, difficulty initiating conversations, avoids eye contact.

Interests: Drawing, crafts, animals, nature walks.

Sensory Preferences: Dislikes crowded spaces and strong smells; prefers natural light and soft textures.

Family Context: Lives with her mother and younger brother. Her mother is supportive but unsure how to help her find a job.

Profile 3: Jamal, 19 years old

Strengths: Fast learner with technology, enjoys repetitive tasks, very polite and respectful.

Challenges: Needs clear routines, becomes anxious with sudden changes, limited verbal communication.

Interests: Video games, coding, assembling electronics.

Sensory Preferences: Sensitive to touch and unexpected physical contact; uses noise-cancelling headphones.

Family Context: Lives with his father and grandmother. His father is actively involved in his development and wants him to become more independent.

Profile 4: Elena, 24 years old

Strengths: Strong writing skills, highly empathetic, good at following rules and procedures.

Challenges: Difficulty with group work, tends to take things literally, struggles with sarcasm or indirect language.

Interests: Reading, writing short stories, working in libraries or bookstores.

Sensory Preferences: Overwhelmed by bright lights and background noise; prefers calm, predictable environments.

Family Context: Lives independently with occasional support from her older sister. She is motivated to work but unsure where to start.

VI. Presentation and sharing (20 minutes)

Each group briefly presents their solutions in 5 minutes. The trainer collects ideas on a flipchart or shared board.

PART 2: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH EMPLOYERS TO SUPPORT THE EMPLOYMENT OF AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS (60 minutes)**VII. Introduction (20 minutes)**

The trainer explains that in this session they will explore the importance of building partnerships with employers to support the employment of autistic people. To stimulate participants' reflection on the topic, the trainer asks the following questions:

- What do you think employers need most in order to feel confident about hiring an autistic person?
- What do employers need to know?
- What materials or tools can we use (intro letters, visuals, contact sheet)?
- How do we maintain contact over time (check-ins, progress updates, joint evaluations)?

VIII. Group activity & sharing in plenary (40 minutes)

The trainer divides participants in small groups. Drawing from the knowledge acquired during the previous sessions of the training course, each group is tasked to develop a strategy to build effective partnerships with employers to support the employment of autistic people. The strategy should include:

- First contact
- Information sharing
- Follow-up structure
- How to involve the employer in a respectful, non-intrusive way

Participants have 30 minutes to develop a list of key considerations and strategies to keep in mind when building and maintaining a good relationship with employers. After that, each group briefly presents their strategies (10 minutes). The trainer collects ideas on a flipchart or shared board.

Materials needed: computer, projector, printed case study sheets, flip chart, markers, printouts of fictional profiles to distribute to participants.

Background documents and further reading:

- List of Neurodiversity Hiring Initiatives & Partnerships:
https://askearn.org/page/neurodiversity-hiring-initiatives-and-partnerships?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Erasmus+-project result - "Job coach for person with disabilities" - European Union. (n.d.).
https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/fd3c744d-c7a8-4936-938b-d44cba9d7ebf/IOL4_UK.pdf

Recommendations for future trainers multiplying this session:

- Trainers should have basic knowledge of autism and inclusive employment, be familiar with relevant models (e.g. supported or customized employment), be able to facilitate interactive discussions and experience-sharing.
- Participants are encouraged to have some experience or interest in autism and employment, be ready to share ideas, challenges, or examples from their context of local partnerships or initiatives.
- The trainer should prepare PowerPoint presentations in advance for the theoretical parts, to facilitate participants' understanding.
- The trainer should collect all the materials produced by participants during the session so that they can be returned at the end of the course in the report on the activities carried out, as potentially useful materials for replicating the activities in their local contexts.

10. Strategies for creating supportive and inclusive workplaces: modifying work tasks and routines and managing sensory sensitivities and behavioural challenges in the workplace

Session title: Strategies for creating supportive and inclusive workplaces: modifying work tasks and routines and managing sensory sensitivities and behavioural challenges in the workplace

Duration: 50 minutes + 180 minutes

Background: Despite growing awareness, many workplaces are still not fully equipped to meet the diverse needs of autistic employees. Challenges such as rigid work routines, lack of sensory-friendly environments, and limited understanding of neurodiversity can create significant barriers. This session addresses the need for practical strategies that employers and colleagues can implement to create more inclusive and supportive work environments.

Aim of the session: To provide participants with practical knowledge and tools to adapt work tasks, routines, and environments to better support autistic employees, with a focus on reducing sensory and behavioural barriers and enhancing workplace inclusion.

