YOUTHASD
UPSKILLING YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS
FOR THE INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH ASD

INCLUSION OF YOUTH WITH ASD:
Report of national researches and contexts analysis

PR1: Guide for youth organizations on structures and strategies for the inclusion of people with ASD

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G. A. KA220-YOU-2021-029

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INTRODUCTION

The project YOUTH ASD- Upskilling youth organizations for the inclusion of people with ASD is funded under the Erasmus+ Programme and involves five countries: Denmark, Greece, Italy, Spain and Cyprus. The project aims at providing youth workers and youth organizations with a new, innovative and accessible learning opportunity on ASD.

More specifically, the project's objectives are: support the participation of ASD youth in youth organizations' activities, increase the attractiveness and accessibility of youth work for ASD youth, provide the necessary training methodology and tools to youth workers in order to include ASD youth in their work, provide organizational support to youth organizations to include ASD youth in their initiatives by upskilling their administrative and management staff and provide youth training opportunities adjusted to ASD needs. The prevalence of ASD is steadily increasing (according with ASDEU 2018 one in 89 children is diagnosed with ASD in the European Union) and it is therefore of paramount importance to address the inclusion of people with ASD within society and to promote interventions to improve their quality of life. At present there are few youth organizations that offers programs for both youth with ASD and their neurotypical peers. Most initiatives are promoted involving only youth with ASD. However, the social participation and integration within society is beneficial for all people, including those living with ASD.

This Transnational Report is part of the first output of the project and is the product of the national analyses conducted in the different partner countries. This Report encompasses both desk research conducted in order to identify best practices in the fields of the inclusion of young people with ASD in youth organizations across Europe, and field research interviewing youth workers, individuals with ASD and/or families of people with ASD and professionals working with young people with ASD, to identify their needs.

This report is aimed at youth organizations, youth workers, professionals, policy makers in the social field and other stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

With the aim of identifying the needs of people with ASD and their families and their experiences and of mapping the needs of youth organizations and the content and format they need; an analysis of the different national contexts was made by each partner organisation.

In order to ensure consistency in the research work and the possibility of comparing the data collected, a Research Protocol was created, which provided the partners with a shared plan and tools. Included in it were all the guidelines for carrying out the research, templates for entering the data collected, and questions to be asked of the participants through an interview, focus group or questionnaire.

The research in each partner country was divided in two activities:

1. Desk research aimed to:
    - Identify best practices in the fields of the project;
    - Report on current relevant policies and guidelines from relevant institutions;
    - Map existing initiatives at local, national and European levels;
2. Field research carried out in parallel with the desk research through interviews, focus group or questionnaire, involving in each partner country the following target groups:
    - Youth workers;
    - Individuals with ASD and/or families of individuals with ASD;
    - Professionals working with people with ASD, such as healthcare, social workers and NGOs active in the field of ASD representatives.

1. Desk research methodology

For the Desk research each partner organization had to:

- identify at least 2 good[1] / promising / best practices[2] consistent with the objectives of the project to report on current relevant policies and guidelines from relevant institutions;
- map at least 2 existing initiatives at local, national and European level;
- outline the national policy framework in which inclusion and work with young people with ASD fits.

National policy frameworks have been profiled on the basis of partners' context, by referring to inclusion legislation and institutional initiatives, school policies and support, both addressed to the family and to people with ASD, young and old.

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[1] https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/page/what-are-good-practices_en
[2] https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/best-promising-and-emerging-practices

The best practices and initiatives include various types of services in the field, but special attention was paid to best practices and examples or cases of participation of ASD youth in youth organizations' activities and organisations that already offer work opportunities to ASD youth.

With regard to the profiling of best practices and existing initiatives, partners considered the following key aspects:

- Impact and innovation;
- Sustainability;
- Transferability.

2. Field research methodology

For Field research partners carried out key informant interviews to explore and to identify the needs and relevant issues for people with ASD and their families as well as practitioners' experiences and suggestions. It was established that the objective of each partner was trying to engage 20 participant per country (10 youth workers, 5 individuals with ASD and/or families and 5 professionals working with people with ASD). In this regard, it should be noted that young people with ASD are understood to be between 13 and 25 years of age.

In order to reach an adequate sample for the analysis of the various partner contexts, the partner organisations tried to include a balanced number of the figures from each target group. The aim of this research was to have a balanced overview of the opinions and experiences of the various key informants. Therefore, partners committed to involve possibly heterogeneous participants who can bring different perspectives of understanding to the table. Participants have been recruited through the partner organisations' existing networks and may be invited in person, by e-mail or by telephone call.

In order to respect privacy and in compliance with research ethics, all data were collected anonymously and aggregated for analysis. During the research, demographic data relevant to the research was collected, which did not, however, include sensitive information and none of the contributions made could be traced back to the person who participated in the research. In addition, all participants in the fieldwork within the YouthASD project signed and provided the researchers with informed consent to participate, whereby the purpose of the research and the use that would be made of the data provided were pointed out.

Based on the guidelines provided for both organising and carrying out the collection of contributions, partners contacted participants. The preferred and recommended method for involving all participants was through individual interviews (in person, online, by telephone), but as far as youth workers and ASD-professionals were concerned, it was possible to collect their contributions through focus groups or through an ad hoc questionnaire.

RESULTS OF DESK RESEARCH

3. POLICY FRAMEWORK

3.1 Main relevant institution and law that legislate, protect and monitor the situation of personas with ASD

The partners in this project outlined the policy framework related to people with ASD in their country. In Italy and Greece there are specific laws and funds for people with ASD. While in Denmark, Spain and Cyprus there are no specific laws for people with ASD but laws concerning rights, support and inclusion more generally of people with disabilities.

In Italy the National Law No. 134/2015 ‘*Provisions on the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of persons with autism spectrum disorders and assistance to families*’ for the first time officially recognised autism by the state and intervened at the regulatory level to indicate the interventions necessary to ensure the protection of health, improvement of living conditions and inclusion in social life and work contexts of persons with autism spectrum disorders, enhancing their abilities within a wide-ranging coordination. In order to enable the implementation of this law a ‘*Fund for the care of individuals with autism spectrum disorder*’ was established at the Ministry of Health in 2016 with an endowment of €5 million per year from the year 2016 and for the year 2021 the endowment of the Fund is increased by €50 million. In 2022 the Budget Law adds an increase of EUR 27 million.

The first mentions of autism in the Greek legislation occurred in 1999 and 2000. The leading public institutions involved in monitoring and protecting the rights of people with ASD are the Ministries of Health, Education and Religious Affairs, and Labour and Social Affairs, depending on the area concerned: health, social care and security, education, work and employment. The social policy regulations for autistic people in Greece mainly pertain to their social protection through the provision of financial aid and social support, their active participation in society, education and labour and the prevention of their exclusion. According to Law 2716/1999, *“the* *state is responsible for providing mental health services, for preventing, diagnosing, treating, caring, rehabilitating and reintegrating adults, children and adolescents with mental disorders and autism spectrum disorders”* (Article 1, par. 1). According to the existing Health Benefits Regulation (Government Gazette 3054/2012, article 17), children with pervasive developmental disorders may receive speech therapy, occupational therapy, and special education up to fifteen sessions per type per month, and group or individual psychotherapy or behaviour therapy up to eight sessions per type per month and parent counselling up to four sessions per month. The maximum amount awarded for the above cases is 440 € per month". The Greek government is also proceeding with the gradual implementation of the National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which among others, foresees the establishment of a National Accessibility Authority, the introduction of a personal assistant for people with disabilities, an electronic disability card, the upgrading of the disability assessment and certification mechanism, a special tax policy, the support of deinstitutionalisation and independent living, and the participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of professional and social life.

In Denmark, the fundamental responsibility for implementing the social and economic rights and requirements and all other aspects of life of persons with ASD have lies mainly with the 98 municipalities. In Denmark there are no specific laws for groups of people with a specific diagnosis, but there is a common overall formulation in much Danish legislation *"that everyone has the right to be supported and protected by the state, regional or local authorities to live their lives on their own terms and on equal terms with all other citizens".*

In Spain, the Ley General de Derechos de Personas con Discapacidad y de su Inclusión Social (2013) states that all governments must safeguard the access to sport for persons with disabilities, specifies that people with disabilities have the right to access social sportive services, and states that sporting activities must be carried out, whenever possible, in accordance with the principle of universal accessibility to any facilities with the ordinary means put to service citizens. In section 23 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (rewritten into law in 1990) the rule specifies that children with disabilities should be able to live in community with the best possible quality of life. Another milestone of note is the ratification by the Spanish Government of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Section 30 of that convention establishes their right to participate in cultural live, recreation activities, leisure and sports, and the duty of signing States to promote their participation at all levels in such activities.

In Spain there is no specific law or act on people with ASD. However, in 2015 the Spanish Strategy on Autism Spectrum Disorders is passed.

The Cyprus Government established the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 and formalised it in 2011. Following that major step, the Ministry of Labour followed with the establishment of a department of Social Inclusion - especially for people with disabilities, and Cyprus Ministries Council approved and signed the first ever “Action Plan for people with Disabilities” in 2013. Cyprus has constituted a strongly bounded legal framework, consisting of 12 laws created to safeguard the rights of people with disabilities and another 25 laws with relevant regulations. According to “The Persons with Disabilities Law of 2000”, published in the Government Gazette of the Republic of Cyprus according to Article 52 of the Constitution “every person with disabilities has the right to an independent living, full inclusion in society and equal participation in the financial and social life of the country”. Cyprus, as a member state of the European Union has implemented the “Europe Without Obstacles to People with Disabilities” plan, which it’s main aim is to provide all the necessary support to individuals with autism so they can enjoy their everyday lives in the same manner as every individual who is benefited by their rights as an EU citizen.

3.2 Main guidelines that are recommended for working with people with ASD

As regarding the main guidelines that are recommended for working with people with ASD, in Italy**,** since 2005, the Italian Society of Infant and Adolescence Neuropsychiatry (SINPIA) has developed ‘*Guidelines for Autism. Technical-operational recommendations for the services of neuropsychiatry of the age of development’.* In 2011, the Superior institute of Health (ISS) draw up the *'Guidelines on the Diagnosis and Treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Children and Adolescents'* on the basis of the evolution of pathophysiological and therapeutic knowledge derived from the scientific literature and national and international good practices. This document was then updated on February 2021. In Denmark, the Danish Health Autority under the Danish Ministry of Health has recently published “National Clinical Guidelines on working with children and adolescents with autism”, and the National Board of Social Services under the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs has published a guide for municipalities called “People with Autism”. In addition, the National Board of Social Services has an entire section on the website that conveys experiences and knowledge related to all aspects of a life with autism.

3.3 Inclusion of people with ASD in educational contexts

As regard the inclusion of people with ASD, with particular reference to school context, in Italy in 1977 the Law No. 517 abolished the differentiated classes in order to promote the creation and implementation of an advanced pedagogical-educational model and to promote the school integration of people with disability. These principles will be further reaffirmed by Framework Law No. 104 of 1992 for the assistance, social integration and rights of disabled persons. Law 104 establishes not only principles of inclusion but also economic allowances for the person and family members in order to facilitate their assistance. The Ministry of Education (MIUR) states that "*School integration of pupils with disabilities is one of the strengths of the Italian school, which aims to be a welcoming community in which all pupils, regardless of their functional differences, can experience individual and social growth".* Moreover, consistent with Law no. 170/2010, MIUR introduced the right to receive customised teaching Education for pupils with Special Educational Needs. The educational, socialisation and learning objectives relating to the different areas of functioning of pupils with disabilities are included in the Individualised Educational Plan (PEI), that is drawn up jointly by the school and the public services (psycho-social health team) with the collaboration of the family. The support to personas with disabilities is carried out by qualified teachers, introduced in 1982 with Law No. 270. In Denmark there are institutional based guidelines in different school settings. They can differ from institution to institution and from municipality to municipality. Parents can be financial compensated for loss of income taking care of their children with autism and have personal assistance in 20 to 50 hours a week – to be set free from the care obligations some hours. In Denmark there are specialist supporting specific the kindergardens –primary schools, special schools and youth education. At the same time all families have their contact persons at the municipality and are connected to the relevant specialists at municipality level or at regional level.

In Greece schooling may occur either in a mainstream school or in special education settings. Several guidelines have been created for autistic students' education, including "Training material on the education and social integration of students with autism" developed by the University of Thessaly (2007).

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4. BEST PRACTICES

The identified best practices concerning services and programmes for people with ASD in each partner country can be classified into four categories:

- multidimensional programmes specific for people with ASD;
- training programmes aimed at people with ASD;
- programmes focusing on the social inclusion of people with ASD;
- programmes focusing on the labour inclusion of people with ASD.

Multidimensional programmes specific for people with ASD	**Training programmes aimed at people with ASD**	**Programmes focusing on the social inclusion of people with ASD**	**Programmes focusing on the labour inclusion of people with ASD**
• *“Panagia Eleousa”- Greece* • *“ERACIS”- Spain* • *“Center for family intervention and support of persons with autism”- Cyprus*	• *Specially designed youth education (STU)- Denmark*	• *“Rulli Frulli”- Italy* • *“Famiglia Ludica”- Italy* • *“Servicio de Ocio Comunitario”- Spain*	• *“ErgAxia”- Greece* • *“The Specialisterne”- Denmark*

4.1 Multidimensional programmes specific for people with ASD

Multidimensional programmes specific for people with ASD is a practice identified in most countries, these programmes include different types of specialised services and supports specifically aimed at persons with autism or other disabilities and their families. Such practices, include for example the programme “Panagia Eleousa” in Greece which provides vocational training, special education, counselling-psychological support, life-long training and care, therapeutic programmes, socialisation programmes and supported living for people with intellectual and associated disabilities. The service target groups include people over 15 years old with severe or mild intellectual disability and related disabilities. A similar programme has also been identified in Cyprus, with the “Centre for family intervention and support of persons with autism”, this centre is specific for people with ASD and their families, unlike the Greek programme, this one is dedicated to children of preschool age diagnosed with the Autism Disorder Spectrum and their families. This practice includes, among other, psychological support services and counselling, homeschooling and educational support services as well as social support services. The programme ERACIS in Spain offers support to people with ASD living in disadvantaged areas in order to improve their quality of life. This programme is implemented by the Seville Autism Association and aims at acting in disadvantaged areas where there exist serious situations of social exclusion and/or populations with risk factors for suffering these situations; training unemployed people to work and support people with disabilities who lives in disadvantaged areas and support people with disabilities improving accessibility in public spaces, promoting citizens participation, provide pre-employment workshops, social and professional itineraries, parent training and organizing inclusive leisure activities.

4.2 Training programmes aimed at people with ASD

The Danish practice “Specially designed youth education- STU” consists of a three-year youth education for young people up to age 25, targeted to people with intellectual disabilities and other young people with special needs who cannot complete another youth education. The training is based on a personal developed curriculum and may consists of:

1. A general part that includes subjects on social conditions, housekeeping, economics and self-care;
2. A specifically targeted part, which, based on interests and abilities, includes training in industrial relations and training in employability;
3. Traineeships in companies and institutions to give young people experience of working conditions and cooperation in a workplace.

4.3 Programmes focusing on the social inclusion of people with ASD

Three best practices were identified which focus on promoting the social inclusion of people with ASD. The two Italian practices promote the inclusion of young people with ASD with their neurotypical peer group and/or with their family members facilitating exchange, cooperation and sharing. Specifically, the Italian practices are “Rulli Frulli” and “Famiglia Ludica”. “Rulli Frulli” is a band that grew up in difficult circumstances: the earthquake that hit Emilia Romagna in 2012. Around seventy young people between the ages of eight and thirty are members. Fifteen of them are young people with disabilities (autism and down syndrome). The members of the band Rulli Frulli search for new sounds and their nuances by building and playing musical instruments using recycled materials (pipes, tiles, pots and pans, washing machine baskets, etc.). The music allows children to speak the universal language of rhythm.

Similarly, the Famiglia Ludica project focuses on integrating young people with ASD with their family members and peer group using board games. The project was born out of the need to create a more engaging space that would strengthen the bonds between family members in an effective way, through a tool that was accessible to all, even economically, such as board games. It seeks to promote through play the knowledge and mutual recognition of skills to create closer ties; the acquisition of notions and skills such as mental organisation, flexibility and self-control; the development of cognitive and socio-relational skills, competences and behaviours such as the ability to stay and work in a group, conflict and frustration management; the improvement in the family and in groups of psychological closeness, mutual respect and solidarity and the ability to adapt and problem-solving.

Another example of good practice aimed at the social inclusion of young people with ASD is the Spanish project called “Servicio de Ocio Comunitario” (Community Leisure Service), which is based on personal interests and leisure with an emphasis on community. The main objective of this service is to provide support for people with ASD so they can enjoy leisure activities, regardless of their condition. Therefore, the service contributes to enhancing personal autonomy and social inclusion within the community. The programme comprises general sports, community, leisure, aquatic and transport activities, and also special activities according to the preferences of the association's users.

4.4 Programmes focusing on the labour inclusion of people with ASD

Two good practices were identified concerning the job placement of people with ASD: the Danish project “The Specialisterne” and the Greek project “ErgAxia”. The Specialisterne is a company founded by Thorkild Sonne, a father of an autistic boy. This company offers services to other companies based on the specific & unique competences of many young people and adults challenged by autism. Today Specialisterne is a company established in many countries employing more than 10.000 people challenged by autism. The Specialisterne also offers training and developing programs for people suffering from autism and acts as employment office finding competent people suffering of autism – but having specific and unigue competences required by other big companies – such as airports – pharmaceutical companies. Another interesting project focused on labour inclusion of people with ASD is the Greek one, called “ErgAxia”. The purpose of this project is to train and support young adults with developmental, intellectual disorders and autism spectrum disorders in the workplace to find and keep their desired work position. The service was established to respond to every person's fundamental right to employment and eliminate the vocational exclusion of people with disabilities from the labour market

5. EXISTING INITIATIVES

Most of the existing initiatives identified concern the integration of young adults with ASD into the world of work in order to guarantee them continuity in care and support after school and thus facilitate a more comfortable transition to adult life. These initiatives offer individualised programmes to promote the autonomy of the persons with ASD, providing opportunities for adaptation and inclusion in society in order to promote a better quality of life for their future. These initiatives are “Il Tortellante” in Italy, the Greek platform “JobLink” and “Vocational training school, counselling services and employment programmes for people with disabilities” and the project “Lanzatea” implemented in Spain. Il Tortellante is a therapeutic - habilitative workshop where youth and adults with autism spectrum disorder learn to make fresh handmade pasta which is then sold to the public. The project is led and supervised by a neuropsychiatrist and with the collaboration of coordinating psychologists and educators and the help of chef Massimo Bottura. The specific activity of making fresh handmade pasta is used as a tool to work with young people with autism spectrum disorder on the main areas that are lacking in this disorder: communication, social relationship with peers and autonomy and offers the opportunity to learn a specialized skill that can make young people with ASD independent in the future. The Greek platform “JobLink” aims to support people on the autism spectrum in finding and keeping a work position. This platform connects businesses with prospective employees on the autism spectrum through an adequately trained mentor-mediator who will consistently support the prospective employee. Analogously, the Vocational training school, counselling services and employment programmes for people with disabilities in Greece promotes the employment of vulnerable social groups. Specifically, the target groups are provided with information on training, employment, and entrepreneurship and receive personalised support to be included in the labour market and achieve social integration and financial independence. Another extensive programme that aims to be a shuttle to youth and adult life for people with ASD and other neurodevelopmental disorders, is the Lanzatea programme. The latter consists of an intensive support resource to transition to a functional and self-sufficient adult life working on social and personal knowledge, functional conceptual knowledge and professional knowledge. The Lanzatea programme also proposes the involvement of people with ASD in leisure activities and sports. Many other existing initiatives are based on sport, leisure activities and artistic activities. Such as the Danish initiative, called “Special sports”, in which a group of volunteers support young people with ASD or other disabilities in finding leisure activities and sports that are useful for them and support the young person in getting started with the leisure activity in question and the Spanish initiative, called “Athletics initiative of Astea Safor” which aims to improving participants' physical well-being and promote practising physical and sport activities in an inclusive community context. In the same vein in Italy, an initiative has been identified to promote the inclusion of young people with autism in school and raise awareness of disability issues. This initiative, called “Gli insuperabili” (The unbeatable), developed in a high school in Modena, creates the possibility of knowing and seeing disability in a different way through cooperation and sharing a single goal, namely the creation of a play that will be put on in the municipal theatre of the city of Modena. The play serves as a tool to realize a school and extracurricular environment of genuine inclusion. Finally, the Danish initiative “AutismYouth”, a youth organization for young autistic people, and young people with close relationships with autistic people, aged 13-30 years in addition to creating inclusive and autism-friendly communities, also act to spread knowledge about autism and advocate for young people with autism in the political debate.

RESULTS OF FIELD RESEARCH

1. PARTICIPANTS

Interviews were carried out with 3 different target groups: youth workers, individuals with ASD and family members and professionals working with people with ASD. A total of 108 participants were involved in the interviews. Below is an analysis for each category of participants.

1.2 Youth workers category

Regarding the youth worker category, a total of 48 people was interviewed. A total of 17 male youth workers and 31 female youth workers participated. On average, the youth workers involved have an educational background ranging from a bachelor's degree to a master's degree or higher.

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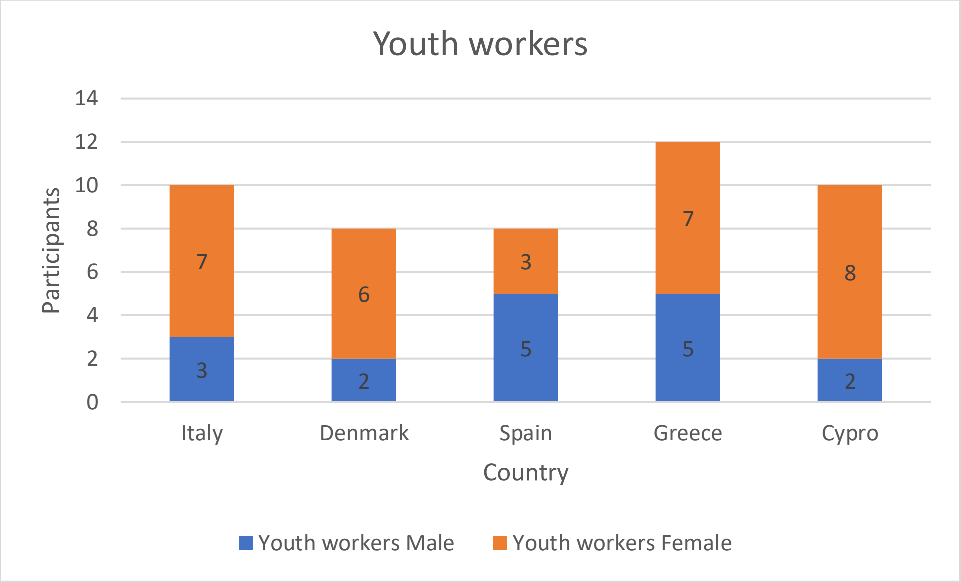
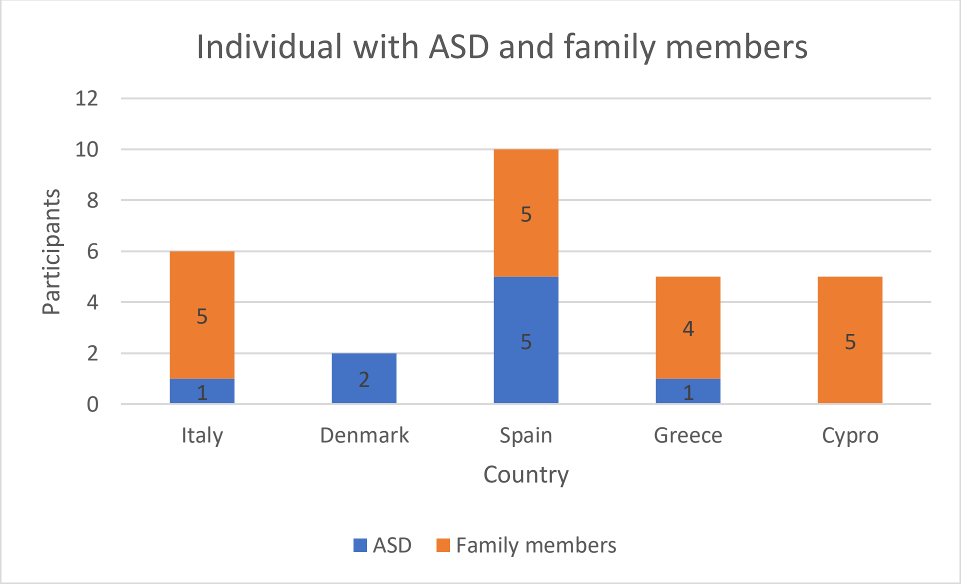
The percentages of male and female participants who took part in the interviews in each partner countries are depicted in the graph below.



1.3 Individuals with ASD and family members

As for the category of individuals with ASD and family members, a total of 28 interviews were conducted, 9 individuals with ASD and 19 family members can be counted among the participants. Below is a graph representing participation in the different countries of the partnership.



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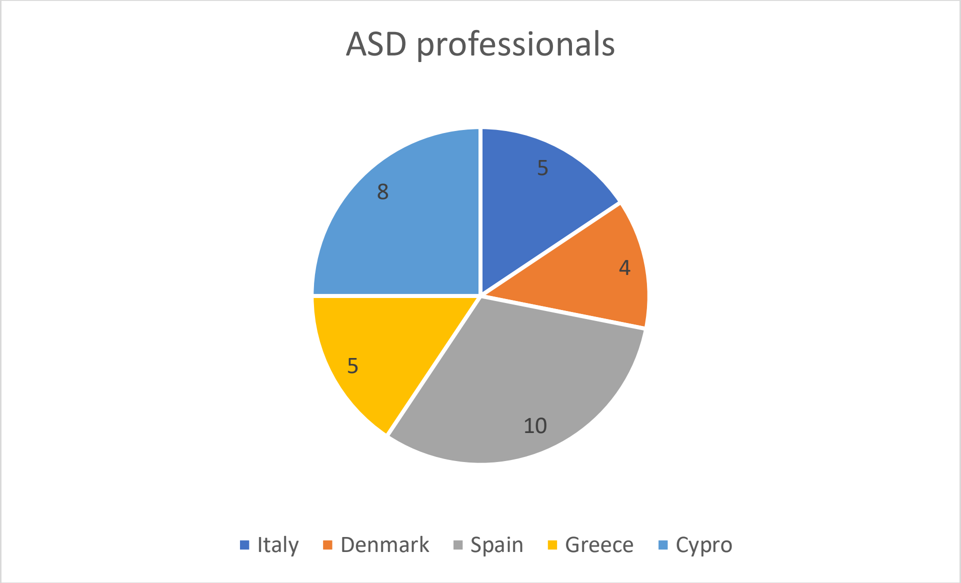
1.4 Professionals working with people with ASD

The last category interviewed was professionals working with people with ASD. A total of 32 participants were recruited. The subjects involved all have education ranging from a master's degree to a higher degree. In terms of profession, they can be categorized as psychologists, behavior analysts, psychotherapists, support teachers, social workers, and therapists specialized in ASD. Below is a pie chart analyzing participation in the different countries of the partnership.



2. USEFUL THEORETICAL CONTENT

The interviews were an extremely useful tool for investigating what could be the indispensable topics to be developed in the guide aimed at organizations, both based on the opinions of experienced professionals working in the field and social workers who are able to identify gaps and needs that have emerged during their work experience. All agree on the need to receive training on general knowledge about the area and then topics such as: symptomatology and clinical characteristics of ASD, the diagnostic framing of autism spectrum disorder, so how it occurs at the level of symptoms, functioning, how it is assessed, what the deficit areas are, and what the main features are. Once a general framework was provided, the need to receive useful tools for interacting with people with ASD was pointed out. Specifically, the importance of the following was highlighted: communication strategies and specific communication tools, such as PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System); strategies and methods to foster inclusion and the integration of a child with ASD; how to support and involve the family; how to promote

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autonomy, social skills and relationships with peers and specific tools related to Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). Last but not least, all affirmed the need to raise awareness in the entire population to promote genuine inclusion and disincentivize stigma around this type of functioning. According to professionals, is fundamental to know autism as a life condition and that each individual is different from the other and can therefore manifest different difficulties and different strengths.

3. NEEDS AND DIFFICULTIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ASD

According to the interviews, the needs that people with ASD may have are mainly in the communicative and relational area. In fact, they were mentioned as needs: socialization; inclusion; equality; acceptance in the community; relation to peers; improvement of verbal and non-verbal communication; recognition and expression of emotions. These needs in interpersonal area reflect the difficulties that youth with ASD may experience in understanding social messages, managing emotions, not being understood and welcomed.

A further need concerns interests: youth with ASD often have particular and restricted interests, often very deep in a single area. It would be useful to start with activities that fit their interests and then gradually involve them in new activities, allowing them time to adapt. It would also be helpful to have a contact person within the youth organization in case of need, someone who knows them and can come to their aid in times of crisis or simply when there is a need to break away from the ongoing activity.

Rigidity is one of the main difficulties of youth with ASD, so when structuring activities, attention should be paid to this aspect and therefore prepare a schedule of planned activities and stick to it as much as possible in terms of order and timing. People with ASD struggle to face novelty and unexpected events, so it is necessary to reduce the likelihood of these so as not to overwhelm them, favouring the management and understanding of the reality.

At the next level of analysis, the needs expressed by youth with ASD relate to the domain of autonomy, and thus there is a strong desire for independence, finding a job that can make them feel valued and achieving a satisfactory level of well-being.

Above all, however, it should always be considered that the ASD is a spectrum, there is a wide range of peculiarities that should be heard and understood, also determined by the type of functioning. It’s significant to know the individual's capabilities, in order to propose individualized activities and interventions. To this purpose, it is worthwhile to explore with each person what their needs are, what their interests are, what their hobbies are, whether or not they like to play sports, etc. To do this, as one youth with ASD reported to us “just ask them”, pointing out the significance of individuals’ active role in comprehending his needs.

4. USEFUL SKILLS

What emerged across the board in all the interviews was that to approach people with ASD, you need to have a toolkit of skills that are generally referred to as soft skills. These skills that should be a prerequisite are: patience, empathy, tolerance, respect, listening skills, sensitivity, flexibility, and adaptability. It is very important to be well prepared and use the skills just listed to try to connect with a person with ASD, establish an initial connection with respect and patience. Second, there are the skills specific to the needs that a person with ASD may have.

Regarding communication, it is useful to know alternative communication systems. These may include the use of signs, communication systems with aids (e.g. PECS, VOCA), alternative keyboards or electronic computers, clear verbal communication without "hidden meanings” (avoid idioms and slang). When starting a conversation with a person with ASD, it was suggested by all respondents to be patient while talking, giving the person time to answer and always strive to be encouraging and compassionate, try to offer concise directions or clear choices (e.g. “Can I ask a question?” or “Would you like to talk about this topic?” etc), understand lack of eye contact, presence of motor tics, invasion of personal boundaries and the lack of respect for turns and for the pragmatics of conversation. One suggestion for starting a conversation is to find out about interests, favorite activities or hobbies and try to find something in common to talk about. Some people with ASD may show hypo- or hypersensitivity and thus be sensitive to certain types of lights, sounds, fabrics, and this is an aspect to always consider.

Above all else, it is important to have a positive attitude, to be able to listen and be curious about the young person's history and coping strategies - and to dare to talk about which of the strategies are appropriate and which can be worked on to change, to have patience and dare to keep trying to understand how the world and everyday life is experienced by the individual, and thereby help to make strategies that can make everyday life work. This is because each person with ASD is different and might exhibit different difficulties or strengths, so when approaching it’s important to be flexible and adapt on the basis of his/her answers.

To avoid increasing the difficulty of handling the unexpected, it is good to be very organized, collect and sharing of relevant daily data within the work team, plan activities in advance and use strategic tools to improve the involvement of a person with ASD (e.g., visual agendas).

Lastly, another crucial aspect to consider is the involvement of the family. In this regard, all the participants agreed that the family plays the most important role in helping a practitioner to provide a good service and build a positive relationship with people with ASD.

5. HOW TO INNOVATE YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

On the topic of how to innovate youth organizations, not much input was given. Some respondents mentioned a few organizational/environmental aspects to consider: environmental factors that may influence negatively sensory issues, promote routines in order to provide safety and emotional management, confined spaces and acceptance.

The fundamental aspect is to train the staff of the organization on what ASD is and on the main communication strategies and tools. The fact that ASD is a disorder that includes several clinical manifestations does not help to adopt strategies that can be effective for everyone, which means that individualized approaches would require more time and effort from the workers.

However, with a short initial training and with the strategies suggested in the previous paragraph, each youth organization can modify its own structure in order to adapt the organization to include youth with ASD.

6. CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

In order to create an inclusive environment, the interviews conducted were very fruitful, many elements were suggested. The key is to create an environment that can be safe considering both the physical surroundings and the psychological and emotional support.

As for the first aspect, to create a sensory-friendly environment some precautions have been suggested such as pay particular attention to: adequate lights (e.g., soft lights), noise control, comfortable textiles and surfaces and spaces and material well organized. When talking about how to create an inclusive environment one very clear answer are given from one of the respondents: “It’s important to create a safe space for the young person either physically - where to go if you feel overstimulated, anxious etc - or psychologically - headphones, gadgets for hands etc” in case of need.

With regard to the second aspect of emotional and psychological support, first of all it is fundamental to involve specialized professional figures, such as psychologists and educational therapists, that can train the staff of the organization on what ASD is and what kind of tools or strategies are useful. In this way, preconceptions around the nature of ASD would be confined, and the peculiarities of this population could be understood. A mother of an ASD mentioned: “How could you include an individual with ASD in your services if you have no idea about his special needs?”. So, the familiarization with the clinical characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder is crucial. The staff must therefore be prepared and well organized, there must be clear rules and activities planned in advance. As regards activities, it was advised, at least at an early stage, to plan dyadic activities that could facilitate the active attendance of ASD youth, considering the discomfort that part of this population experiences when exposed to crowds and rioting. In this way, services adjusted to the individualized needs of young people were on point.

However, trained and educated staff was not the main concern. Above all, inclusive environment should consist of supportive and sensitive professionals who are willing to implement flexible and adaptive practices in their services provided. About this, a testimony from a youth with ASD is very fitting: “If someone is willing to support our population, he will try to treat us properly, being more flexible and open in the practices applied”.

Finally, the cooperation between youth workers and individual family members was suggested as an inclusive functional factor.

CONCLUSIONS

The research carried out allowed us to investigate in all countries of the partnership different aspects that impact the lives of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The following were considered: the legislative context, the main guidelines, and existing initiatives and good practices that have been established and implemented to promote the inclusion of people with ASD.

In reference to legislative interventions toward people with ASD, research shows that Greece and Italy have specific laws and funds for people with ASD. These are carried out both as financial and social support, to encourage active participation in society, at work and in educational terms, and to prevent the exclusion of these people from society. Treatment and rehabilitation services are also offered by the National Health Service. In Denmark, Spain, and Cyprus there are no specific laws for people with ASD but that does not mean they are not considered and protected. Enforcement is at a more generic level, for example in Denmark there is a common overall formulation in much Danish legislation *"that everyone has the right to be supported and protected by the state, regional or local authorities to live their lives on their own terms and on equal terms with all other citizens".* In Spain and Cyprus, on the other hand, there are laws that generally protect people with disabilities. These types of laws highlight the right of all people with disabilities to an independent living, full inclusion in society and equal participation in the financial and social life of the country. In addition, responsible health societies in Italy and Denmark have issued specific guidelines for Autism Spectrum Disorder. In both cases, these are either technical-operational guidelines for services and those working with children and adolescents with ASD or recommendations on diagnosis and treatment based on the effectiveness that has been proven.

At the school level, there are no differentiated classes in Italy, and students with special needs have the opportunity to have an Individualized Education Plan, so as to create an educational and formative intervention that considers the difficulties and strengths of each individual. In Denmark, there are institutional based guidelines in different school settings and parents are supported financially for the therapies and interventions they decide to undertake for their children with ASD.

At the legislative level, it can be said that much has been done to protect the rights of people with ASD. However, there is no general directive for countries involved in the research. This could be a suggestion for the future: to draw on what has already been done and add common regulations with the aim of protecting the rights of people with ASD at the personal, school, community and work levels so as to ensure well-being and autonomy.

The identified best practices that emerged from the research concerning services and programmes for people with ASD in each partner country can be classified into four categories:

- multidimensional programmes specific for people with ASD;
- training programmes aimed at people with ASD;
- programmes focusing on the social inclusion of people with ASD;
- programmes focusing on the labour inclusion of people with ASD.