Objectives of the session:

- Identify common workplace challenges faced by autistic employees;
- Apply effective strategies to modify work tasks and routines in a way that leverages individual strengths;
- Recognize sensory sensitivities and implement adjustments to the physical environment;
- Understand the nature of behavioural challenges and adopt proactive and respectful management approaches;
- Promote a more inclusive and empathetic workplace culture.

Competences addressed:

- Inclusive communication and collaboration;
- Workplace adaptability and flexibility;
- Problem-solving in neurodiverse teams;
- Empathy and understanding of neurodiversity;
- Ability to implement inclusive HR and management practices.

Methodology and methods:

- Interactive presentation with real-life case examples;
- Group discussions to share experiences and reflect on workplace practices;
- Visual tools and checklists for identifying sensory triggers and task adjustments;
- Company visits to organizations that currently employ or have previously hosted autistic individuals, offering participants the opportunity to observe inclusive practices in real-world settings and engage in dialogue with staff and managers.

Session flow:

I. Theoretical introduction (20 minutes)

The trainer provides a theoretical introduction, focusing on the key guidelines for successful integration of the work environment in relation to the characteristics of a neurodivergent person.

The following points highlight key factors to consider when designing inclusive and supportive workplace settings for autistic individuals, ensuring that both the physical and social environment respond to their specific needs:

Practical recommendations for supporting neurodivergent employees in the workplace

- Pay attention to high-intensity stimuli (sounds, lights, and smells)
- Observe and monitor unfamiliar or sudden movements to provide predictability for the person
- Check the environments, how areas are divided, and guide the person in becoming familiar with those spaces, assigning each one a clear meaning and explaining its use (e.g., canteen or dining area)
- Pay attention to the number of interactions with different people, which are not always predictable, and to the ways they interact
- Identify and explain the hierarchy
- Communicate written rules, habits, and customs using visual cues as the main source of knowledge and learning
- Explain gestures and irony
- Identify a tutor figure with whom the person can gradually build a relationship of deep trust
- Anticipate changes and introduce them gradually
- Reduce stress caused by production deadlines
- Try to identify potential risk factors that the person might perceive
- Begin work in a new area with reduced hours, then progressively increase hours and responsibilities. Maintain constant contact with the supervisor and a reference colleague
- To reduce noise intensity, use headphones as company PPE and allow more frequent breaks
- Train the work team and staff, paying particular attention to the different ways in which people interact with each other, especially in unstructured spaces (coffee breaks, lunch in the canteen).
- Explain roles and define the role of authority within the department to reduce anxiety in situations where the person struggles to "make sense" of things.
- Provide prior written communication in case of any changes to activities or meeting locations
- Avoid productivity-related deadlines during the first two years of employment
- Create a schedule suited to transport needs and attendance at courses aimed at developing new skills and independence (e.g., apprenticeship training, driver's license).

II. Divide in thematic categories (10 minutes)

Now, the trainer asks participants to create small groups and each group should organise the practical recommendations mentioned above into meaningful categories.

In particular, participants should analyse each item of the list and consider:

- What is the *main focus* of this action?
- Is it related to the *physical environment, social communication, work structure, stress management, or support systems*?

Each group should sort the items into thematic categories based on what they aim to address.

III. Presentation and sharing (20 minutes)

Each group has 5 minutes to presents their solutions. The trainer collects ideas on a flipchart or shared board.

IV. Organise a field visit (150 minutes)

In this session the trainer organises a field visit to allow participants to have first-hand experience of supporting neurodivergent employees in the workplace. Participants will be divided into three groups. Each group will visit a different company or workplace that currently employs, or has experience working with, individuals on the autism spectrum.

If it is difficult to organise visits to three different companies, the whole group can visit the same company/organisation.

The objective of the visit is to observe and assess how the company has adapted its environment, routines, and team dynamics to support neurodivergent employees.

The trainer provides the following instructions for participants:

- Use a structured observation checklist provided by the trainer (see document above).
- Focus on key areas such as sensory environment, communication practices, task structure, support systems, and team awareness.
- Engage in respectful dialogue with company staff, if possible, to better understand their inclusive strategies.
- Take notes to prepare for a group debrief and discussion.

V. Debrief (30 minutes)

After the visit, all groups will reconvene to present their findings, share reflections, and discuss good practices and areas for improvement. Each group briefly shares:

- A short overview of the company they visited;
- What they think the company is doing well to support autistic employees;
- Anything that seemed challenging or missing;
- One inspiring idea or take away from the visit.

Materials needed: computer, projector, flip chart, markers, and printed copies of the document on practical recommendations for each participant.