Not all of these already have evidence of effectiveness and a structure that allows replication in any context. This, presumably, is due to the fact that interventions within ASD are for the most part of recent application due to an awareness of the disorder in the population and society that is still growing. However, all of them can serve as an example for those involved in ASD and thus promote the inclusion of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder at work and social level.

Most of the existing initiatives identified concern the integration of young adults with ASD into the world of work in order to guarantee them continuity in care and support after school and thus facilitate a more comfortable transition to adult life. These initiatives offer individualised programmes to promote the autonomy of the persons with ASD, providing opportunities for adaptation and inclusion in society in order to promote a better quality of life for their future. Initiatives have also been identified to promote inclusion at school, in sports and recreational settings and in the community. As for good practice, the initiatives are not all structured and proven but they are all valid examples of possible behaviours useful to the inclusion of people with ASD in society and to the achievement by them of an autonomy that allows a better quality of life.

The interviews then allowed us to fully enter the world of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, putting us in close contact with those who work in this field (youth workers and professionals) and with those who have to deal with this disorder every day (individual with ASD and family members). From this material came very useful suggestions for the creation of training material for youth organisations and youth workers. In fact, important topics, knowledge and tools have been identified to know and to be able to apply when dealing with an individual with ASD or when you want to create specific activities within your organization. First, it is necessary to know the theoretical context of the disorder, its manifestations, strengths and difficulties. Then, it is crucial to know how to communicate and relate with each individual with ASD. Specific tools and strategies have been identified for this purpose. All of these can be used to create an inclusive environment and to renovate a youth organization, once it has been defined what features they should have. Such knowledge and tools are all aimed at encouraging the inclusion of youth with ASD in the community. Despite the initial appearance of rejection, young people with ASD have a strong need to feel included and active part of society and this has emerged transversally in all the interviews conducted by the partnership.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: DENMARK – National report

Annex A – Best practice identification form 1

Title	*The Specialists*
Location	*Founded in Aarhus Denmark* Now established in many countries all over the world.
Organisation	*The Specialists*
Website	*Website (if applicable)* https://www.dk.specialisterne.com/#
Overview	This company started when Thorkild Sonne, the father of an autistic boy – became impatient and couldn`t wait anymore for the society and social services in Denmark to come up with a proper plan and offer for his son turning 18 years old. TS was director at one of the biggest telephone companies in Denmark, having a substantial high income – however he quitted his job and established and started the company SPECIALISTERNE. First employee was his son and the company named **SPECIALISTERNE** in Danish (**The Specialists in English**) started to offer services to other companies based on the specific & unique competences of his son and later on many more young people and adults challenged by autism. Today **SPECIALISTERNE** is a company established in many countries employing more than 10.000 people challenged by autism. **The SPECIALISTs** still offer services to other companies based on the specific and unique competences the autistic employees have or tasks that can be solved by people of autism. Now years after the establishment **The SPECIALISTs** also offer training and developing programs for people suffering from autism.

	At the same time **The SPECIALISTs** act as employment office finding competent people suffering of autism – but having specific and unigue competences required by other big companies – such as airports – pharmaceutical companies. From the company's international homepage *Specialisterne Foundation is a not-for-profit foundation with the goal to generate meaningful employment for one million autistic persons and those with similar profiles (ADHD, OCD, dyslexia etc.) – in combination referred to as neurodivergent persons – through social entrepreneurship, corporate sector engagement and a global change in mindset.* *Read more* https://specialisternefoundation.com/about-us/ *(Approx. 250-300 words)*
Impact and innovation	The initiative of establishing The SPECIALISTs speaks for itself when it comes to innovation. It is very innovative to build up an economical sustainable worldwide company based on the identification of special competences and skills among young adults suffering from autism. To people suffering from autism – it has of course a huge impact on daily life and value for the individual person to be offered a job and an income. Moreover, is the value to the individual person that these jobs are based on the specific skills and competences I have as a person suffering from autism. Moreover, Thorkild Sonne and the establishing of The SPECIALISTs has had an enormous impact on the general public`s view on people suffering from autism in Denmark and further more in the countries where the SPECIALISTERNE are established today. The impact and change in the public view and approach to people suffering from autism, has of course mostly been coursed by the high quality of the services provided by The SPECIALISTs through the years of the company`s existents, but also to a very professional marketing implemented by the company. Lately some television programs presenting some representatives in private and in their working life. These videos do unfortunately only exist so far in a Danish version – however the stories or the presentations almost speak for themselves. These programs can be watched at

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	https://www.dr.dk/drtv/serie/de-skjulte-talenter_6599 It has changed the general view on children, youth and most people suffering from autism – from only being a group of: "another group of mentally disabled people" to a more diverse approach and understanding– more open – more curiously to people suffering from autism. A respect related to the fact that this is a group of people, where some contain very unique competences and skills other people can`t even dream of developing, no matter how hard we try. ***Briefly elaborate the impact and any innovative aspects of the best practice.*** ***(Approx. 200 - 300 words)***
Sustainability	Whether the SPECIALIST`s is sustainable will at the end be decided by ordinary marked mechanism. It is a private company operating on marked conditions. Supply and demand. However, for now it looks very positive – the company expand both when it comes to number of services provide to the marked – to people suffering from autism and they expand also more and more internationally. At a time, the company will of course be challenged when Thorkil Sonne will hand the managing hand to his successors. However, it is a fact that the people at the top of this foundation has been involved in many years and are expected to be able to continue the development of The Specialists. *Briefly elaborate whether the practice enjoys the technical, human and financial conditions to ensure its continuity over time.* ***(Approx. 150-200 words)***
Transferability	*The basic idea and the formulated and the developed concept for the company The Specialists in order to achieve the formulated objectives of The Specialists – is, in our view, highly transferable to other countries.* *Basically, The Specialists themselves have documented that the concept is transferable to other countries/regions since they have already, at request*

	and by invitation from a number of countries, established themselves in many countries in a few years. *This does not change the fact that there are still many countries that could be inspired by the idea, purpose and concept behind The Specialists.* *It could be transferred as new independent initiative in these countries inspired by The SPECIALISTs or by initiating a collaboration with The Specialist Foundation having an ambition about establishing this offer in its own country – or regional area.* *Briefly elaborate whether this practice is applicable in a different context. (Approx. 150-200 words)*
Additional info	*Add any additional information related to the best practice you consider important.* *(Approx. 150-200 words)*

Annex A – Best practice identification form 2

Title	**Specially designed youth education (STU)**
Location	*Denmark.*
Organisation	*State financed.* Many providers
Website	*Website (if applicable)* https://csv.randers.dk/stu-paa-csv-randers/ https://www.empata.dk/?gclid=CjwKCAjwpqCZBhAbEiwAa7pXeYg_Y-_IxgUyhPxsVYOOvWGu0MnxibI8RWhBcs7q5kVSipVnsPtLThoCcagQAvD_BwE https://uu.aarhus.dk/stu/ All these Danish webpages – can be translated into english
Overview	Approx. 72% of all young people in Denmark start at upper secondary school and almost 19% start vocational training. For many of the young people who are unable to follow one of these two youth educations – there is now a third option. Youth educational program for young people with special needs (STU)

	STU is a three-year youth education for young people up to age 25, mentally disabled people and other young people with special needs who cannot complete another youth education. **Specially designed youth education (STU) is aimed at young people who, for physical or mental reasons, cannot complete another youth education.** **The training is based on a personal developed curriculum and may consists of:** 4. A general part that includes subjects on social conditions, housekeeping, economics and self-care 5. A specifically targeted part, which, based on interests and abilities, includes training in industrial relations and training in employability 6. Traineeships in companies and institutions to give young people experience of working conditions and cooperation in a workplace The training begins with a clarification process of up to 12 weeks, where the young people together with a counsellor from the Municipal Youth Initiative and his parents make an educational plan for the course. The starting point is the young person's wishes and opportunities for future education and employment. The training plan is adjusted as needed and at least once a year. The educational plan may include elements of teaching from continuation schools, independent vocational schools, folk high schools, vocational schools, day colleges and other institutions. At the end of upper secondary education, a competence paper is issued, which contains a description of the school and internships in which the young person has participated. *Briefly describe the best practice, including information on the type of services and activity provided, target groups, overall objectives, professionals involved etc* *250 – 300 words*
Impact and innovation	If we look into to the overall purpose of STU the innovative part become quit clear.

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	LBK: § 1. *The purpose of youth education is that young people with intellectual disabilities and other young people with special needs acquire personal, social and professional skills for as independent and active participation in adult life as possible and possibly for further education and employment.* It is innovative to have a 3-year upper secondary education that is not based on a common national curriculum – but is based on a formulated and written personally planned curriculum – which is based on exactly what the young person in question is to learn. At least in Denmark. A personally designed curriculum – which only contains goals and methods for the individual young person (e.g. with autism) to be strengthened by personal and professional competencies in order to live a more independent life and develop greater active participation in society in general, but also to be able to find a place in the labor market. ***Impact*** From the experience we have since the education started in 2013 is that it means a big difference between the approx. 1000 to 1300 young people who have started or are now starting the education. Many get a significantly more independent life, many become much more active in daily life and the offers their surrounding environment offers and many are actually able to start a formal qualifying education or apply for and get a job. Moving away from home – leaving the parents and starting an independent life in their own setting. *Briefly elaborate the impact and any innovative aspects of the best practice. (Approx. 200 - 300 words)*
Sustainability	Since the educational offer is based on Danish legislation, which obliges Danish municipalities to offer it with the grant of the necessary additional support offers required for the young person to participate in the 3-year education, the offer will exist and be continuously qualified and be expanded based on the ongoing experience accumulated. In Denmark, all education is state-funded and free for young people seeking education – this also applies to the SU. In this way, education is secured and sustainable in the years to come. *Briefly elaborate whether the practice enjoys the technical, human and financial conditions to ensure its continuity over time.* *(Approx. 150-200 words)*

Transferability	In principle, the STU can be copied and transferred directly to any other country. A transfer of the educational concept will of course require national and regional adaptation of the laws, circulars and educational guidelines that exist and which formulate the framework and objectives of the 3-year training course. The challenge for a number of countries will probably be funding. Since all education in Denmark is state-financed through the citizen and company-paid tax and thus free of charge for the participants, the financing takes place on equal terms with all other education of children and young people in Denmark. These are not applicable conditions in all other EU countries and the financing for start-up and operation will probably be the first challenge in a number of the other EU countries to copy the STU model. *Briefly elaborate whether this practice is applicable in a different context. (Approx. 150-200 words)*
Additional info	*Add any additional information related to the best practice you consider important. (Approx. 150-200 words)*

Annex B – Existing initiatives identification form 1

Title	*Special Sport*
Location	*Country, city* Established in more cities – however the first initiative started in a suburb to Copenhagen named Rødover and later on it spread out in the country.
Organisation	*Special Sport*
Website	*Website (if applicable)* https://specialsport.dk/
Overview	Many families find that sports and other ordinary spare time activities are not an option for their disabled child, for many reasons. Special sport.dk – is a quit new organization in Denmark, which on volunteering basis try to overcome this challenge. The organization have a strong focus on the challenges of families and on solving the challenges surrounding access to sports with creative suggestions for concrete solutions adapted to the child. Which sport and

	club are best suited? Is there a one-off sport, team sport or something completely different? The are present for testing solutions in practice together with parents, schools, municipalities and other partners. The organization offer advice for matching children and spare time activities. They find concrete solutions between the family and the specific association. It can also be about the economy or needing help with companionship by a volunteer adult, if a slow induction and start-up is needed and required. This kind of companionship starting up in new activities are also considered to set the parents free and have time off. The organization takes initiative to start up and develop new spare time activities in local area, that match the special needs and requirements children and youngsters with different challenges have *Briefly describe the initiative, including information on the type of services and activities provided, target groups, overall objectives, professionals involved, etc.* *(Approx. 250-300 words)*
Impact and innovation	This initiative was and still are quit innovative in Denmark as it was established in 2014 It started at Skovmoseskolen in Rødovre (a suburb to the capital Copenhagen), by committed parents and with support from the Joint Municipal Disability Sports Pool. They started with a karate team with 7 children and a dream of becoming real bridge builders. *The project kick-starts with an external donation that supported the project in the years 2016 to 2018.* *Having a 25-hour pay-covered project manager, things went fast.* The project had at the end of 2018 formulated all the goals and more. 14 teams and 150+ children took active part in different activities in organized activities at local sports and activity associations at the end of 2018. Shortly before the end of 2022 – more than 221 different associations are active partners to SpecialSport.dk. **Impact:** Systematically, traditional sports associations but also other providers of leisure activities become aware that they also have a responsibility to offer activities aimed at children and young people with special needs and the

	willingness and ability of these associations to act on this realization – strengthened tremendously by the support they can get from the association SpecialSport.dk This means that many hundreds of children and young people with special challenges and special needs have found important social leisure activities they like and they can be active in. Slowly and systematically, this figure increases with each week and month. More and more activities are coming in, in more and more parts of Denmark and more and more children and young people are engaged. *Briefly elaborate the impact and any innovative aspects of the initiative. (Approx. 200 - 300 words)*
Sustainability	Initiatives starts in Denmark often as small local initiatives – but over time grow bigger and bigger and end up often being nationwide show mostly a large and significant survivability. If SpecialSport.dk manage to establish themselves in all parts of the country and thus become a nationwide initiative and at the same time they manage to associate some talented people who can give them some PR and publicity in the media, they will typically either end up receiving municipal support permanently or they will find a foundation or private company that will support them firmly. Denmark has a comprehensive system of funding –supporting children and young people's education or well-being. In the same way, CSR is a significant part of running a private business in Denmark. For the financial year 2016 and beyond, the country's largest companies must supplement their management report with new, comprehensive descriptions of their social responsibility. From 2018, the CSR requirements are obligatory to many Danish companies. The establishment of CSR obligations – and the tradition of doing volunteering work in Denmark are 2 important aspects making initiatives as SpecialSport.dk sustainable. *Briefly elaborate whether the initiative and its activities enjoys the technical, human and financial conditions to ensure its continuity over time.* *(Approx. 150-200 words)*

Transferability	The idea can be copied and transferred to other countries relatively easily and uncomplicatedly. Success will probably depend on 2 significant factors. 1 Denmark and Danes have a very strong and very developed readiness for volunteerism and an idea and a concept like this of course also benefits from this. When such an idea as SPECIAL SPORT is launched in Denmark, it benefits, among other things, from the fact that it is relatively easy to get the idea / concept visible among potential people who would like to get involved and offer themselves as a volunteer. All municipalities in Denmark have gradually established volunteering centres. A Volunteer Center is a place where people who want to volunteer can contact and be presented with what efforts exist and which they can engage in. On the other hand, initiatives can contact and inform the centre that they are looking for volunteers for their specific efforts. 2 Finding the necessary funding could probably also be a barrier to copying and transferring the idea to other countries. Denmark has as presented earlier a huge number of humanitarian private funds -and a proactive CSR policy – that force companies to get involved in initiatives like SpecialSport.dk
Additional info	*Add any additional information related to the initiative you consider important.* *(Approx. 150-200 words)*

Annex B – Existing initiatives identification form 2

Title	*Title of the service/ project/ initiative/ programme*
Location	*Established in 8 bigger regional cities in Denmark*
Organisation	*Name of the organisation providing the initiative* Autismeungdom (YouthAutism)
Website	*Website (if applicable)* https://www.autismeungdom.dk/

Overview	We will to let the young people present them selves. From the homepage of **AutismYouth.** **What is Autism Youth?** ***Autism Youth*** is Denmark's youth organization for young autistic people, and young people with close relationships with autistic people, aged 13-30 years. You are welcome if you have a sister, brother, boyfriend or parent who is autistic. Autism Youth is an organization that works with 3 main topics: 1: Spreading knowledge about autism 2: Advocating for young autistic people in the political debate 3: Creating inclusive and autism-friendly communities  As the map shows – there are room for more units in the very western part of DK. However the 8 units are placed in the regions where the majority of people leave. Everyone can participate in the local chapters, and all members can contribute to the association. Whether it is by being a member and showing your support, by coming to the events you want, or by running for your local board or for the executive committee. The most important thing is that you contribute with what you want and can accommodate, and that you have fun while doing so. **What Does Autism Youth Do?** In Autism Youth, we work to give young autistic people a voice in the political debate. We believe that young autistic people should also be consulted when politicians make decisions that concern us. We are already creating inclusive and autism-friendly communities where you can meet others who are similar to you.

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	We do this primarily in our local chapters, which hold events, such as conversation cafes, board game nights and walk & talk, within their respective geographical areas. In short, we work to create an autism-friendly Denmark! *Briefly describe the initiative, including information on the type of services and activities provided, target groups, overall objectives, professionals involved, etc.* *(Approx. 250-300 words)*
Impact and innovation	Right now, we do not know whether having a national youth organization for young people with autism is innovative compared to other EU member states. As we are not aware if young people with autism in other countries have made their own national organisation – free of parents and other friendly stakeholders. If we consider the fact that the initiative is about establishing a youth organization in Denmark – then it cannot be called innovative either. There are countless initiatives launched by young people for young people in Denmark. However considering that Denmark never previously have had a nationwide youth organization established by young people with autism and specifically aiming young people with autism – on young people with autism`s conditions – it is of course innovative. IMPACT: The initiative will of course have one big impact on young people with autism's self-understanding and on their opportunities to communicate what they want to communicate to the outside world, about their wishes and their needs. It will also help young people with autism find it much easier to find sparring partners who match themselves as young people with autism, when they get access to a much larger group of young people with autism and thus also much greater opportunity to find one that matches them better than those who are just in their nearest neighborhood. Find someone where it is not just autism that is the common denominator – but what they are each concerned with as a young person.

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	It will provide the young people with autism their own independent voice in the many different public discussions regarding a number of issues relevant and important to young people with autism. They will be seen as an independent group – liberated from always being seen and talked about as a part of "families having children of autism". *Briefly elaborate the impact and any innovative aspects of the initiative. (Approx. 200 - 300 words)*
Sustainability	Whether the organization is sustainable will largely depend on their ability to communicate as something special that has something special to offer the particular youth group they are addressing. Something special that is different from what the main organization Danish Autism Association offers young people through their families. It is largely families of children and young people who are back in the Danish Autism Association and who have supported the establishment of Autism Youth, to give the young people a free space and a voice that is independent of the parent generation. In this way, Autism Youth may also represent a much-needed youth rebellion within young people with Autism – that they want to be seen and heard as young people and not always be thought of as young people in a family with a young autistic person. We believe that there is a need for the empowerment of young people acting by themselves and therefore this initiative will prove to be sustainable. And they'll find donors and sponsors who will support them. – see previous description in relation to SpecialSport.dk Briefly elaborate whether the initiative and its activities enjoys the technical, human and financial conditions to ensure its continuity over time. (Approx. 150-200 words)
Transferability	The idea of establishing and build up a national or regional youth organisation for young people with autism and thus giving young people their own platform and voice can, in our view, be easily copied and transferred to other countries.

	The concept and model the young Danes have designed and started up on will probably be copied directly and implemented in other countries – which do not already have a nationwide or regionally wide organization for young people with autism. In countries that do not already have a membership-based organisation of young people – for young people – speaking on behalf of young people and addressing young people. Who, on behalf of the young people, takes an active part in the public debate, to improve the conditions and opportunities for young people with autism. Processen kunne formentlig opstartes, implementeres og udvikles via EU støttede projekter. Et sådan spor vil formentlig kræve, at der er erfarne EU projektudviklere til at tage de første skridt – herunder identificere de unge der kunne være de bærende kræfter på sigt – blandt unge med autisme. *Briefly elaborate whether this practice is applicable in a different context.* *(Approx. 150-200 words)*
Additional info	*Add any additional information related to the initiative you consider important.* *(Approx. 150-200 words)*

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Annex C – Policies and guidelines reporting

Elaborate an overview of the policies, guidelines and recommendation in your country and region in order to identify the national policy and regulatory framework and coordination for work with persons with ASD, in general and youth specifically. (Approx. 600-700 words)

It is recommended to provide links and references to what will be reported (relevant institutions, guidelines, laws, policies, recommendations, relevant documents, etc.).

The provision of information is free and open, but some stimulating questions to support partners in profiling their national context could be the following:

- ***What are the main relevant institutions that legislate, protect and monitor the situation of persons with ASD? Describe them briefly.***

  In Denmark, it is the parliament that sets the framework for the rights you as a citizen have as a minimum and not least the requirements you as a citizen may have, which the responsible local and regional authorities must live up to.
  The fundamental responsibility for implementing the social and economic rights and requirements and all other aspects of life persons with ASD have lies mainly with the 98 municipalities in Denmark. The 5 regions in Denmark are responsible offering young people with autism the statutory specific health services covered by current legislation,
  If you as a citizen do not believe that the municipality or region lives up to its obligations, there are initially local and regional appeal bodies – and citizens can finally proceed to a number of national complaints bodies and ultimately you can complain to the relevant ministry and minister.

- ***What laws and policies to protect persons with ASD and families are in place in your country?***

  Denmark never legislate with the designation of specific groups or group of diagnosis.

  It is a common overall formulation in much Danish legislation.
  "that everyone has the right to be supported and protected by the state, regional or local authorities to live their lives on their own terms and on equal terms with all other citizens".

This means that everyone has the right to be supported and helped in relation to the disabilities they may have, so that they can live a life as optimally on their own terms and on such equal terms with non-disabled people.

- ***Are there laws and policies aimed at young people with ASD?***

  No.

  As an example. In the law regarding the formal educational program named STU – Special Designed Training Course for citizens between age 15 to 25 with special needs, no diagnosis is mentioned – even though it is clear that the law is targeting children and adolescents with ASD and people in general having learning disabilities.

- ***In your country, what are the main guidelines that are recommended for working with people with ASD (in general and in the youth sector specifically)?***

  In general it is a guideline – that people should have a relevant educational background to work with young people of autism. Social pedagogical background – social advisor, psychology.

  The Danish Health Authority under the Danish Ministry of Health has recently published new "National Clinical Guidelines on working with children and adolescents with autism" https://www.sst.dk/-/media/Udgivelser/2021/NKRautismespektrumforstyrrelserBornUnge/NKR-for-behandling-af-autismespektrumforstyrrelser-hos-boern-og-unge.ashx?sc_lang=da&hash=EDA1646F49FB8C8DE3A462014F85A147

  The National Board of Social Services under the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs has recently published the following guide for municipalities.

  - Headline: "People with Autism"
  - Subheadline "Social initiatives that work

  In addition, the National Board of Social Services has an entire section on the website that conveys actual and updated experiences and knowledge – related to all aspects of a life with autism.

  https://socialstyrelsen.dk/handicap/autisme

- ***Are institutional guidelines or recommendations applied in school settings? Which ones?***

  There are institutional based guidelines in different school settings. They are either made at municipality level or at institutional level. They can differ from institution to institution and from municipality to municipality.

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- ***How is support and assistance provided to people with ASD (e.g., customised plans, home care, school support, specialist teams, service networks, etc.)?***

  The support and assistance are provided according to all the examples mentioned in the above headline. Further more parents can be financial compensated for loss of income taking care of their children with autism and have personal assistance in 20 to 50 hours a week – to be set free from the care obligations some hours.
  In Denmark there are specialist supporting specific the kindergardens –primary schools, special schools and youth education.
  At the same time all families have their contact persons at the municipality and are connected to the relevant specialists at municipality level or at regional level.

- ***Are there any specific recommendations for young people with ASD?***

  No and Yes.
  Childhood and youth period are treated as a separate life period on an equal footing with other life periods in the 2 guidelines and recommendations we mentioned earlier, from the Danish Health Authority and the Danish National Board of Social Services, respectively.

  -

- ***Are there any specific recommendations for practitioners working with young people with ASD?***

  Some professionals have specialized already during their basic education to become social pedagogue – teacher – social worker. At the same time there are a number of supplementary courses for professionals going to work with children and youngsters with autism.

- ***Which guidelines for promoting and improving the quality and appropriateness of care interventions in autism spectrum disorders are in force in your country?***

  - https://www.sau.rm.dk/siteassets/faglighed--kvalitet/mennesker-med-autisme---sociale-indsatser-der-virker_socialstyrelsen.pdf
  - https://socialstyrelsen.dk/handicap/autisme/om-autisme/unge-med-autisme
  - https://www.sst.dk/-/media/Udgivelser/2021/NKRautismespektrumforstyrrelserBornUnge/NKR-for-behandling-af-autismespektrumforstyrrelser-hos-boern-og-unge.ashx

  However, it might be fair to state, that the decisive force in developing and improving the quality of the services and support children / young people with autism and their families receive in Denmark is partly through the information work, information work and political pressure practiced by the National Autism Association and especially through the direct support they give their members and by bringing families together across.

FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

7. Findings from the interviews with youth workers

Interviewing youth workers have in general been a great experience and learning for the process of the YOUTH ASD project. At SOSU OJ we have talked to 8 youth workers who have all contributed with relevant knowledge and experiences about working with young people with ASD. 6 of the participants identify as women while 2 as men and are in the age group of 21-49. Most of the participants are educated at a bachelor level or higher and are currently working as consultants, in the police, as teachers and as psychologists.

They meet the young people either through their jobs or at volunteer centres where they are responsible for the general coordination of the organizations. The teachers have different experiences with working in classes with special needs etc.

Some of the great experiences that are noticed are the visit at “Frirum” translated as the Free Room, at the Danish island “Youth Island” here there are given a place for young people with a diagnosis to have a free safe space, that only they can decide over and where there is different activities based on different needs. This is a great initiative, where many young people come and feel included in a community. We hope to engage them in the project later.

One of the primary issues that are highlighted is the different treatment you get accordingly to where you live in the country. Near the bigger cities more offers for help, organizations and volunteer options occur and this inequality have a big impact on the young people lives and how they will develop in life. This is not perhaps an issues we can tackle in the youth asd project, but it is worthy to be aware about.

The youth workers ask for specific training in

- General knowledge about the area
- Strengths of people with asd – there are too much focus on weaknesses
- How to support and specific activities that are suitable to do so
- Inclusion and less stigma
- Communication strategies

Many believe that the strategies of inclusion of people, not only with ASD, but also other diagnosis’ are supposed to happen a lot earlier. Included in the primary school curriculum, make it a part of strategy in a company etc. be creative in making it a natural part of life!

A final note from the youthworkers which is important to remember again and again is:
It is a very complex area to work with. ASD is not a particular thing and therefore it will never be a one size fits all support to be designed. These children are as different as any other child!!

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8.

9. Findings from the interviews with the individuals with ASD and family members

Talking to people who experience ASD as a central part of their daily life
It is clear that the possibilities that are granted in Denmark from the state and municipalities, makes a huge difference for the individuals who access these initiatives. E.g. the respite care, nanny hours and a car that are fitted the individual, seems to have given a lot more freedom to the families.
The final sentence of the questionnaire is a key take away message after having done this research, namely: <u>People with ASD are all as different as neurotypical people so they need to be seen and treated individually.</u>

Findings from the interviews with the individuals with ASD have perhaps been the most important process of the fieldwork in this phase. We have talked to <u>2 young people</u> who are diagnosed with ASD and are active in the organisational unions. One of the are in secondary education, where she has been granted a special scheme, where she can spend one more year than most students to finish the study. The other respondent is taking a professions bachelor and have the same agreement with the education. They both declare that their favourite types of activities in their spare time are being a part of the NGO’s which plays a huge part of their daily life. One of them have actually started an NGO himself, where he have been granted a place on the “youth island” in Denmark where they have complete autonomy of the area and can design it and have the activities they want. Also, the municipality of Copenhagen are supporting them with money, in order for them to be sustainable and stable offer for the young people with ASD and other diagnosis’.

One of the most important statements that was given from one of the respondents are that they often meet people who thinks they are stupid because they have been diagnosed with ASD. This is a very important factor to have in mind when working with the curriculum, that it is important to talk about equality. As well, both the respondents are stating that people around them lack information about ASD and both friends and professionals around them are not meeting their needs when they experience a challenge combined with ASD. This is great information for the youth ASD project to have in mind!

10. Findings from the interviews with the professionals working with people with ASD

The phase with interviews with professionals have been very meaningful and the participants have granted us with a lot of new information and perspectives. At SOSU we have interviewed 4 professionals who are working with ASD in their daily life. Their educational backgrounds are a bachelor, master’s degree, a PhD and teachers. Besides teaching they are in the fields of psychology and therapy. They work with various target groups in different age, functional level etc. One of the noteworthy experiences with working with ASD is that one of the teachers have “Worked for three years at a disability riding school with children, adolescents and adults with ASD”. Other experiences from their background are being a” Physiotherapist specialising in neurorehabilitation, with various courses on physical, mental, cognitive, and social functions, skills, limitations, assessment, and treatment/rehabilitation, including courses on ASD and treatment and rehabilitation of patients within the spectrum”.

Some of the skills that are highlighted from the professionals which are important to have when working with young people with ASD are:

- have great respect for the fact that young people with ASD are as different as any other young person.
- have patience and dare to keep trying to understand how the world and everyday life is experienced by the individual, and thereby help to make strategies that can make everyday life work.
- to be able to listen and be curious about the young person's history and coping strategies - and to dare to talk about which of the strategies are appropriate and which can be worked on to change.
- dare to talk about the challenges we see from the outside in relation to the individual and ASD
- clear verbal communication without "hidden meanings
- not demanding eye contact

When talking with the professionals about what is important to know more about and which skills are essential to develop when working with young people with ASD are, that you always have to remember that every person is different, no matter if they have a diagnosis or not. Also, you cannot expect that every person with ASD have a skill they are brilliant at, sometimes ASD is not that visual. They also suggest that the professional are great at self-reflection as the work with people with ASD are not always as you would expect. Then there are the more “obvious skills” working with how you communicate, body language, inclusion, patience, empathy and so on.

“It is especially the social aspect that can be challenging, as well as if the rules for participation are not clear, but require "interpretation" and adaptation along the way”.

When talking about how to create an inclusive environment one very clear answer are given from one of the respondents. “Create a safe space for the young person either physically - where to go if you feel overstimulated, anxious etc - or psychologically - headphones, gadgets for hands etc”. The key here is to be aware of both the physical surroundings and the mental stimulation. The answer is elaborated with “All questions must be able to be answered simply. One person as contact person.

Always the same people around the young person, clear rules, knowledge of ASD, cooperation with relatives if there are special needs, non-verbal communication, etc.”

11. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the main conclusions is, that the knowledge about ASD needs to be much more widespread. This is what we hear from the youth workers, the families and relatives and the professionals. In general people are not very enlightened with what ASD actually is and how different it is within different people. A series on Netflix called “Atypical” have put some focus on the topic, which is great, but is also mostly show the easy parts of being young with ASD. Another series called "Love on the Spectrum" is also found on Netflix, which are more like a documentary format, where people with ASD are dating. This is highlighted as many of the youth workers say, that young people get their knowledge from these series, and that it is great that representation are current, but that we need an alternative to talk more about when ASD can be very challenging.

It must be concluded that there is a need for people to learn more about ASD and they want to! This is a big step for the project we need to meet. It also seems like there is a huge potential within the group of professionals working with the target group, but that sometimes the resources are smaller and therefore the actual needs are not met.

It is important to talk about equality and not seeing ASD as a mental disorder. Every person are different, neurotypicals as well as atypicals.

12. Some general recommendations:

- Create a curriculum that are a part of the obligatory pensum for teachers in primary schools
- Create a curriculum that are easy to plug and play for organisations and schools where people with ASD attend activities, so that it is easy for the institution to be inclusive on a researched basis.
- Engage with youth organisations working with young people who have a diagnosis and ask them to be a part of creating the necessary initiatives
- Try. Act. Do something. Do not just watch things go wrong for people with a diagnosis, research and meet them with the best you have got!

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Annex 2: ITALY – National report

13. INTRODUCTION

International epidemiological studies have reported a generalized increase in the prevalence of ASD. Increased training of clinicians, changes in diagnostic criteria, and increased knowledge of the disorder by the general population, also related to the socioeconomic context, are factors to be considered when interpreting this increase. In Italy, an estimated 1 in 77 children (age 7-9 years) present with an autism spectrum disorder with a higher prevalence in males: there are 4.4 times more males than females. From a regulatory perspective, in Italy the first law to protect individuals with ASD in school was Law no. 517, in which differentiated classes were abolished. From there on, various regulations were passed to regulate school services, such as the creation of the Individualised Educational Plan (PEI), a protective measure for all students with disabilities, neurodevelopmental disorders or learning disabilities. At present, alongside the protections at the legislative level, the Public Health Service offers interventions based on Applied Behavior Analysis, which is the evidence-based treatment that has demonstrated the most validity. However, it is often joined by private services to strengthen the potential of this tool, at a substantial cost to families. The increasing sensitivity of the population to disability in general has enabled the creation of local initiatives and activities that have also become good practices for the inclusion of youth with ASD in the community. Building on these examples, it will be possible to improve on what already exists and do better and better to foster true inclusion.

14. REPORT FROM THE POLICY AND GUIDELINES

In its Message No. 5544 of 23 June 2014, the National Social Security Institute (INPS) defines the syndrome as a '*severe social disability with a chronic developmental character, the expression of a developmental disorder, resulting from biologically and genetically determined processes that therefore affect the degree of clinical expressiveness within the individual trajectory*'.

National Law No. 134/2015 '*Provisions on the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of persons with autism spectrum disorders and assistance to families*'[3] for the first time officially recognised autism by the state and intervened at the regulatory level to indicate the interventions necessary to ensure the protection of health, improvement of living conditions and inclusion in social life and work contexts of persons on the autism spectrum, enhancing their abilities within a wide-ranging coordination.

In order to enable the implementation of National Law No. 134/2015, a '*Fund for the care of individuals with autism spectrum disorder*' was established at the Ministry of Health in 2016 with an endowment of €5 million per year from the year 2016 and for the year 2021 the endowment of the Fund is increased by €50 million.

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[3] https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2015/08/28/15G00139/sg

The Budget Law 2022[4] adds an increase of EUR 27 million for the year 2022. A refinancing that does not have school specificities, but intends to generally favour initiatives and projects of a socio-assistance and habilitative nature for persons with autism spectrum disorder.

Since 2005, the Italian Society Of Infancy And Adolescence Neuropsychiatry (SINPIA) has made available the '*Guidelines for Autism. Technical-operational recommendations for the services of neuropsychiatry of the age of development'*[5]. In 2011, the Superior Institute of Health (ISS) published the first guidelines on autism[6] for families, who were thus legitimised to turn to the National Health Service for the therapeutic treatment of their sick children. However, in implementation of the Normative Framework above presented, it was only in 2016 that the Ministry of Health commissioned the ISS to draw up the *'Guidelines on the Diagnosis and Treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Children and Adolescents'* on the basis of the evolution of pathophysiological and therapeutic knowledge derived from the scientific literature and national and international good practices[7]. The clinical guideline recommendations were then updated in February 2021 with the document *'Guideline Recommendations for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders'*[8].

With regard to the aspect of inclusion, with particular reference to school contexts, as early as 1977 through Law no. 517[9] the creation and application of an advanced pedagogical-educational model comes, based on the school integration of disabled people, abolishing differentiated classes. This law establishes the principle of inclusion for all pupils with disabilities in primary and secondary schools from 6 to 14 years of age and the right to education and education in common sections and classes for all persons with disabilities, specifying that *'the exercise of this right cannot be prevented by learning difficulties or other difficulties resulting from disabilities related to the handicap'*. These principles will be further reaffirmed by Framework Law No. 104 of 1992 for the assistance, social integration and rights of disabled persons. Law 104 establishes not only principles of inclusion but also economic allowances for the person and family members in order to facilitate their assistance.

The support to persons with disabilities carried out in the public school 'of all and for all', which is substantiated through teachers qualified in teaching disciplines and then specialised in favouring inclusion, introduced in 1982 with Law no. 270. The Ministry of Education (MIUR) states that "*School integration of pupils with disabilities is one of the strengths of the Italian school, which aims to be a welcoming community in which all pupils, regardless of their functional differences, can experience individual and social growth*"[10].

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[4] https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2021/12/31/310/so/49/sg/pdf

[5] https://sinpia.eu/wp-content/uploads/atom/allegato/148.pdf

[6] https://www.salute.gov.it/portale/saluteMentale/dettaglioContenutiSaluteMentale.jsp?lingua=italiano&id=5619&area=salute%20mentale&menu=autismo

[7] https://osservatorionazionaleautismo.iss.it/bambini-e-adolescenti

[8] https://snlg.iss.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Raccomandazione-1-autismo.pdf

[9] https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1977/08/18/077U0517/sg

[10] https://www.miur.gov.it/alunni-con-disabilita

Moreover, consistent with Law no. 170/2010, MIUR introduced the right to receive customised teaching Education for pupils with Special Educational Needs[11]. The educational, socialisation and learning aims and objectives relating to the different areas of pupils with disabilities are included in the Individualised Educational Plan (PEI), that is drawn up jointly by the school and the public services (psycho-social health team) with the collaboration of the family.