Recommendations for future trainers multiplying this session:

- The trainer must organise the field visit well in advance of the training. In particular, they must: contact the company/organisation that employs autistic people that they wish to visit and ask if they are available to welcome the group of participants, set the date and time for the visit, and notify the participants of the planned activity in advance. In case it is not possible to organise an in-person visit, the trainer should organise an online meeting to have the opportunity to explore the work of different organisation in an online setting.
- The trainer may consider introducing an interactive activity where participants are invited to simulate a brief training moment for future colleagues of an autistic employee. The goal is to help participants translate the theoretical knowledge from Session 4 into practical, inclusive communication. For example, the trainer could ask participants to create small groups and to role-play a short workplace briefing, where they explain to the team *what is important to know* in order to support their new colleague effectively. **Important note regarding privacy:** Participants must not mention the diagnosis or any medical terms. Instead, they should focus only on concrete information that helps promote understanding and inclusion (e.g., communication preferences, need for clear routines, and sensitivity to noise).
- The trainer should prepare PowerPoint presentations in advance for the theoretical parts, to facilitate participants' understanding.
- The trainer should collect all the materials produced by participants during the session so that they can be returned at the end of the course in the report on the activities carried out, as potentially useful materials for further exploring and replicating the activities in their local contexts.

11. Assessing the progress and success of employment interventions for autistic individuals

Session Title: Assessing the progress and success of employment interventions for autistic individuals

Duration: 90 minutes

Background: For quality involvement and meaningful inclusion of autistic individuals in the workplace, it is critical to regularly assess and evaluate the progress and success of employment interventions. According to the outcomes of the monitoring and evaluation, the employer can indeed adapt daily tasks and activities to ensure that individual needs are taken into account and to enable everyone to feel included and contribute to the organization's work to the best of their ability.

This session presents a multi-perspective model that includes inputs from all the relevant stakeholders: the autistic employee, the organisation/ company, and the job coach. By exploring different assessment tools, this session encourages participants to develop evaluation processes that are person-centered, realistic, and developmental, rather than punitive or purely numerical.

Aim of the session: To empower participants with the knowledge, skills and tools necessary to effectively evaluate the progress and success of employment interventions for autistic individuals.

Objectives of the session:

- To understand the importance of regular evaluation for the progress and success of employment intervention;
- To learn different methods of evaluation and monitoring;
- To understand the importance of person-centred evaluations;
- To understand the importance of joint evaluation that takes into account the point of view of the autistic employee, the organisation/company, and the job coach.

Competences addressed:

- Learning-to-learn competence;
- Communication and feedback skills;
- Teamwork;
- Monitoring and reporting skills.

Methodology and methods:

- Theoretical input;
- Group work;
- Discussion.

Session flow:

I. Introduction to the session (10 minutes)

The trainer introduces the concept of multi-perspective evaluation in employment interventions, highlighting the importance of acknowledging all three different points of view of:

- The autistic person employed
- The company involved
- The job coach

The trainer explains that:

- Regularly gathering feedback from the autistic person helps strengthen their self-perception, communication and awareness skills. The trainer emphasises that this is a person-centred approach, which values the unique perspectives and preferences of the individual.
- Regularly gathering feedback from the company allows you to obtain external and objective feedback, especially with regard to the workplace behaviours and skills of the autistic person, as well as the adjustments made by the company to ensure the best possible inclusivity.
- Finally, regularly gathering feedback from the job coach is essential to ensure effective coordination, adaptations, and overall strategy.

With this in mind, it is also very important to schedule group discussions with both the autistic person, the company tutor and the job coach, in which these three perspectives can be compared and they can learn from each other

II. Theoretical input: organisation feedback (10 minutes)

The trainer gives a brief presentation on the importance of evaluating the career path of young autistic people from the perspective of the companies/organisations involved. By investing resources in the individual, the company has every interest in applying a structured monitoring system that should take the below presented elements into account.

In relation to its policies and resources, the organisation should:

1. collect and analyse initial data and data relating to the implementation phases of the strategic plan;
2. (self-)assess progress at appropriate intervals, as set out in the strategic plan, and make any necessary corrections;
3. organise regular meetings with the autistic person concerned to assess the implementation of the plan (or programme) and any necessary improvements or additions.

To support the organisation in monitoring its activities, the “Self-assessment checklist” is available in ANNEX 5, listing the various key aspects of inclusion. The checklist is intended as an immediate tool that allows the organisation to summarise the results achieved in an aggregated, intuitive and simplified manner. The trainer can print several copies of the checklist and distribute them to participants so that they can keep them as a template.

III. Theoretical input & discussion: Job coach feedback (10 minutes)

As explained in previous sessions, in this session the trainer resumes the explanation of the role of the job coach, focusing on its importance in assessing the progress and the success of employment interventions for autistic individuals.