15. REPORT FROM THE BEST PRACTICES

Title	Banda Rulli frulli (*Rulli Frulli Band*)
Location	Finale Emilia, Italy
Organisation	Banda Rulli Frulli
Website	*https://www.bandarullifrulli.com/*
Overview	Rulli Frulli is a band that grew up in difficult circumstances such as the earthquake that hit Emilia Romagna in 2012. Around seventy young people between the ages of eight and thirty are members. Fifteen of them are young people with disabilities (autism and down syndrome). Rulli Frulli focuses on aspects usually considered 'parallel' to musical activity: • Research into sound and its nuances; • Workshops for the construction of musical instruments using recycled materials (pipes, tiles, pots and pans, washing machine baskets, etc.); • Integration and interaction for different ages and abilities, aiming for maximum involvement of everyone, each to the best of their ability; • Sharing. • Understanding the potential of a sound material and understanding an object that sounds, how it sounds and why it sounds is an instinctive (almost primitive) way of coming into contact with an instrument of expression that - albeit modified and customised - allows children to speak the universal language of rhythm. The activities are divided into two types of workshop: • Music workshop, in which the concert-show takes shape • Instrument-making workshop. Mainly four professionals are involved, a band director and deputy director, a technical manager and a social media manager.
Impact and innovation	The practice results particularly innovative, because it is in its entirety that the project's greatest achievement can be observed, the vision of a group

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[11] https://www.miur.gov.it/disturbi-specifici-dell-apprendimento-dsa-

	that does not show disability but enhances it, as everyone is included in a social network of mutual acceptance and respect. Underlying the practice is the innovative idea that cooperating to put on an annual show helps the youngsters to strengthen the sense of togetherness they experience, through travelling for trips and sharing the stage and the emotions that each trip can convey. It also allows them to confront the results of their own growth, through a process of sharing in being on stage and sustaining the tension together, and then rejoicing in the satisfaction of a successful performance, admiring the fruits of their labour and feeling a sense of achievement.
Sustainability	Each year the project offers a year-long preparation for the final performance. The Rulli Frulli not only aims at inclusion but also at the value of recycling and reuse. Many tools are in fact co-constructed and co-designed in dedicated workshop sessions. This also has the dual benefit of using potentially discardable materials and working together to achieve a valuable and useful result.
Transferability	The Rulli Frulli is also realised thanks to the support of foundations. But the practice could be replicated in different contexts, perhaps starting with smaller groups, as was the case at the beginning of the Banda Rulli Frulli project.
Additional info	-

Title	Famiglia Ludica
Location	Rolo, Italy
Organisation	Famiglia Ludica ODV (Voluntary organisation)
Website	https://famiglialudica.com/
Overview	Famiglia ludica is a voluntary association founded by a family whose member has autism. The project was born out of the need to create a more engaging space that would strengthen the bonds between family members in an effective way, through a tool that was accessible to all, even economically, such as board games. The aim of the practice is to disseminate and help families and groups of young people. It aims to help improve dialogue, knowledge and inclusion in the family and among peers through the use of board games as an educational tool and social facilitator. It seeks to promote through play (board games, but also role-playing and intelligent play in general): • the knowledge and mutual recognition of skills to create closer ties; • the acquisition of notions and skills such as mental organisation, flexibility and self-control; • the development of cognitive and socio-relational skills, competences and behaviours such as the ability to stay and work in a group, conflict and frustration management;

	• the improvement in the family and in groups of psychological closeness, mutual respect and solidarity; • the ability to adapt and problem-solving.
Impact and innovation	The practice is particularly innovative because it involves using the game in a broad and strategic way, capturing the players' interests and triggering a virtuous circle in which the more the players feel involved and have fun, the more they learn and improve their skills and knowledge of those they are playing with. The impact that the practice can have is multidirectional, on the one hand it addresses the individual by helping him/her to develop specific notions or skills, on the other hand it addresses group and family relationships that can benefit greatly from the relationships and interactions stimulated by the game itself. Finally, the practice has even more relevant objectives that aim to innovate the institutional education system. In this regard, they would like to provide the inputs to start considering play as a didactic subject or as a support to teaching, by including it in a small part as an integration in school curricula from primary school onwards.
Sustainability	The practice requires no special techniques or resources. Collaborations with local youth and family centres are currently under way, also for mildly disabled situations. Online outreach activities are carried out via a website, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram with themed articles and game reviews. The organisation also participates in trade fairs with various collaborations and participates as 'play parenting experts' in some courses.
Transferability	The practice is highly replicable and transferable on a large scale, precisely because it requires no special professional profile, skills or tools. What is required for transferability are a sharing space, board games (also available and printable free of charge on the web) and the desire to spend time as a family in a stimulating, creative and not at all passive activity that brings fun, enrichment, knowledge and self-improvement as individuals and within a group.
Additional info	In 2022 Famiglia ludica started a project, with the support of the Emilia Romagna Region and the involvement of an educator and game designer and an actress and playwright, called “Ragazzi fuori dallo schermo” (Guys off screen). The project is aimed at young people of school age and aims to build a more aware vision and consequent use of digital tools, while offering children a real and socialising alternative in which they can find the same stimuli that drive them to abuse technology.

16. REPORT FROM THE EXISTING INITIATIVE

Title	Il Tortellante
Location	Italy, Modena

Organisation	Aut Aut Modena
Website	https://www.tortellante.it/
Overview	Il Tortellante is a therapeutic - habilitative workshop where youth and adults with autism spectrum disorder learn to make fresh handmade pasta. The project, launched in January 2016 and supplemented by habilitative and training activities to improve autonomy, has also proven to be a good practice of inclusion, involving the whole community. "Il Tortellante" is one of the projects that the Aut Aut Modena association offers for adulthood and has several goals: • initiate individualized training paths for job placement • improve team activity, even with people not trained for autism • to improve and enrich the condition of participants in adult life and in view of "AFTER US" • support families in the transition to adulthood • stimulate and facilitate the integration and inclusion of autistic people in the target community, raise awareness of autism in the community. The project is led and supervised by a neuropsychiatrist and with the collaboration of coordinating psychologists and educators and the help of chef Massimo Bottura. The specific activity of making fresh handmade pasta is used as a tool to work with young people with autism spectrum disorder on the main areas that are lacking in this disorder: communication, social relationship with peers and autonomy and offers the opportunity to learn a specialized skill that can make young people with ASD independent in the future.
Impact and innovation	During 2016 and 2017, the first pilot project was held at Aut Aut Modena, with 21 young people between the ages of 15 and 27, with different levels of ability, who participated in the activities for two hours a week divided into three groups. The semester's experience has shown that this is a rewarding and functional activity for young people with autism, even in the case of individuals with a reduced level of autonomy. Qualitative evaluations conducted at the end of the course showed that the boys enhanced their self-image, increased autonomy, and increased several hitherto critical aspects (working in a team, following rules, managing waiting time, etc.). Feedback from families was positive, and so was feedback from volunteers and supporters. To date, "Il Tortellante" workshop has a 3-year history of experimentation and involves 24 families involved, a scientific staff and many volunteers. Over the next two years, the project was refined to improve the compatibility between services required for fresh pasta making and the specific needs of autism. Contacts with institutions, families and the network of supporters in

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	the area were also strengthened, in addition to spreading the project in local and national media. In autumn 2018, the Social Promotion Association was established, with the inauguration of its new headquarters in a central area of the city, renovated and equipped thanks to the commitment and funding of families and private sponsors. The initiative, which began as a habilitative and educational therapy, can now represent a concrete employment opportunity for the children, as well as a "gym of autonomy" aimed at facing the "After Us" with more tools.
Sustainability	The workshop is a community reality involving many families and many volunteers who are experts in homemade pasta making. The innovation of the project lies in the fact that all the activities designed and implemented are done as a team and everyone brings a contribution, has fun, is active, relates: plays an important role. The project as an example of community inclusion activities and job opportunities for young people with ASD and having the experience of 3 years of experimentation stands as an original and replicable example: a sustainable model. Initially, the project began as a pilot project, designed and implemented by the Aut Aut Association. Over time, it established itself as an independent reality, creating a specific working team and finally with the creation of the Social Promotion Association in 2018 and the involvement of the local political and community network and a dedicated venue for the project, it can be said to be an initiative with the possibility of continuity over time.
Transferability	Il Tortellante is a workshop that can be replicated in other contexts, especially in Italy, where there is a strong culinary tradition and specialty foods in every city. Gastronomy is an area that can occupationally engage young people with autism and lead them to independence, as it includes routine preparations and procedures that are very akin to the preferences of young people with ASD, in general. However, it should be specified that the main activities that are organized during the workshop are specifically cooking activities so in order to replicate the results of “Il Tortellante”, it will be necessary to recreate an environment with kitchen equipment such as a cutting board, rolling pin, pasta rolling machine or baking tools if necessary in addition to special spaces for storing fresh culinary products. In addition, it will be necessary to involve people who are experts in that culinary specialty, as happened in the workshop with the help of chef Massimo Bottura and volunteers.
Additional info	-

Title	Gli Insuperabili
Location	Italy, Modena
Organisation	Gli Insuperabili

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Website	http://www.gliinsuperabili.it/chi_siamo.php
Overview	The project fits into the specificity of the Sigonio High School in Modena through a curricular path in which social, psycho-pedagogical and musical issues are addressed. It stems from the common idea of thinking about a different way of experiencing inclusion in the classroom, at school and everywhere, and from the need to think about a space of action in which all students are empowered in order to value diversity. This creates the possibility of knowing and seeing disability in a different way through cooperation and sharing a single goal, namely the creation of a play that will be put on in the municipal theater of the city of Modena. The play serves as a tool to realize a school and extracurricular environment of genuine inclusion. All this is accomplished through a weekly workshop experienced as a space created and built with the students and not simply for the students, to enhance what the students do well. In this way even just one word spelled correctly and at the right time acquires a new value. The idea for the show comes from a brainstorming session in which everyone offers their input, and the project ends with a final performance in the theatre. The project is designed and coordinated by the school's support officer, who is also an expert in Applied Behavior Analysis, and each year students from the school and volunteers from the association are involved. The target group of the workshop are high school students with different types of disabilities, with a focus on autism spectrum disorder. The main focus is on "group building" even through the chaotic and messy moment and carving out fun school and extracurricular moments such as lunches, parties and making music together. This allows vulnerable students to share a rewarding experience that enhances self-esteem and self-efficacy, a chance to experience themselves in a heterogeneous group by increasing social and interpersonal skills and understanding of rules related to the context.
Impact and innovation	The innovation of the project of "The Insuperables" lies in wanting to create a moment of true inclusion in which every student is actively involved and feels a responsible part of the process of creating the show and subsequently staging it. The students are involved in all activities and valued for what they can do. This kind of inclusive approach created a positive atmosphere throughout the school and, especially during the initial phase but also afterwards, the students with disabilities created strong bonds with their peers, and the result was that this approach was also taken outside the school environment and everyone was invited to parties, dinners, and even on vacation. The project impacts the entire Sigonio High School in Modena. Since its piloting, it has involved all students in the school and continues to this day. In addition, through the tool of the play that is staged each year the whole community is involved as spectators. In this way, students in addition to working on the group during the weekly workshop have a long-term goal.

Sustainability	“Gli Insuperabili” is a project that was tested in a school setting and involved teachers, pupils and experts. Since the Sigonio High School in Modena is a school that offers specific training in the psycho-social and musical fields, throughout its activities there will always be teachers and students with that specific training. Since this initiative has been quite successful and is now well established, participating in this project is interesting for the students and is also a chance to gain experience in the social field, the future area of work for many students at this school. At a technical and financial level, since the project was registered as a social promotion association, it has gained a solid structure that can count on the solidarity of the community and on the proceeds of the theatrical performance and also for this reason to ensure the continuity of the project over time.
Transferability	Since the Sigonio High School in Modena is a school that offers specific training in the psycho-social and musical fields, it is a particular context. However, it is correct to specify that the proposed activities serve as a tool for working on a more general goal of inclusion and grouping with students with disabilities. Consequently, the activities can also be proposed both in a school context without this type of specific training, and by using another type of tool that can be used with the same objective, such as sport.
Additional info	-

17. FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Findings from the interviews with youth workers

Ten youth workers were involved in the interviews, 3 men and 7 women, all with education level with bachelor's degree or higher. The main professions are: educator in various settings including women's juvenile community, day care centres for disabled adults and cooperatives for adolescents, psychologists and psychotherapists, ABA therapists, pedagogists and art therapy technicians. The target groups for the interventions of these youth workers are mainly: adolescents and preadolescents, young people with different types of disabilities, and youth in general with special focus on young people in vulnerable or troubled families. The average age of the target group is between 12/13 years old to about 25. With the exception of two youth workers, the others have all had experience working with young people with autism spectrum disorder either indirectly because they came across them in the school or work context or directly through experience working in Applied Behaviour Analysis-based interventions, school-based support or Parent Training interventions, summer centres, or some workshops. Among the experiences cited as examples of initiatives for the inclusion of persons with autism are several services, including cooperatives working specifically in rehabilitation and school services, among the latter the project 'Gli Insuperabili' was mentioned twice. Those who work directly in the field of autism spectrum disorder reported having participated in training courses mainly based on Applied Behaviour Analysis, the others had no specific training or only a few courses offered by their organizations. All but 2 youth workers said they were interested in participating in ASD training.

All agree that it would be good to know the diagnostic framing of autism spectrum disorder, so how it occurs at the level of symptoms, functioning, how it is assessed, what the deficit areas are, and what the main features are. In addition, it was pointed out that it is important to receive practical tools to deal with the first relational approaches and thus to know alternative communication techniques in case of low functioning or in general social skills. Other aspects highlighted that might be of interest are: life experiences of caregivers from which to draw inspiration for strategies; how to involve and support the family; fostering autonomy; and finally, the approach to sexuality.

The need to be included, to relate to peers and sociability are the main needs that a young person with ASD might have that emerged from the interviews, along with the need for time to adjust to the demands and for a reference figure in case of need. From the perspective of youth workers, the skills to develop to work in this field are mainly relational and communication skills. In fact, according to them, it is very important to devote the right amount of time to relationship building, to learn how to manage distance with the user on both psychological-emotional and physical levels, and to develop empathy and use it in a proper way. All social skills are needed, in which patience, empathy, willingness to listen and accommodate the person are included. In order to communicate effectively, it is important to use direct questions and a reassuring tone of voice, to hold the gaze, not to hurry, and to consider the reactions to adjust our behaviour. The importance of working as a team with colleagues and networking to discuss and support each other was also emphasized.

Regarding the difficulties that a young person with ASD may face in interacting and participating in activities, all youth workers agree in identifying mainly relational and communication difficulties, especially difficulties in understanding social messages, managing emotions, not being understood and welcomed. Another difficulty may lie in the activities themselves, which may not belong to the interests of the youth with ASD, and managing unpredictability. An inclusive environment should be one that is comfortable and puts people at ease, with simple, well-organized spaces and in addition to activities that are well timed and explained from the very beginning. Support from a psychologist, ongoing training, supervision, planning and discussion with colleagues are the main types of support recommended by youth workers based on their experience. Finally, it was asked what aspects of organizations could be changed/improved to foster the inclusion of youth with ASD. In reference to this, youth workers in addition to pointing to the need for training of staff who also need to be involved in the design of activities, they all insisted on the importance of creating truly inclusive environments, thus: more de-structuring of gathering places and services, not precluding or tying some activities/services to a single target group but opening up and involving other youth and thus creating a mixed environment that does not only offer activities for people with special needs. In addition to training for internal staff, a course aimed at parents to explain what autism is and to avoid possible prejudices that may prevent participation in activities could be useful.

Findings from the interviews with the individuals with ASD and family members

5 family members (3 mothers, 1 father and 1 sister) and 1 young person with ASD were involved. The ages were quite heterogeneous 51, 44, 54, 46 for the parents, 20 for the sister and 17 for the young person. All participants state that they receive the service of the educator, participation in sports and association activities and are quite satisfactory for both parents and children, but they would appreciate more personalisation in the services provided and in identifying the professional.

The activities most appreciated are ABA therapy, mainly related to childhood, theatre, music, rhythmic activities, percussion, board games, video games, anime, watching films, cooking, and activities to be carried out outdoors such as playing sports, agriculture, walks, adventure parks, excursions to the beach or to the swimming pool. They state that the most positive experiences are related to these environments that can be stimulating, foster socialisation and team spirit, receiving stimulation from peers and in terms of learning and autonomy. Other relevant needs are to have the opportunity to participate in initiatives that iron out differences and allow for involvement and cooperation on the part of young people, basing tasks on their individual skills, potential and characteristics. It's crucial to take the time to get to know the youth

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and to get to know them in order to deepen and get to know their interests. Furthermore, promoting the involvement of young people with ASD in volunteering can be very beneficial.

Some of the participants state that they have taken part in activities that are aimed at young people with and without ASDs, such as sports and theatre activities. However, the proposal of such initiatives is very small, and some important difficulties for implementation are the possible reluctance and mistrust on the part of the parent with a disability, as if there were a fear of prejudice, and the difficulty in adequately implementing could lead to a high probability of abandonment. The youth with ASD is part of an association in which the use of board games as a means of socialisation is promoted in a very effective way and has been an approach that has brought him many benefits.

In order to create a positive environment for the inclusion of a person with ASD, it might be necessary to avoid too much light and noise, and to involve professionals or operators who are specialised and ready to offer their support and participation.

It’s important to create teams of positive and empathetic people, who are sociable and not imposing or insensitive. The operator can make a difference, and in this respect his or her training and preparation also plays an important role in ensuring that specific aspects are also realised. It would also be useful to promote initiatives allowing everyone to participate appropriately, possibly involving specific professionals. The involvement of the family is essential in order to collaborate, share and exchange information, thus fostering understanding and knowledge of the young person and continuity with the family environment.

Findings from the interviews with the professionals working with people with ASD

5 female professionals working with young people with ASD took part in the interviews, profiling as Psychologist, Behaviour Analyst, Psychotherapist, Teacher with specialisation in learning disorders and Educator. According to professionals, is fundamental to know autism as a life condition and approach strategies, the framework of neurodiversity and the basic principles of behaviour analysis, the various types of functioning, ABA principles, the concept of autonomy that does not create dependency, the concept of environmental enrichment, different communication systems and the inclusive support tools available. Practice also proves to be crucial, and for an organisation and youth workers it’s recommended to receive specific training and mentoring, which is particularly present at the beginning and gradually decreases. Other recommended skills are a propensity to work in a team, empathy, listening, caring relationships, flexibility and curiosity. It’s important that the work with youth with ASD considers the individuality, characteristics and difficulties of the person because this is information that the organisation needs to develop activities. Relevant are Pairing strategies, which, by exploiting interests, objects or environments that the young person likes, allow them to associate the operator with situations or objects that create pleasure and thus promote the building of a positive relationship.

It's important to respond to the need of the youth with ASD to familiarise with the local area, create reference points for themselves and work on their autonomy. It’s also necessary to respond to the need for social inclusion, with a view to future employment and on achieving the well-being and goals of the person and family members, which must be measured above all with a view to improving the services offered.

Youth with ASD may have specific difficulties also determined by the type of functioning and there may be barriers to social interaction, which also includes difficulties in communication and in interfacing with rigidity of others or with the environment realities. It’s significant to know the individual's capabilities and to help them learn about the various activities or situations that may arise in order to reduce the unexpected, favouring the management and understanding of the reality.

From a communicative point of view, one should listen and observe the person, asking, especially at the beginning, for feedback to be sure that communication is effective and above all avoid asking a lot of questions, interrupting and using metaphors or turns of phrase.

Inclusion can be promoted through key strategies and tools such as music, flash cards, conversation cards, board games or activities simulating everyday life. Cooperative activities should be proposed in a clear way, underlining that their contribution is crucial to the achievement of the objective and can be theatre, motor, art or culinary activities.

It would be very useful to start by raising awareness among youth without autism, through videos, direct narratives or peer training or with specialists. Activities could be proposed that are based on the interests of children with ASD and then adapted to involve everyone.

To create an inclusive environment, it's crucial to consider the sensory abilities or barriers of youth with ASD, supporting in orientating and understanding the space through explanations and pictures. It's not mandatory that the environment contain no challenges, but they must be gradually exposed otherwise it becomes too difficult and frustrating for them.

The relationship with family is very important and the practitioner and organisation must be able to create an alliance and mutual support and understanding. Activities and projects must be co-constructed with families, to share strategies and to be able to fully approach young people with ASD through continuity and consistency in education and support for autonomy.

18. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is increasing awareness in the Italian context regarding autism spectrum disorder compared to a decade ago. For the purpose of fostering the inclusion of youth with ASD in youth organizations, it has been very beneficial to receive the opinions of youth workers, professionals in the field, and families of youth with ASD, and foremost among them. It has generally been observed that there are many services and initiatives aimed at low-functioning youth with ASD, fewer those aimed at high-functioning youth. A very important aspect that emerged is that all interventions and activities should be individualized and designed according to the type of functioning, since as this disorder is a spectrum it includes different manifestations and consequently one individual may show very different strengths and difficulties than another. All interview participants agreed that it is important to receive training on the topic and thus to know the theoretical and clinical framework of the disorder, how it manifests and what symptoms and most deficit areas are. Next, the need to receive tools and strategies to foster relational and communication skills to be implemented in approaching youth with ASD was emphasized. The best method for receiving this training should be a mentoring approach with expert, which is particularly present at the beginning and gradually decreases. The training and suggested strategies should fall within the theoretical framework of Applied Behaviour Analysis, which is the framework for now suggested by WHO for treatments for ASD. An inclusive environment should consider the youth's sensory sensitivity, if any, and be one in which the purpose is clear, activities should be structured, presented first, and should consider the youth's interests and then gradually involve him or her in other fields. In addition, it was pointed out that true inclusion must be achieved by creating non-sectorised interventions and thus involving youth with all types of disabilities as well as neurotypical youth. Despite difficulties in communication, relational, and social areas, the need for inclusion and sociability of youth with ASD emerged transversely. To this purpose, the YouthASD project can find fertile ground to fill the gap in interventions and initiatives of youth organizations for youth with ASD.

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Annex 3: CYPRUS – National report

1. INTRODUCTION

People with autism are frequently excluded, not only from their communities but also from all debates related to autism. Generally, people with developmental disorders have inadequate access to services and support which are theoretically destined for them. Furthermore, their loved ones (families) systematically carry substantial emotional, economic and care burdens.

Growing awareness of autism could lead to higher acceptance, recognition and respect toward those concerned. It could also change the omnipresent strategy of teaching people with autism to be less different from society, teaching them more self-confidence and how to advocate for themselves.

There is a lack of research on family and disability in Cyprus. People who have worked on disability studies in Cyprus suggest that more research is needed, and at the same time, inclusive policies and practices need to be developed (Angelides, 2004; Phtiaka, 2007).

On a general discourse level in Cyprus, parents' associations began to ask for their children's rights and to apply pressure for integration. They became a driving force for integration with their disagreement with the separatist environment that had prevailed with the 1979 law (Phtiaka, 2007, p. 153). In 1992, together with the Parents' Federation, the Constantinides Report was produced (Constantinides, 1992), which recommended the urgent need for a law related to integration, not segregation.

The Ministry of Education and Culture, with two publications in 1988 and 1996, underlined its support for integrating children with special needs into mainstream schools. According to the publications, the purpose was to facilitate learning, minimise differentiation, enhance socialisation, and reach the same level of educational development as the rest of Europe and America had (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1996).

2. REPORT FROM THE POLICY AND GUIDELINES

The Cyprus Government established the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 and formalised it in 2011. The ratification of the Convention was a significant milestone for Cyprus's public, and the national approach toward disabilities served as an intense initiation for many positive alterations and actions and to raise the general awareness of disability and inclusion.

Following that major step, Cyprus's Government and public authorities proceeded with another two important innovations. The Ministry of Labour followed with the establishment of a department of Social Inclusion - especially for people with disabilities, and Cyprus Ministries Council approved and signed the first ever "Action Plan for people with Disabilities" in 2013 (United Nations Human Rights - Office of the High Commissioner, 2017).

Cyprus has constituted a strongly bounded legal framework, consisting of 12 laws created to safeguard the rights of people with disabilities and another 25 laws with relevant regulations. Continuous efforts are made to modernise existing legislation to embrace more progressive outlooks and ensure the harmonious inclusion of the general society of people with disabilities whilst offering the needed support to maintain their physical and psychological well-being.

According to "The Persons with Disabilities Law of 2000", published in the Government Gazette of the Republic of Cyprus according to Article 52 of the Constitution "every person with disabilities has the right to an independent living, full inclusion in society and equal participation in the financial and social life of the country". All the articles included in Cyprus's Law regarding people with disabilities closely follow the "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol", which Cyprus, a state member of the United Nations, signed the Protocol in 2007. The Convention was an attempt to change attitudes and approaches towards persons with disabilities. It took the movement to a new height from removing the stereotypical view of persons with disabilities as "objects" of charity to viewing them as individuals with rights who can make decisions for their lives based on their free will and consent (OHCHR, 2014).

To valorize and promote the aforementioned intentions and views, Cyprus's Law regarding persons with disabilities was created with the core principle of equal treatment of disabled persons, which implies that there will be no discrimination whatsoever against any person on the grounds of disability, shall apply in the implementation of this Law. In addition, it safeguards individuals with disabilities' "accessibility to information and communication with the use of special means, where necessary, especially for groups of people with sensory disabilities" and "participation in cultural, social, athletic, religious and recreational activities".

The Cyprus Government and Law approach to individuals with Autism promotes the notion that people with autism should enjoy the same rights and privileges enjoyed by all citizens of European Countries. As was established in the Charter of the Rights for people with autism, during the 4th Congress of "Autism Europe" – the European Federation of Parents of individuals with Autism Association in Hague, on May 10th, 1992. Cyprus, as a member state of the European Union has implemented the "Europe Without Obstacles to People with Disabilities" plan, which it's main aim is to provide all the necessary support to individuals with autism so they can enjoy their everyday lives in the same manner as every individual who is benefited by their rights as an EU citizen.

Moreover, in Cyprus were put in action two laws specifically created to respond to Individuals that fall under the Autistic Spectrum Disorder needs and rights: (1) The Mentally Retarded Individuals Law of 1989 as was issued and publicised in the official Cyprus Gazette – Article 52 of the Constitution and (2) The Individuals with Disabilities Law of 2000, as previously stated.

3. REPORT FROM THE BEST PRACTICES

Title	The establishment of a Centre for Family Intervention and Support of Persons with Autism
Location	Nicosia, Cyprus
Organisation	Family Support and Intervention Centre for Autism
Website	N/A
Overview	In Cyprus, the Ministries concerned have drawn up an action plan establishing a Centre for Family Intervention and Support of Persons with Autism to address the needs of 300 children with autism and their families that include, among

	other, psychological support services and counselling, homeschooling and educational support services as well as social support services. The Council of Ministers approved in May 2019 the creation and operation of the Centre for Family Intervention and Support for Autism with the mission of providing specialised services to children of preschool age diagnosed with the Autism Disorder Spectrum and their families. The Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities is at the stage of initial consultations with interested parties to prepare public procurement documents for the project assignment.
Impact and innovation	Growing awareness of autism could lead to higher acceptance, recognition and respect toward those concerned. It could also lead to changing the omnipresent strategy of showing people with autism how to be less different from society, to rather teaching them more self-confidence and how to advocate for themselves The Centre is expected to operate as a model Centre for family support and intervention for autism in Cyprus; thus, it must provide systematic cooperation with a similar model Centre abroad and use or develop model tools, methods and support and intervention techniques for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families.
Sustainability	The vision of the Centre will be the provision of such services that will ensure, on the one hand, proper preparation of the children to achieve active participation in all aspects of life and, on the other hand, the maintenance of family cohesion, unity and balance. The services provided by the Centre are the following: (a) <u>Psychological support, Counselling and Psychotraining Support</u> This service will be staffed with seven (7) specialised Psychologists (a Head of the Service included) having permission to exercise their speciality according to national legislation for the registration of Psychologists and will be addressed to the parents and family of the child with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The Psychologists will be recruited by the Project Contractor. (b) <u>Training and Support at Home Service</u>

	This service will be staffed with fifteen (15) Home Trainers having a degree (nationally recognised degree) in Psychology or Social Sciences or Special Education who will be trained to use specialised tools for early intervention and training focused on children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The service will be addressed to the child as well as the child's carers. The trainers will be recruited by the Project Contractor. (c) Social Support Service This service will be staffed with seven (7) Social Workers who will be employed by DSID-the Contracting Authority and will cooperate with the Project Contractor. The service will be addressed to the child's parents.
Transferability	N/A
Additional info	N/A

Title	Platform for finding jobs for autistic people (launched)
Location	Nicosia, Cyprus
Organisation	N/A
Website	N/A
Overview	"JobsLink" is the name of the platform that will work to make it easier for people on the autism spectrum to find work. Through this - and with the constant support of a mentor - the candidate will now be able to enter the job market. The platform is a donation of the "Greece 2021" Committee and was officially presented. Autism doesn't end at 18 Presentation at SEV of the new platform funded by #Greece2021 at the request of Mrs. Angelopoulos and which aspires to connect employers and employees who are on the autism spectrum.
Impact and innovation	The advisor of the Employment and Labour Market Sector of the SEB, Giorgos Nathanael, speaking at the presentation event of the platform, gave the answer. "A business with a diverse workforce and one that treats its different employees equally is more competitive, more innovative, more profitable." As he

	added, “it is no coincidence that large companies such as SAP, IBM and Microsoft have established programs for people with Asperger syndrome. The peculiarities of these individuals are real, but their talents are equally remarkable – especially in innovation, as the case of Bill Gates shows,” he concluded. The platform is currently in pilot application, but its founders invite those interested to come in and register in order to create a registry. All registrants will receive a message at the start of its operation. People with Autism Spectrum Disorder, High Functioning Autism or Asperger’s Syndrome have a different way of thinking and certain weaknesses, which overshadow their often excellent abilities and skills. For example, they have difficulty creating a plan of action and setting priorities, yet they often have an excellent ability to concentrate on detail and achieve a goal. The platform was created with a donation from the “Greece 2021” Committee.
Sustainability	According to the President of the “Greece 2021” Committee Ms. Gianna Angelopoulou, “the creation of the platform brings prospective employees into contact with businesses, but also with the appropriate animators who will provide the necessary guidance and support, so that the integration of people of them in the labour market to be smooth and mutually profitable”. She continued by stating that “Our goal is to create a crack, to break the wall of exclusion that exists for various vulnerable groups and to help with inclusion, so that worthy people, with unique abilities, can find the job that suits them, give their best”.
Transferability	N/A
Additional info	N/A

4. REPORT FROM THE EXISTING INITIATIVE

Title	The Mentally Retarded Individuals Law of 198932
Location	Nicosia, Cyprus
Organisation	N/A

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Website	N/A
Overview	SINCE a dignified way of living and social insurance are among the fundamental rights of human beings, regulated by Article 9 of the Constitution and the value of equality before Law and Governance, also regulated by Article 28, and calls for the provision of the necessary means to vulnerable members of society ensuring human dignity, in addition to the manifestos of the General Assembly of the United Nations of 1971 and 1975 for the rights of individuals with mental retardation, as well as the obligations of the state towards its disadvantaged members, as stated in the European Social Charter which has been with the European Social Charter Law of 1967 (April of 1967). Concise Title: The present Law shall be referred to as the Mentally Retarded Individuals Law of 1989.
Impact and innovation	Basic Rights of Individuals with Mental Retardation: 1. Any individual with mental retardation has a right to a dignified way of living and social insurance adapted to its needs and abilities. The responsibility for legally protecting and fully ensuring these rights lies in the state. It is the state's responsibility to provide the individual with mental retardation with the necessary means of care to ensure human dignity, a healthy lifestyle and development to the degree that his/her abilities allow. 2. Once the provisions of this passage in the current article and Article 4 are met, it is the state's obligation to protect the dignity of the individual with mental retardation and provide or contribute according to his/her needs, daily and medical care and support which includes the following: A. Special education in suitable schools or education centres and professional training. B. Residence, daily and medical care in institutions. C. The creation of opportunities for vocational rehabilitation. D. Care and support in the home of the individual with mental retardation who is living with his/her parents or relatives. E. Securing a place of residence and the care of the individual with mental retardation who is living with his/her parents or relatives following their death or in the event that they are rendered incapable of offering the necessary care to the individual. F. Favourable treatment in Social Insurance schemes. G. Adopting legislative measures to protect the individual with mental retardation in society.

	H. Providing the necessary support in order to socialise individuals with mental retardation and integrate them in society to the degree to which his/her abilities allow. I. Appointing suitable persons to manage the property and protect the interests of the individuals with mental retardation. 3. The provisions of this paragraph do not relieve the parents of their own duties towards their children.
Sustainability	N/A
Transferability	N/A
Additional info	N/A

5. FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Findings from the interviews with youth workers

Overall, there were 10 participants, with 80% of them being female and 20% male. Their educational backgrounds come from various areas; specifically, 20% are bachelors' level, 60% master's level and 20% PhD level. Specifically, 40% are working/or have worked with young people with ASD, and 60% have responded with No. One of the participants mentioned 'implementing projects and activities that empower, educate and help the youth to gain skills so they can more easily find a job and develop themselves. The rest have suggested that teaching, supporting and facilitating are key aspects.

Specifically, one of the participants stressed that he 'used to be an art teacher at an afternoon art school where there was one person with ASD. The experience I have is very good as this person always surprised me with how she saw things, shapes and colours. The combination that she was using and her understanding of still life drawing were so extraordinary that not even other people could comprehend these combinations and aesthetically pleasing way of drawing'. The remaining 60% of the participants mentioned that they do not usually have this target group.

A surprising aspect was that all the participants mentioned that they have never received training on ASD issues and 70% of them are keen to receive/participate in training on ASD and 30% answered with a 'maybe'.

The participants have suggested that what would be useful to know about the topic are:

- 10%: What is ASD and different areas, What can foster the integration of a child with ASD, Communication strategies, Special activities to facilitate the youth with ASD social interaction with peers, Promoting social skills in people with ASD, Strategies to promote relationships building with others
- 20%: Communication strategies, Strategies to promote relationships building with others, How to increase knowledge and awareness of young people without autism, Improving communication with colleagues to improve the quality of services also offered to people with ASD

- 70%: What can foster the integration of a child with ASD, Communication strategies, Strategies to promote relationships building with others, How to increase knowledge and awareness of young people without autism, Cooperating with one's own organisation to develop appropriate services, Improving communication with colleagues to improve the quality of services also offered to people with ASD.

The participants highlighted that the skills that should be developed to work with young people with ASD are:

- Overcome obstacles in relationship with a person with ASD, Design activities/educational programmes for young people with ASD, Involve families, Collect and sharing of relevant daily data within the work team, Using strategic tools to improve the involvement of a person with ASD (e.g., visual agendas)
- Involve families

One participant has raised that 'some Autistic people tend to be more introverts and may not want to interact and participate in activities at times. A difficulty may be this and ways to make that person trust you and accept to interact on the activities has to be achieved.

Finally, to create an inclusive environment, what should be taken into consideration and with whom would it be useful to work are:

- Work materials, Adequate teams, Adequate lights (e.g., soft lights), Noise control, Comfortable textiles and surfaces, and Full patterns, I have no experience in this field and I don't know

Findings from the interviews with the individuals with ASD and family members

The participants were 5 in total, and all of them were female. Their ages varied from 38 to 63, and they were family members of young people with ASD. They all mentioned receiving financial support from the government, but they stated that it is inadequate to cover their needs and expenses. Two participants mentioned that the therapies for young people with ASD are expensive.

Furthermore, they stated that extra-curricular activities are valued if they are carried out to improve the quality of young people's afternoons and all the parents mentioned that they would like to participate in activities that involve young people and children with ASD and some of them have participated in activities in different organisations.

The participants mentioned that the needs for young people with ASD are:

- acceptance in the community
- equality
- continuous support
- extracurricular activities
- communication and
- finding a job so they can feel valuable

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The communication aspects that practitioners should consider when approaching young people with ASD are that everyone is different so they need to be mindful of that. When approaching a person with ASD, people or practitioners should take into consideration that these people are susceptible to lights, sound, clothes and spaces but also, it is important to take into account the body language and sensitivity of each individual. In this regard, all the participants agreed that the family plays the most important role in helping a practitioner to provide a good service and build a positive relationship with people with ASD. Specifically, one participant mentioned that ‘they need to listen to us’ and the practitioner needs to have a positive attitude towards the child and the family but also, confidentiality.