The trainer explains that the job coach has several tools at their disposal to monitor the progress of the autistic person, such as: taking regular notes on any aspect (positive and negative) that may be useful to discuss with the autistic person and the employer; regular interviews, feedback forms, etc.

As an example, the trainer can present participants with an example of a feedback form completed as part of an internship with a autistic person:

Indicators	1	2	3	4	5	Notes
Absence communication					x	
Organizational and behavioural rules					x	Understands and respects all rules
Work attendance consistency					x	Excellent
Tidiness and care of the workplace				x		Needs guidance
Attention at work					x	
Work pace			x			Good pace maintained unless workload increases
Learning through practical instructions				x		Excellent understanding
Learning through verbal instructions				x		Good understanding, some difficulty with complex instructions
Problem solving			x			Does not demonstrate good problem-solving skills
Asking for help				x		Less self-limiting when accompanied during tasks
Task execution				x		
Physical fatigue resistance			x			
Work planning				x		Good memory for repetitive tasks
Autonomy			x			
Outcome monitoring				x		
Context and role awareness			x			
Relationship with colleagues			x			Good collaboration
Teamwork				x		
Feedback and criticism			x			Shows processing and response
Stress management			x			
Reaching the workplace				x		
Personal care and hygiene				x		Maintains good hygiene, only if assisted during key moments

The trainer asks participants to comment on the table, stimulating their reflections with the following questions:

- What do you notice?
- Do you think it is useful to add personalised comments in a feedback form?
- Do you think it is beneficial to always give high scores to motivate the autistic person?

After the participants have shared their thoughts, the trainer emphasises that over-scoring (e.g. 5/5) can be counterproductive, because it does not help the person to recognise their limitations and strive to overcome them or develop strategies to limit them. From this perspective, over-scoring limits learning and personal growth, so it should definitely be avoided. On the other hand, it is important to continue to encourage the person and offer constructive criticism to avoid creating feelings of frustration and lack of motivation.

IV. Developing questionnaire - group work (30 minutes)

The trainer explains to participants that in this activity they will be divided into groups and each group, based on all the knowledge and skills developed during the training course, will have to develop a suitable questionnaire to be submitted to young autistic people in order to gather their feedback on their employment path.

In order to have more concrete elements to work with, the trainer can suggest participants to develop a questionnaire based on the case studies that participants explored in session 9 (Approaches to providing job coaching and ongoing support and to building partnerships with employers to support the employment of autistic individuals - the 4 profiles described in the activity „Imagine yourselves as a Job coach“).

Participants are divided into small groups of 4. Each group can first discuss some orientation questions to help them with formulating questionnaire such as:

- Within the scope of all the aspects we have explored during the course, what is important to ask? And how?
- What is important to keep in mind when communicating with autistic people?
- What soft skills can autistic people develop in their work? How can progress in this area be assessed?
- What are the key aspects for creating supportive and inclusive workplaces? How can we gather feedback on these aspects?

V. Developing questionnaire - discussion (30 minutes)

The trainer invites all the participants to the plenary for a presentation of their work. The trainer then gives an estimated time of 5 minutes for presenting to each group. After all presentations are done, participants and the trainer draw up a joint questionnaire covering the best examples of questions.

Materials needed: ANNEX 5 - Self-assessment checklist printed to distribute among participants, flipchart, paper, markers, laptop, and presentation for the theoretical input.

Background documents and further reading:

- <https://www.andelagenzia.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Lavoro-inclusivo-delle-persone-con-disabilita-Indirizzi-operativi.pdf>
- Valuable input on the topic are available at the website of the HOST project funded by the European Union (Project Number: 2022-1-CY01-KA220-VET-000086365): <https://www.hostproject.eu/project-results-1/host-vet-course/>

Recommendations for future trainers multiplying this session:

- Concerning ANNEX 5, the trainer should explain to participants that, for the purposes of ongoing monitoring, every checklist should be verified, regularly updated and validated by a representative of the organisation, with the input of the disability manager, if present.
- If participants have already some experience with job coaching and are working with young autistic persons they can propose to the groups to develop a questionnaire for that specific person, giving to the group all the necessary information.

12. Evaluation and closure of the training course

Session Title: Evaluation and closure of the training course

Duration: 95 minutes

Background: Evaluation of the training course is the final session of the programme. In this session participants have the opportunity to reflect on the whole programme and evaluate it, including the expectations, fears and contributions set in the first working day. Furthermore, in this session they have different activities that ensure the overall evaluation of trainers' performance, methods and methodologies used, group energy, the support from the organisers, etc. This session is highly important for organisers and trainers as well, since it provides them with feedback and suggestions on how to improve their work in future projects.