In order to create a positive environment for inclusion of a person with ASD, participants have mentioned that generally is useful to take into consideration:

- the person is sensitive and vulnerable
- to have respect, patience and tolerance towards young people with ASD

Half of the participants weren’t sure about which aspects a youth organisation should consider and improve but two of them mentioned that it will be nice to organise more activities specifically for young people with ASD taking into consideration their vulnerability and one participant mentioned ‘good planning’.

Finally, the participants expressed their opinions regarding that in Cyprus we need to raise more awareness about ASD and specifically one participant stated that ‘change does not happen in one day but it needs acceptance, love, respect and support, so it takes time and effort’.

Findings from the interviews with the professionals working with people with ASD

The participants were 8 in total, and they were 62.5% female and 37.5%, male. Their educational backgrounds were master’s or equivalent (87.5%) and PhD level (12.5%). They work as psychologists (counselling psychologists, providing psychological support to parents etc.), and 2 of the participants work as special educators.

Their regular target group for most of them is parents of their children and children with ASD. The average age of their target groups is the mid-30s and 40s; some are children around the age of 4.

The participants mentioned that their main activities/tasks are:

- counselling
- psychotherapy
- Support, psychoeducation, stress management, self-caring, strengthening of couple’s relationship and in general management of the parents’ needs
- Parental counselling and guidance

Furthermore, they mentioned that what would be useful to know about the topic are:

- What can foster the integration of a young person with ASD? Special activities to facilitate the youth with ASD social interaction with peers
- What is ASD and its different areas? What can foster the integration of a young person with ASD, Communication strategies, Organising activities properly, Special activities to facilitate the youth with ASD social interaction with peers, Promoting social skills in people with ASD, Strategies to promote relationships building with others, How to increase knowledge and awareness of young

people without ASD, Stimulating peer solidarity, Cooperating with one's own organisation to develop appropriate educational programmes, Improving communication with colleagues to improve the quality of services offered also to people with ASD

- Strategies to promote relationships building with others

The needs of young people with ASD are:

- Improvement of verbal and non-verbal communication, Recognition and expression of emotions, Autonomy and independence, Facing novelties and unexpected events, Management of stereotypic behaviours (e.g., flicker, head banging, etc.)

How to meet the needs:

- Through early intervention
- In person
- Through professional support and training
- From Autism Organisations

All of the participants agreed that the skills that should be developed to work with young people with ASD are mainly appropriate strategies to communicate with people with ASD, design activities/educational programmes for young people with ASD, organise spaces properly, Involve families, Using strategic tools to improve involvement of a person with ASD (e.g., visual agendas).

The effective ways to support them in overcoming these challenges are:

- Ergotherapy, Speech Therapy and trainings
- trying to communicate in a way that is understandable and manageable by the young person with ASD thus, educating people to understand and how to apply different ways of communicating
- learning skills and support from parents

Finally expressed their opinions on what would they recommend to a professional in his/her first experience with young people with ASD by adding that it is essential to:

- be understanding and patient
- gain as much knowledge as possible
- Show empathy, patience and try to find a common way of communicating
- understand how a child with autism sees the world
- understand that the whole family must be involved in the intervention

Their recommendations regarding what kind of skills one should have to communicate/interact/approach young people with ASD are:

Knowing alternative communication systems such as sign language, Use of communication systems with aids (e.g. PECS, VOCA), Use of alternative keyboards or electronic computers, Be patient while having a conversation, giving the person time to answer and always strive to be encouraging and compassionate, Offer concise directions or clear choices (e.g. "Can I ask a question?" or "Would you like to talk about this topic?" etc), Learn about their favourite interests, games or hobbies and try to find common ones, Understand lack of eye contact, presence of motor tics and invasion of personal boundaries, Avoid idioms and slang, Understand the lack of respect for turns and for the pragmatics of conversation.

In order to create an inclusive environment, participants mentioned that these should be taken into consideration:

- Spaces, Work materials, Full patterns
- Noise control
- Adequate lights (e.g., soft lights), Noise control, Comfortable textiles and surfaces

These are the professionals that have to be included:

- Speech therapy, Ergotherapy, Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Neurologist trainers and mentor

Regarding their experiences, these are the activities that could most facilitate the involvement of young people with ASD:

- Sports, Reading, Dancing and playing
- Group therapy and primary interventions
- Volunteering
- Informational events

Finally, the participants stressed that the organisational/environmental aspects are important to take into account in order to foster the inclusion of young people with ASD in programmes targeting youth in general and more specifically, taking into account environmental factors that may influence negatively sensory issues, promote routines in order to provide safety and emotional management, confined spaces and acceptance.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General debates around disability in Cyprus emerged based on educational initiatives and were discussed by people who had worked abroad and were aware of other countries' policies and practices (Kypriotakis, 2000; Phtiaka, 1999), by people who were actively engaged with disability issues and could criticise the charity model (Constandinides, 1992; Phtiaka, 2003) or from disabled people and their families.

There are various laws in Cyprus regarding the rights and provisions for disabled people in general and specific disabilities. For inclusion to be implemented successfully, legislation needs to be deconstructed and reconstructed. In these terms, it is vital to make, for example, education for all-inclusive in practice and theory.

In any new legislation, there should be a collaboration of all interested parties and not only the Ministry of Education and Culture. All children should be included regardless of their level or type of disability. The word 'special' should be abolished in order for a gradual change of the minds of society as well.

Last but not least is the necessity for the new legislation to indicate respect for the voice of mothers and parents of disabled children and their voices should be clearly stated as highly valued in the decisions for their children's future and development.

Finally, taking into consideration tools and specific training that professionals will be useful to receive work with ASD youth are the communication techniques, training in general for ASD and how to work with individuals, psychoeducation about ASD and alternative communication and understanding of ASD people, behavioural therapy training and assessment tools. The practitioners should be mindful of each individual’s background and vulnerabilities and show respect, love and acceptance to young people with ASD. Family members play an essential role in each individual’s life.

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Annex 4: GREECE – National report

1. INTRODUCTION

Although Greece is still among the countries with the lowest autism rates at 72.4 per 10,000 cases or else 1 in 138, the percentage of children with autism in Greece has rapidly increased over the last years[12]. In general, no large-scale prevalence study has ever been conducted in the country. However, in a recent study published in 2020 involving 10- to 11-year-old children, the nationwide prevalence of ASD was 1.15%. This research analysed data from the 13 regions of Greece with autism ranging from 0.59% to 1.50%. Specifically, the rate of autism among males was 1.83%, while for females, it was 0.44%, making the male-to-female ratio 4.14:1 (Thomaidis et al., 2020).

It is worth noting that autism only appeared in the Greek legislation with the intervention of the Hellenic Society for the Protection of Autistic People in 1999, with Law 2716/1999 on Mental Health and in 2000 with Law 2817/2000 on Special Education (Regional Directorate for Education of Thessaly, 2016). Until then, there was no State Law, and therefore, no possibility to make claims for benefits for people with autism. Thus, until recently, autism spectrum disorders have been relatively unknown to most people in the country apart from those directly affected.

2. REPORT FROM THE POLICY AND GUIDELINES

As mentioned before, the first mentions of autism in the Greek legislation occurred in 1999 and 2000. After that, laws and regulations have been established several times to prevent the exclusion and marginalisation of autistic people and provide them with social protection. The leading public institutions involved in monitoring and protecting the rights of people with ASD are the Ministries of Health, Education and Religious Affairs, and Labour and Social Affairs, depending on the area concerned: health, social care and security, education, work and employment. It should be mentioned that the Greek legislation includes people with pervasive developmental disorders, including autism, in the category of people with special needs or disabilities.

The social policy regulations for autistic people in Greece mainly pertain to their social protection through the provision of financial aid and social support, their active participation in society, education and labour and the prevention of their exclusion. Specifically, people with pervasive developmental disorders and a disability rate of 80% and above are entitled to participate in a financial assistance program along with people with severe mental retardation, an IQ below 30 and people with Down's syndrome (Amea-care.gr, n.d.). Also, according to Law 2716/1999, *“the state is responsible for providing mental health services, for preventing, diagnosing, treating, caring, rehabilitating and reintegrating adults, children and adolescents with mental disorders and autism spectrum disorders”* (Article 1, par. 1). Autistic people are being treated by Medical and Pedagogical Centres, psychiatric departments and Mental Health Centres as well as from certain NGOs and private organisations.

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[12] https://www.amea-care.gr/%CF%81%CE%B1%CE%B3%CE%B4%CE%B1%CE%AF%CE%B1-%CE%B1%CF%8D%CE%BE%CE%B7%CF%83%CE%B7-%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85-%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%83%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%8D-%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%B9%CF%8E%CE%BD-%CE%BC/

Moreover, according to the existing Health Benefits Regulation (Government Gazette 3054/2012, article 17), children with pervasive developmental disorders may receive speech therapy, occupational therapy, and special education up to fifteen sessions per type per month, and group or individual psychotherapy or behaviour therapy up to eight sessions per type per month and parent counselling up to four sessions per month. The maximum amount awarded for the above cases is 440 € per month"[13]. As for adult persons with autism over 18 years of age, the granting of the above benefits may be extended following a medical opinion after a reassessment and scientific evaluation of the evolution of the case.

In addition, one of the ten axes around which the National Action Plan for Mental Health in Greece revolves[14] is the completion of the national network of mental health services for children and adolescents and the special provision for people with pervasive developmental disorders. At the same time, the Greek government is also proceeding with the gradual implementation of the National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,[15] which among others, foresees the establishment of a National Accessibility Authority, the introduction of a personal assistant for people with disabilities, an electronic disability card, the upgrading of the disability assessment and certification mechanism, a special tax policy, the support of deinstitutionalisation and independent living, and the participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of professional and social life.[16]

Moving on to the area of education for people with ASD, depending on the student's evaluation and special educational needs and recommendation of the competent authorities "KEDASYs", schooling may occur either in a mainstream school or in special education settings. In mainstream education, students may attend an ordinary mainstream school classroom in case of mild learning difficulties, supported by the classroom teacher; a mainstream school classroom, with concurrent support-inclusive education by special education teachers when the student's needs require so; or specially organised integration classes, operating in the general and vocational education schools, offering either a combined mainstream and specialised programme (up to 15 teaching hours weekly) for students with milder special educational needs; or a specialised group or individualised programme of extended hours for students with more severe special educational needs, not accounted for by separate special education schools corresponding to the kind and degree of needs (European Commission, n.d.) Special education settings these concern both primary and secondary education, including vocational education and training. Moreover, the attendance of students with diffuse development disorders at special schools can be prolonged beyond the age of 23, depending on their educational needs (Regional Directorate for Education of Thessaly, 2016). Several guidelines have been created for autistic students' education, including "Training material on the education and social integration of students with autism" (University of Thessaly, 2007).

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[13] https://www.autismthessaly.gr/index.php/autism/zontas-me-ton-autismo/suxnes-erotiseis/
[14] https://virus.com.gr/oi-10-axones-toy-ethnikoy-schedioy-gia-tin-psychiki-ygeia/?utm_source=1&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NEWSLETTER_30-06-2021&utm_content=title
[15] https://primeminister.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-ethniko-sxedio-drasis-amea.pdf
[16] https://www.ethnos.gr/Politics/article/134545/ethnikosxediodrashsgiaatomameanaphriaoiexipyloneskaioi30stoxoi

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3. REPORT FROM THE BEST PRACTICES

Title	Workshop of Special Vocational Training and Rehabilitation "Panagia Eleousa" Messolonghi
Location	Greece
Organisation	Prefecture of Etoloakarnania
Website	www.ergpanel.gr
Overview	The Workshop "Panagia Eleousa" provides vocational training, special education, counselling-psychological support, life-long training and care, therapeutic programmes, socialisation programmes and supported living for people with intellectual and associated disabilities. The associated continuous, comprehensive and innovative approaches aim to improve the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. In addition, by organising various activities, efforts are made to raise awareness of disability issues to promote social acceptance and integration for the service users. The service target groups include people over 15 years old with severe or mild intellectual disability and related disabilities (kinetic disabilities, sensory impairments, speech disorders, slight psychiatric disorders, autism, Down Syndrome, etc.). Panagia Eleousa's services are person-centred and revolve around Vocational Education and Training (VET) and improving these persons' quality of life.
Impact and innovation	The Workshop "Panagia Eleousa" was innovative by creating two independent training departments for people with autism, which are integrated into the operation of the Day Care Centres of the Workshop "Panagia Eleousa" in Agrinio and Messolonghi. There was an imperative need to have two departments since the Workshop "Panagia Eleousa", up to 2014, already provided services to 18 people with autism. These departments aim to assure that the person with autism has a pleasant, peaceful, and at the same time structured place to participate in training and therapeutic programmes, respecting their individuality and contributing to the transition from "I" to "we". In the department, there is a specialist-experienced trainer who helps people with autism to grow. The department's operation offers families specialised training, contributing to the organisation's better and higher quality operation. Other areas of excellence and innovative services include raising awareness in local society and using a person-centred approach.
Sustainability	The workshop was officially established in 1990. It is anticipated that the Workshop "Panagia Eleousa" will continue to operate using the principles of EQUASS Excellence and evolve into a leading Social Rehabilitation Centre in Europe. The organisation envisages the equal and fair participation of service users with intellectual disabilities in society, promoting a person-centred approach. The organisation also envisages a social Welfare-State distinguished by solidarity and Social Justice.

	The " Panagia Eleousa" Workshop is governed by a seven-member Board of Directors and a three-member Audit Committee, whose members for 27 years have been unpaid volunteers. To ensure its continuity over time, the organisation has financial sponsors such as "Knauf" and "Agrino".
Transferability	Considering that this organisation works not only with people who have autism but also with people who have a severe or mild intellectual disability and other related disabilities (kinetic disabilities, sensory impairments, speech disorders, slight psychiatric disorders, Down Syndrome, etc.), it is safe to say that their work can be transferred into different contexts.
Additional info	–

Title	"ErgAxia" Supported Employment Service
Location	Greece, Athens
Organisation	Theotokos Foundation
Website	http://www.theotokos.gr/
Overview	Theotokos Foundation is a non-profit welfare organisation established in 1954 and supervised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Services are provided to children and young adults with intellectual developmental disorders and autism spectrum disorders and their families to ensure equal rights to life and employment. Theotokos aims to evolve into an exemplary assessment, education and rehabilitation organisation in Greece and Europe and have a central and essential role in creating a world where people with intellectual developmental disorders and autism spectrum disorders will have equal rights in life and work. One of the projects in Theotokos Foundation is "ErgAxia" – Promotion into Employment Service for individuals with developmental, intellectual disorders and autism spectrum disorders. ErgAxia's purpose is to train and support young adults in the workplace to find and keep their desired work position. The service was established to respond to every person's fundamental right to employment and eliminate the vocational exclusion of people with disabilities from the labour market. It is based on the Supported Employment (SE) model – the person-centred approach, which adapts to meet the needs of each individual and is entirely consistent with the concepts of taking responsibility, social inclusion, dignity and respect for individuals. According to international statistics, SE is an effective means of intervention for people with disabilities to find a job and keep it in the long term. This specialised intervention accomplishes integrating the individual into the workplace and adapting the workplace environment to the individual.
Impact and innovation	It has placed 190 individuals into the open labour market up until today. It has been acknowledged and agreed upon as the European model of best

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	practice by the European Union of Supported Employment (2005). To implement this specific model, ErgAxia uses the Toolkit, created within the context of the Leonardo Program “EUSE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT TOOLKIT,” in which the methodology and procedure must be followed are clearly described and defined. ErgAxia participated as a partner in the Leonardo program and contributed successfully to the Toolkit creation. The service’s most recent collaboration in a Leonardo program was in creating the “Toolkit for Diversity”.
Sustainability	ErgAxia has been operating since 1997. On the international level, Theotokos foundation has been certified with ISO 9001:2015 from February 2018 to 2024 and ISO 9001:2008 from 2012 to 2018. ISO 9001 is an internationally recognised standard for quality management concerning all companies, regardless of type, size, product or service. The standard provides the methodology for systematically controlling a company's operations to ensure the customer's expectations and requirements. On the European level, it has been certified with the European Quality in Social Services (EQUASS) Assurance offered by the European Platform of Rehabilitation –EPR from 2016 to 2018. EQUASS Assurance provides an integrated system of certification tailored explicitly for the social sector and allows social service providers to enhance their performance. The European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR) is a network of leading European providers of rehabilitation services to people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups. Theotokos Foundation ensures its continuity over time with the support for people throughout their life from early interventions that support/teach children with immaturity and/or disorders in their development for ages 2,5 to 4, following prevocational training and then going to vocational training and transition programs in which people up to 35 can participate. Several benefactors and donors support the work of the Theotokos Foundation, ensuring its continuity over time.
Transferability	ErgAxia works not only with youth with ASD but also with people who have intellectual developmental disorders.
Additional info	Besides the employment service, Theotokos Foundation offers other opportunities for youth with ASD. For example, they provide vocational training for young adults aged from 20 to 32 years. The aim is to develop and acquire social skills, vocational skills and behaviours necessary for independence and the social and vocational integration of young adults with intellectual developmental disorders. Individualised training is offered in specially equipped workshops, based on their desires and skills.