Aim of the session: To create space for reflection and evaluation of the training course and the learning experience of the participants.

Objectives of the session:

- To reflect collectively on the key learnings from the training;
- To reflect on the expectations, fears and contributions set in the first working day;
- To evaluate the training course programme and learning gained;
- To evaluate methods used and trainers' performance;
- To reflect and share the impressions on the overall organisation of the training course and the experiences gained.

Competences addressed:

- Communication and collaboration;
- Self-reflection and evaluation;
- Citizenship competence;
- Digital competence;
- Creative expression.

Methodology and methods:

- Self-reflection;
- Group evaluation;
- Written evaluation form;
- Verbal evaluation.

Session flow:

I. Individual and group reflection: “What have we learned?” (20 minutes)

At the start of this evaluation session, the trainer asks participants to use sticky notes to write their evaluation on 3 different aspects of the training and place them in 3 different flipchart papers, by using the following questions for instructions:

- One key thing they’ve learned that they didn’t know before;
- One challenge they now feel more equipped to face;
- One thing of the training that was not particularly valuable and relevant for them and their work.

Each participant has 5 minutes to complete the task. Afterwards, participants briefly share their reflections in plenary - if they are willing to - or the trainer shortly goes through each flipchart to read some of the evaluations by ensuring anonymity. The trainer tries to identify common insights from the feedback that emerged.

II. Reviewing the definition of “Reasonable Accommodation” (10 minutes)

The trainer brings back the definition of “Reasonable accommodation” that participants have defined at the beginning of the training, during session 3, and invites participants to reflect at the following questions:

- Has anything changed in your understanding?
- Would you add or remove anything based on what you’ve learned?

Key points are noted on a new flipchart and used to update or enrich the original definition.

III. Self-reflection on expectations, fears and contributions (15 minutes)

In this part of the session, the trainers facilitate a self-reflection activity of the participants on their expectations, fears and contributions shared during the first working day of the training course. Each participant should find their own papers from the three flipcharts from the first day “expectations, fears, contributions”. When they find it, they have to remove the paper from the flipchart in case their expectations are met, their fears are not relevant to the overall experience, and their contributions are filled. In case these aspects still stand, they leave the paper on the flipchart paper. Further discussions take place in case participants want to share. In case a online platform was used, Padlet or Mentimeter for example, the trainers screens the answers and leads a discussion by asking participants to voluntarily comment on their expectations, fears, contributions.

IV. Written evaluation (20 minutes)

The written evaluation is one of the most important activities in this session as it allows participants to give a thorough evaluation on the following aspects: learning objectives, evaluation of trainers’ performance and methods used evaluation of the organisation’s team, logistics and accommodation, as well as the group energy. The trainers need to prepare an evaluation form prior to the training, or during the training in order to formulate the questions according to the content of the training. A digital tool can be used and shared via email or social media groups. They give participants 20 minutes to conduct this evaluation.

V. Final round with verbal evaluation and the closure words (30 minutes)

The final activity for evaluation is the verbal evaluation with the closure round. The trainer invites everyone in the plenary to briefly share their impressions on the programme and general experience during the training course, and to say anything they wish as a personal closure within this group, as this is probably the last opportunity for the whole group to be together and listen to everyone individually. In case the Dixit cards were used in session 5, trainers can use them now again by asking participants to choose one card that represents their impression of the training. After everyone shares their impressions, the trainers are the last ones to add on this and then officially close the training course.

Materials needed: flipchart papers, post-it notes, pencils and pens, markers, digital devices for written evaluation (in case some of the participants cannot use their phones), internet connection, Dixit cards (if used in session 5).

Background documents and further reading:

- Further training evaluation activities can be found at the following link:
<https://www.europlanet-society.org/outreach/europlanet-evaluation-toolkit/evaluation-tool-target-evaluation/>

Recommendations for future trainers multiplying this session:

- The organisers should prepare the written digital evaluation form in advance and test if it works or not. They should be able to assist/provide participants with a digital device in case someone needs it. It is also recommended to prepare several printed forms for participants that prefer to write by hand.
- The trainers should ask participants if they want some background music while they are doing the written evaluation: in some cases music could help participants to focus, but it could also be a source of distraction for participants, so it is always important to ask.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 - Autism and employment: Key facts for professionals (factsheet)

To be used in Session 2: Understanding autism and its implication for employment

What is autism?

- Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition characterised by differences in social communication, repetitive behaviours, sensory processing, and a need for routine
- Autism is a spectrum – each individual is unique with varying strengths and challenges

Key traits of autism in employment contexts

- May prefer clear, direct communication
- Can thrive with structured tasks and routines
- May struggle with ambiguous instructions or multitasking
- Sensory sensitivities (e.g., noise, lighting) can affect focus and comfort

Neurodiversity & strengths-based perspective

- The neurodiversity paradigm recognises neurological differences as natural variations of the human brain.
- Common strengths in autistic individuals include:
 - Detail orientation
 - Sharp focus on preferred tasks
 - Honesty and loyalty
 - Unique problem-solving approaches

Barriers to employment

- Societal: Stigma, stereotypes, lack of inclusive policies
- Sensory: Overstimulating or under stimulating environments
- Social: Confusing social cues, unclear expectations
- Cognitive: Overreliance on speed and spontaneity, being required to multitask, chaotic structures and poor task design, a lack of visual supports
- Procedural: Inaccessible application or interview processes, a lack of onboarding procedures and support during the employment period

Autism Myth Buster - Common misconceptions

- Myth: Autistic people lack empathy
 - ✓ Truth: Empathy may be expressed differently, but is often present.
- Myth: Autism equals low intelligence
 - ✓ Truth: Intellectual abilities vary widely.
- Myth: Autistic people don't want to work
 - ✓ Truth: Many are highly motivated but face systemic barriers.
- Myth: Autism only affects children
 - ✓ Truth: Autism is a lifelong condition.

Inclusive practices for autistic individuals

- Use clear, written instructions
- Be clear in your expectations and avoid sarcasm and figurative meanings when speaking
- Offer sensory-friendly spaces
- Provide routine, predictability, and regular constructive feedback

- Encourage mentoring and peer support

Why it matters

- Inclusive employment benefits everyone – diverse teams are more innovative and productive
- Addressing barriers helps autistic individuals thrive and utilise their unique strengths

ANNEX 2 – Job Interview questions

To be used in Session 5: Helping autistic individuals set realistic career goals and plan for their future

Presentation of Traiettorie's Questions

The facilitator introduces a list of structured questions inspired by the work of the project Traiettorie, which are designed to guide a reflective conversation with a young autistic person. This interview should take place in a quiet, welcoming office space — ideally one that is well-lit, calm, and free from overwhelming sensory stimuli. The environment should make the young person feel safe and respected. The interviewer's tone should be warm, patient, and non-judgmental, allowing time for the person to process and respond in their own way. It is essential that the interviewer remains attentive not only to verbal responses but also to non-verbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, body posture, or changes in behaviour, which may convey important insights or emotions even when words are limited. This approach fosters trust and allows for a more authentic and supportive exchange.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Family information: How many family members? What are their jobs? What are they like? Do you take part in family decisions?
2. Do you know your weekly schedule? How do you remember it?
3. Education path: How did it go? How did you feel in school? Why did you choose that school?
4. What are your personal interests or passions? (music, movies, video games, reading, travel, sports...)
5. IT skills: Do you use email, internet, Google Calendar, Maps, make phone calls, WhatsApp?
6. Independence at home: Do you use an alarm clock to wake up? What time? What do you do in the morning? Do you have tasks to do at home? Who cooks? Can you cook? Do you stay at home alone?
7. Describe your house and your bedroom. Do you have your own house keys?
8. Are you used to keeping your personal documents?
9. Do you have money? Can you decide how to use it? Do you shop in stores? Do you recognize the value of money and of objects?
10. How would you describe yourself? Physically and personality-wise. Are you aware of your strengths and challenges?
11. Desires and future plans.

12. Do you recognize when you're unwell? Do you have allergies? Do you carry medication with you? Do you take it by yourself?
13. Emotions: Do you know primary and secondary emotions? Where do you feel emotions in your body? How do you react afterward?
14. Do you use social media? In what way?
15. Do you have friends? Do you hang out with them? Where do you go together?
16. Relationship with strangers: Do you know how to speak and behave differently with strangers than with family or friends?
17. Do you know how to ask for help? When you're in trouble, who do you turn to? Give an example.
18. Getting around: Do you move around on your own? Who goes with you? Do you use a bike or public transportation? Do you have a ticket or pass?
19. Do you take part in community activities? (festivals, events, local organizations...)
20. Do you know the shops in your town?
21. Do you know what an association is? Do you know any in your area? (This helps understand interests, values, and passions to identify volunteering opportunities.)
22. Future vision: How do you see yourself in 1 year? In 5 years?
23. Parents: What do they think about the fact that you finished school? What do they think about work?
24. Have you done other courses before? Why did you want to join this one?
25. Do you know anyone who has already done this course? What did they tell you about it?
26. What does being an adult mean to you?
27. What do you think about work? How do you imagine it?
28. Are you registered with the Employment Centre? Do you know what the Targeted Placement Office does?
29. Do you have a CV? What is it for?

If the autistic person prefers to respond in writing rather than orally, the following questionnaire could be used as a template:

1. WHAT KIND OF WORK/INTERNSHIP WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO?

- SHELF STACKER (supermarket)
- SHELF STACKER (large store)
- RECEPTIONIST
- KITCHEN ASSISTANT
- WAITER (bar or restaurant)
- SCREEN PRINTING
- GREEN MAINTENANCE ASSISTANT
- ASSEMBLY/WAREHOUSE/PACKAGING

2. FOR THE JOB/INTERNSHIP YOU HAVE CHOSEN, THESE SKILLS ARE REQUIRED:
WHAT SCORE WOULD YOU GIVE YOURSELF IN:

1 poor – 2 sufficient – 3 good – 4 very good – 5 excellent

Work in a noisy place

1 2 3 4 5

Work in a big group most of the time

1 2 3 4 5

Work alone most of the time

1 2 3 4 5

Talking to customers

1 2 3 4 5

Know how to keep things in order

1 2 3 4 5

Have physical strength to use heavy equipment

1 2 3 4 5

Know how to carry out precision work, with specific tools

1 2 3 4 5

Doing a job that requires REPETITION of movements

1 2 3 4 5

Remembering procedures

1 2 3 4 5

Doing a job that requires STANDING STILL most of the time

1 2 3 4 5

Doing a job that requires you to STAND/WALKING most of the time

1 2 3 4 5

Doing a job that requires SITTING most of the time

1 2 3 4 5

3. WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS?

4. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO IMPROVE?

5. HOW MANY HOURS A DAY WOULD YOU BE AVAILABLE FOR A JOB/INTERNSHIP?

- 4 hours a day
- 5 hours a day
- 6 hours a day
- 7 hours a day

6. HOW MANY DAYS A WEEK WOULD YOU BE AVAILABLE FOR A JOB/INTERNSHIP?

- 5 days from Monday to Friday
- 5 days, including Saturday

- 5 days, including Saturday and Sunday
- 3 days from Monday to Friday
- 4 days from Monday to Friday
- Only on weekends (Saturday and Sunday)

7. AT WHAT TIME WOULD YOU BE AVAILABLE FOR A JOB/INTERSHIP?

- Morning
- Afternoon
- Indifferent

8. HOW DO YOU PLAN TO GET TO THE WORKPLACE?

- By public transport
- By bicycle
- By foot
- By car

9. FOR HOW MANY MONTHS WOULD YOU BE AVAILABLE TO WORK?

- 2 months
- 3 months

10. WOULD YOU BE AVAILABLE TO START YOUR INTERSHIP IN JUNE/JULY?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

ANNEX 3 - Sensory Response Observation – Understanding Preferences through Stimulus-Based Interaction

To be used in Session 5: Helping autistic individuals set realistic career goals and plan for their future

Sensory Response Observation – Understanding Preferences through Stimulus-Based Interaction

When working with young people with more severe forms of autism, traditional interviews or verbal reflection may not be possible. In such cases, it becomes essential to shift the focus toward observational methods and sensory-based interaction. This third example illustrates a practical and respectful way to explore likes, dislikes, comfort zones, and distress signals by offering structured sensory stimuli and observing the individual's reactions.

In this activity, the youth worker or specialist prepares a variety of stimuli — these can include visual (lights, colours), auditory (music, sounds), tactile (textures, materials), olfactory (smells), or proprioceptive elements (movement, pressure). The stimuli are presented one at a time, with calm pacing and clear boundaries, while the young person is not asked to respond verbally, but is instead observed closely in how they naturally interact with each input.

Key aspects to observe may include:

- Facial expressions or changes in muscle tone
- Vocalizations (intonation, pitch, rhythm)
- Body movements (approaching, avoiding, freezing, self-soothing)
Gaze direction and eye contact
- Self-stimulatory behaviours (e.g. rocking, flapping)

All interactions are video recorded, with full consent, to allow a more detailed review and interpretation afterward. The youth worker and team re-watch the footage and take notes on how the individual responded differently to different types of stimuli. They focus especially on identifying positive engagement cues (e.g. smiling, vocal play, relaxed posture) and signs of stress or discomfort (e.g. withdrawal, tension, agitation).

For example, a participant might show excited vocalizations and reach out toward a vibrating object, but frown and turn away from loud music. Over time, patterns begin to emerge that help the team understand what is enjoyable, motivating, or overwhelming for the individual.

This observational method is not only a way to uncover preferences and avoidances, but also a way to begin understanding the individual's sensory profile — a crucial foundation for planning appropriate work environments, communication tools, and future goals. It also teaches practitioners to become more sensitive to non-verbal communication and to recognize the subtle ways in which each person expresses themselves, even without words.

ANNEX 4 - Skill Card Game – Discovering Personal Strengths through Playful Reflection

To be used in Session 5: Helping autistic individuals set realistic career goals and plan for their future

Skill Card Game – Discovering Personal Strengths through Playful Reflection

In this activity, participants are invited to explore the concept of **soft skills** in a way that is accessible, engaging, and adaptable to different communication styles. The facilitator prepares a set of cards, each featuring the name of a soft skill — such as “Creativity”, “Patience”, “Problem-solving”, or “Teamwork”. Optionally, each card may also include a simple image or pictogram to visually reinforce the meaning of the skill, which can be particularly helpful for participants with limited verbal comprehension or a strong visual thinking style.

The cards are laid out face-down on a table, creating an element of curiosity and surprise. Participants take turns selecting one card at a time. Once a card is drawn, they are invited to reflect on the skill written on it: first, by trying to understand what the skill means — either independently or with support from a peer or facilitator — and then by considering whether they believe they possess this skill or not.

If they feel confident enough, they can share an example from their life that illustrates this skill in action. For instance, a participant who draws “Patience” might say they use patience when helping a younger sibling with homework. If they don’t think they have the skill, or are unsure, this too can become a meaningful point of discussion and self-awareness.

The activity can be conducted either individually (as a guided one-to-one session) or in small groups. In a group setting, after a participant shares their thoughts, others can gently add their own

perspective — for example, pointing out when they have seen that skill in the person. This adds a collaborative and affirming layer to the exercise, helping participants see themselves through the eyes of others.

This game is especially valuable when working with autistic individuals who may find it difficult to talk about themselves in abstract terms. It transforms the conversation into a **concrete and visual experience**, encouraging honest self-assessment and promoting awareness of skills that are relevant not only to personal development but also to future employment. It also provides an opportunity to **introduce and explain the language of soft skills**, which is often unfamiliar yet essential in career planning processes.

In cases where a participant feels uncertain or reluctant to evaluate themselves, the facilitator can normalize this by saying, “It’s okay not to be sure — some skills develop over time or show up in different situations.”

The overall tone of the activity should remain supportive, light, and exploratory — not evaluative. The goal is not to assess performance but to stimulate reflection, recognition, and self-confidence.

ANNEX 5 - Self-assessment checklist

To be used in Session 11: Assessing the progress and success of employment interventions for autistic individuals

Source: inclusive workplaces for people with disabilities – Guidelines (2014)

<https://www.andelagenzia.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Lavoro-inclusivo-delle-persone-con-disabilita-Indirizzi-operativi.pdf>

Criteria	YES/NO
1. Adequacy of the workstation for employees with disabilities within the organization	YES/NO
2. Access to economic/compensation benefits on equal terms with other staff	YES/NO
3. Planning and participation in ongoing training courses (if applicable), accessible and usable by all	YES/NO
4. Access to organizational welfare on equal terms with other staff	YES/NO
5. Preparation/involvement of colleagues and work teams (including team leaders)	YES/NO
6. Contacts with the service network (social services, targeted job placement services, employment centers, work mediation)	YES/NO
7. Flexible management of working hours, work pace, task distribution, and overall work organization	YES/NO
8. Absence of architectural, sensory-perceptual, and digital barriers in all organizational environments	YES/NO
9. Existence of an accessibility plan within the organization	YES/NO
10. Contacts with local third and fourth sector networks (volunteering, families, third sector, social services)	YES/NO
11. Presence of a support person assigned to the employee with disabilities	YES/NO

12. Attention to communication needs based on different types of disabilities	YES/NO
13. Organization-wide survey (using appropriate methods, preferably anonymously) to assess perceptions of inclusion and accessibility (including more focused assessments if needed)	YES/NO
14. Career advancement or salary increases based on competencies, under equal conditions with other staff	YES/NO
15. Employment of persons with disabilities beyond legal obligations	YES/NO
16. Presence of individuals with multiple disabilities within the organization	YES/NO
17. Presence of a disability manager or diversity manager within the organization	YES/NO
18. Allocation of a dedicated budget for inclusive policies (training, upcoming hirings, awareness initiatives, etc.)	YES/NO
19. Employees with disabilities in leadership or top-level roles within the organization	YES/NO
20. Involvement of the employee with disabilities, and their support figures, in the design and implementation of actions concerning them, where relevant	YES/NO
21. Adoption of reasonable accommodations	YES/NO

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