4. REPORT FROM THE EXISTING INITIATIVES

Title	“JobsLink” Platform

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Location	Greece, Cholargos
Organisation	Hellenic Association for Asperger's Syndrome
Website	https://asperger.gr/
Overview	The Hellenic Association for Asperger's Syndrome, in collaboration with the "Greece 2021 Committee", has recently established the "JobsLink" platform, which aims to support people on the autism spectrum in finding and keeping a work position. The "JobsLink" platform is the first serious effort in Greece to connect businesses with prospective employees on the autism spectrum through an adequately trained mentor-mediator who will consistently support the prospective employee. Thus, the three target groups involved in "JobsLink" are people with ASD, mentors and future employers. This initiative recognises that people on the spectrum may have different ways of thinking. Still, they often also possess exceptional abilities and skills in specific areas and given the right opportunity, they can excel in also in the workplace. For example, their high degree of attention to detail, persistence in completing tasks and love of routine are generally assets in the workplace. However, people with ASD usually have difficulty organising a plan of action and setting priorities, while environmental stimuli may cause stress and discomfort. Therefore, if not adequately supported, people with ASD may have difficulty entering the labour market and securing sustainable employment. This translates into a loss for both them and employers who could benefit from integrating employees with ASD into their workforce.
Impact and innovation	The "JobsLink" platform is an innovative initiative and is the first systematic effort in Greece to connect businesses with potential employees and people with ASD. It offers the opportunity for people with ASD to receive specialised and systematic guidance from a mentor on work matters and to enter the workplace successfully. At the same time, it also allows employers to enrich their workforce with employees on the spectrum, getting to know them and benefit from their assets. Thus, the platform is not just another application but a structured and staffed system, thanks to which actual opportunities are given to people with ASD who have been excluded from the labour market until now.
Sustainability	The Hellenic Association for Asperger's Syndrome pointed out that launching the platform has long been necessary for the ASD population in the country but was only recently made possible thanks to the insightful donation of the Greece 2021 Commission. As long as the funding is available and as the "JobsLink" platform becomes more well-known to the broader public, it will be able to ensure its continuity over time.
Transferability	Provided that the "JobsLink" platform is new and innovative, it has not been replicated yet by other organisations. However, since the initiative gathers

	the expertise of the Hellenic Association for Asperger's Syndrome and of specialised mentors-mediators, it may enable other organisations to adapt it shortly.
Additional info	https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/561922582/platforma-eyresis-ergasias-gia-atoma-me-aytismo/

Title	Vocational training school, counselling services and employment programmes for people with disabilities
Location	Greece, nationwide
Organisation	Public Employment Service (DYPA)
Website	https://www.dypa.gov.gr/idikes-koinonikes-omades?tab=apaskholisi-kai-efpathis-koinonikes-omades&tab2=skholi-epaghghelmatikis-katartisis-atomon-me-anapiria-skholi-amea-athinwn&tab3=i-idikothtes
Overview	To promote the employment of vulnerable social groups, the Greek Public Employment Service offers vocational training and counselling services to people from vulnerable social groups, including people with disabilities, such as ASD. Specifically, the target groups are provided with information on training, employment, and entrepreneurship and receive personalised support to be included in the labour market and achieve social integration and financial independence. The above services are provided to unemployed individuals free of charge after the online completion of a profiling questionnaire. At the same time, the Public Employment Service regularly launches employment programmes targeted at unemployed people with disabilities. A related example was a unique three-year programme with a subsidy to support employers for the recruitment of 2,300 people, of whom 2,080 persons with disabilities, along with persons formerly dependent on addictive substances, persons released from prison, young offenders or young persons at social risk. In this specific employment programme, the grant duration was set at thirty-six months, while the companies had to commit to retaining the staff for twelve months at the end of the grant[17].
Impact and innovation	The services mentioned above and programs are innovative as they constitute a systematic provision of services free of charge to people with disabilities, including ASD, at a national level. They aim to ensure those people's right to independent living and prevent their institutionalisation through vocational training, offer employment prospects in the labour market, and provide strong incentives to employers to fulfil this goal.
Sustainability	To provide training, counselling and employment opportunities to people with disabilities, the Public Employment Service receives grants from the

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[17] https://www.trikala-chamber.gr/trikala/articles/article.jsp?context=103&articleid=14618

	European Union, the European Social Fund, and European Structural and Investment Funds, allowing it to enjoy the technical, human and financial conditions to ensure its continuity over time.
Transferability	Provided the long presence of the Public Employment Service in training and work-related matters for people with disabilities, it is believed that it has the necessary tools and mechanisms to enable other organisations to implement similar initiatives. It should be noted that it was announced that within 2022, the pilot programme for supported employment of people on the autism spectrum would start in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which will employ up to 200 people with a specific diagnosis of ASD[18].
Additional info	https://www.epixeiro.gr/article/29622

5. FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Findings from the interviews with youth workers and professionals working with people with ASD

Three focus groups were conducted online, each for every target group. Focus groups were recorded, and notes were taken from one of the two facilitators. Their duration was about an hour. The first focus group was comprised of 12 youth workers, 5 males and 7 females and the second was comprised of 5 professionals working with people with ASD, 1 male and 4 females. The majority of them were psychologists and social workers. Finally, the third focus group was comprised of 1 male who was identified as an individual with ASD and 4 family members, 1 male caregiver and 3 mothers of children with ASD.

Whereas two different focus groups occurred for youth workers and professionals working with individuals with ASD, their positions coincided in most of the fields questioned, so the findings below concern both populations.

- When asked about their working experience with individuals on the spectrum, the majority of the participants mentioned that they have cooperated with young people with ASD. However, they are not explicitly trained in their inclusion. In this way, youth workers and professionals agreed that further education and training are needed to approach this population better. It is worth mentioning that all of the interviewees were willing to invest in their education on this topic.
- Only two out of seventeen participants stated their self-efficacy in working with people with ASD, highlighting that their education on ASD was obtained by seminars and training programs and not by their academic studies at the University. More specifically, one professional worker, a psychologist, mentioned: “We just got an early taste of what ASD is in the University. It was up to us if we wanted to specialise in Autism after University”.

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[18] https://www.ertnews.gr/eidiseis/ellada/d-michailidoy-xekina-to-pilotiko-programma-apascholisis-atomon-sto-fasma-toy-aytismoy/

- Considering the particular fields of training required, youth workers focused on the symptomatology and clinical characteristics of ASD. At the same time, professionals prioritised the familiarisation with specific communication tools, such as PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), which would allow non-verbal individuals to engage in peer groups.
- When asked about the particular accomplishments someone should have to work with young people with ASD, all participants agreed that willingness constitutes the most significant factor. Thus, youth workers and professionals pointed out the importance of sensitisation and awareness in this attempt. The majority of the interviewees also reported communication skills and familiarisation with the peculiarities of ASD youth. Moreover, flexibility and adaptability were considered inextricable aspects of a sufficient professional. A youth worker mentioned: “You have to be willing to accommodate the ASD individuals’ specific needs and implement new strategies to achieve functional cooperation with this population”.
- When the conversation came to the difficulties around ASD people’s involvement in youth organisations, a significant part of both youth workers and professionals claimed that the lack of trained staff and the absence of specific communication tools make the inclusion of young people with ASD harder. The fact that autism is a spectrum with a wide range of clinical characteristics was also highlighted as an obstacle in implementing catholic strategies, which means that individualised approaches would require more time and effort from the workers. Non-speaking autistic young people were considered the most significant challenge by the majority of the participants.
- Whereas only a tiny part of the interviewees was educated on ASD, all of them were willing to include ASD youth in their services if they were appropriately supported. More specifically, youth workers, as a whole, mentioned that their training is essential. At the same time, professionals focused on the need for their supervision by an expert to be sure that they treat this population properly. Finally, both sides agreed that cooperation with the individual’s family and caregivers would benefit them. A psychologist also mentioned: “Family could be our ally; they know their child’s needs better, and communicating with us would make our interventions easier”.
- Considering the circumstances under which an inclusive environment for individuals with ASD could be created, all participants suggested recruiting specifically trained staff in youth organisations and involving specialised professionals, such as psychologists and educational therapists. Moreover, three interviewees (two youth workers and one professional working with people with ASD) proposed the enrichment and accommodation of the activities provided in youth organisations. More specifically, they mentioned that dyadic activities could facilitate the active attendance of ASD youth, considering the discomfort that part of this population experiences when exposed to crowds and rioting. In this way, services adjusted to the individualised needs of young people were on point. Finally, a sensory-friendly environment was suggested by a social worker, and the majority of the participants agreed.

Findings from the interviews with the individuals with ASD and family members

- When asked about the ASD individuals’ particular needs, caregivers and family members mentioned that taking into consideration that Autism is a spectrum, there is a wide range of peculiarities that should be heard and understood. This way, individualised interventions adjusted to each young person's needs were proposed. The individual with ASD who participated in the focus group answered: "Just ask them", pointing out the significance of individuals' active role in comprehending his needs.

- Considering the approach methods and communication practices applied, caregivers and family members mentioned that priority should be given to updating communication tools. They highlighted that existing functional practices, such as PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), could be beneficial for the non-verbal autistic population if a modernising process was followed. Furthermore, they criticised other communication tools, such as ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis), supporting that it is misinterpreting individuals' strengths and difficulties. At this point, the individual with ASD added that this tool could be characterised even as "abusive" for the population addressed.
- When asked about the special accommodations and changes required in youth organisations in order to facilitate the inclusion of the ASD population, both the individual with ASD and family members focused on the need for youth workers and professionals' familiarisation with the clinical characteristics of Autism. In this way, preconceptions around the nature of ASD would be confined, and the peculiarities of this population could be understood. A mother of an autistic child mentioned: "How could you include an individual with ASD in your services if you have no idea about his special needs?" According to this aspect, the recruitment of specifically trained professionals in youth organisations was also supported by the majority of the participants. The main intention was the population's better and more appropriate approach. However, trained and educated staff was not their only primary request. ASD individual mentioned that a safe, inclusive environment should consist of supportive and sensitive professionals who are willing to implement flexible and adaptive practices in their services provided: "If someone is willing to support our population, he will try to treat us properly, being more flexible and open in the practices applied".
- Finally, the cooperation between youth workers and individual family members was suggested as an inclusive functional factor. Both the individual on the spectrum and caregivers mentioned that family could play a determinant role in the ASD population's involvement in youth organisations by informing and communicating their children's particular needs, allowing the staff to know in advance their strengths and difficulties, and preparing and adjusting their services to them.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Autism has only recently started to receive attention in the Greek context, and there is currently greater awareness about it than a couple of decades ago. However, to date, no single project exists in the country from which youth workers or professionals working in youth organisations can improve their knowledge and skills in including youth with ASD in their activities. Also, there are no specific recommendations for practitioners or organisations working with youth with ASD apart from school settings where such recommendations are already available. In general, the existing initiatives and good practices are aimed toward younger children with ASD in the school environment or adults regarding vocational training or their integration into the labour market.

Considering the findings from the field research, professionals' further education and training are required to properly include the ASD population in peer groups and youth activities. The involvement of willing but specialised staff in youth organisations could facilitate this inclusion process, promoting flexible and adaptive practices adjusted to ASD individuals' needs. For this purpose, individualised interventions are recommended. Furthermore, person-centred and updated communication tools could contribute to the complicity of the non-verbal autistic population, assisting their particular needs to be heard. Finally, the cooperation between professionals and individual caregivers was evaluated as a significant inclusive factor, enabling the interaction between the person's most fundamental aspects: home and social life. In this way, ASD individuals' strengths and difficulties would be communicated in advance, giving the youth organisations the chance to prepare and accommodate their services.

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Annex 5: SPAIN – National report

1. INTRODUCTION

The highest level law of the Spanish legal system is the Spanish Constitution of 1978. In the Constitution, we cannot find any section specifically aimed at safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities. Although some people may consider that this absence implies equal treatment for these people, the new paradigms and evidences demonstrate that the treatment must not be egalitarian, but equitable and developed according to the characteristics and needs of the disabled people.

However, we should understand that like all other surrounding countries, with the passing of time the Spanish Government has advanced in defining and protecting the rights of people with disabilities, both physical and intellectual equally. We should highlight three milestones regarding rules and acts, like:

- Ley de Integración Social de las Personas con Discapacidad of 1982 (LISMI)[19].
- Ley de Igualdad de Oportunidades, no Discriminación y Accesibilidad Universal de las personas con discapacidad of 2003 (LIONDAU).
- Ley de Infracciones y Sanciones en Materia de Igualdad de Oportunidades, no Discriminación y Accesibilidad Universal de las Personas con Discapacidad of 2007.

2. REPORT FROM THE POLICY AND GUIDELINES

In 2013 the *Ley General de Derechos de Personas con Discapacidad y de su Inclusión Social* was passed. This last rewrites and supersedes the three preceding. In section 7 it states that all governments must safeguard the access to sport for persons with disabilities, in section 50 it specifies that people with disabilities have the right to access social sportive services, and in section 51 it states that sporting activities must be carried out, whenever possible, in accordance with the principle of universal accessibility to any facilities with the ordinary means put to service citizens. Moreover, and only if the need for support is required, specific services and activities can be established.

If we observe the international landscape, we should highlight the signature and passing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (rewritten into law in 1990). In section 23 the rule specifies that children with disabilities should be able to live in community with the best possible quality of life. With that in mind, governments should remove all barriers that prevent children with disabilities from being independent and actively participating in the community. Every child with disabilities should be allowed to enjoy their lives in the community as good as possible. The governments must remove all barriers that prevent children with disabilities from being independent and actively participating in the community. Another

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[19] It is the first rule passed in Spain specifically aimed at safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities.

milestone of note is the ratification by the Spanish Government of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Section 30 of that convention establishes their right to participate in cultural live, recreation activities, leisure and sports, and the duty of signing States to promote their participation at all levels in such activities.

Globally and with relation to ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), we should take into account:

The Charter for Persons with Autism, approved by the European Parliament on 9 May 1996. In that charter there is a special mention on sports activities.

The Resolution 67/82 adopted by the General Assembly on 12 December 2012 highlights specially the safeguarding of rights of people with ASD and emphasizes the challenges that communities are facing.

In the Resolution 62/139 of 18 December 2007 on World Autism Awareness Day the 2 April is established as the World Autism Awareness Day to expand social awareness about ASD.

In Spain there is no specific law or act on people with ASD. However, in 2015 the Spanish Strategy on Autism Spectrum Disorders is passed. This rule of law was agreed by the Spanish Government and the three big federations of this country related to ASD (Confederación Autismo España, Confederación Española de Autismo FESPAU and Confederación Asperger España). It states that access to sport is a fundamental right for people with ASD and encourages their participation and social inclusion (page 56) Moreover, in the Annex I (Charter for Persons with Autism, approved by the European Parliament on 9 May 1996) it is noted that "*persons with autism spectrum disorders must have full right to access to culture, entertainment, spare time and sport activities, and to enjoy these freely*".

Lastly, it should be noted that each autonomous community has certain rules and regulations that affect exclusively people with disabilities exclusively in their regions. We should highlight as an example the Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha, with the program "Estrategia Regional de Atención al Autismo" and the Generalitat de Cataluña with the "Plan de Atención Integral a las personas con TEA".

3. BEST PRACTICES REPORT

Title	*Community Leisure Service (Servicio de Ocio Comunitario)*
Location	*Spain, Galicia, Vilagarcia de Arousa (Alaxe)*
Organisation	*Asociación Autismo Bata*
Website	*https://autismobata.com/*
Overview	*The Community Leisure Service is based on personal interests and leisure with an emphasis on community. This best practice prioritises the usage and optimisation of environmental resources to favour the development of*

	personal support programmes from an inclusive and normalising perspective, that is to say, guaranteeing the active presence and participation of the users. *The main objective of this service is to provide support for people with ASD so they can enjoy leisure activities, regardless of their condition. Therefore, the service contributes to enhancing personal autonomy and social inclusion within the community.* *The programme comprises general sports, community, leisure, aquatic and transport activities, and also special activities according to the preferences of the association's users, like go-karts or animal therapies.* *This leisure programme is related to some personal objectives agreed individually each year with the user, in order to guarantee a coordinated response with all the stakeholders around the people that use the service, but always having in mind the personal enjoyment that leisure adds to the factors that complement the quality of individual and family life.* *The Community Leisure Service consists in* ***three programmes****:* • *SATURDAY LEISURE PROGRAMME (PROGRAMA OCIO SÁBADOS): designed for users of BATA services, BATA family members and/or members of the APA MECOS association.* • *JULY LEISURE PROGRAMME (PROGRAMA OCIO JULIO): designed for 6-21 years old users of BATA services, BATA family members and/or members of the APA MECOS association.* • *SUMMER LEISURE FOR ADULTS (OCIO VERANO ADULTOS): designed for the Adult Life area of the association.* *The service runs throughout the year except for August due to vacations, and the more recreational activities take place during summer.* *We also foster interpersonal relationships by means of natural supports, that is to say, support in the different contexts and environments of service users, to favour their inclusion and participation. This also has reinforces the relation between the supporter and the user, being bidirectional and reciprocal.* *Finally, the programme aims to protect the rights of people with ASD so they are respected and enforced by the community. People with ASD have the right of being able to participate in leisure just as all other people do.*
Impact and innovation	*This leisure service is specific for people with ASD. We can find a lot of different programmes, associations and organisations focused on diversity in general, but it is very innovative that these services are specifically related to ASD.* *The impact can be measured by the characteristics of the service itself. As previously mentioned, the service is coordinated with the individual support plan, which in turn is based on the QoL development of that person.* *The individual support plan for each person is based on quantitative and qualitative objectives that can be measured and assessed on a regular basis,*

	matching with the start of the plan or any relevant change in the life of that person. *This leisure assessment is strongly related to the QoL, as it is one of its dimensions. Hence, by encouraging personal enjoyment and satisfaction, we can make a positive, measurable impact on the person's QoL.* *Due to the inherent characteristics of ASD, we may find profiles that need exploring different experiences, as their restricted interests may make it difficult for them to make a first approach.* *By offering different opportunities to live experiences we can be flexible and find motivating activities that many people would not have been able to experience without this leisure programme.* *The staff and human resources of this service are duly trained and specialised in ASD. This means that all personal experiences can be customised and the support is optimal as to guarantee the success of each experience. This is quite important, as with all single positive engagement we will be closer to achieving personal enjoyment and making a real difference in that person's QoL.* *The impact is positive both at individual and community level, as the community realises that it is possible to include people with ASD in society so they can be full citizens with the same opportunities for leisure experiences as any other person. They simply can enjoy leisure.*
Sustainability	*Regarding resources, we have:* ***Technical resources:*** • *Accessible visual aids to facilitate the usage of community resources and materials for activities.* • *For inclusive leisure activities, the required technical resources would be transport and materials for the activities (sport clothes, rackets, balls, etc.) and public facilities.* ***Human resources:*** *As it is a BATA private programme, the participants are people trained by the association. In the association we can find psychologists, who coordinate the support plans, and educators in charge of guidance tasks.* ***Financial resources:*** *In this programme participate clients of the Education Service, of the UAM's Adult Service and members of the parents' association APA MECOS, co-founder of the service. To fund the remaining costs, private resources are also used.*
Transferability	*This leisure service could be applied by to other entities as it is possible by the nature of the service itself, the use of community resources and the search for natural support.* *It would be necessary to coordinate with external entities and also internally with all services.*

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	Weekend leisure activities, more general in nature, can take place anywhere depending on the available resources. However, for different weekly and summer activities, specific resources and environments are needed, such as: • *For water activities: swimming-pool, beach* • *For recreational activities: bowling pins and balls, gaming rooms, cooking spaces, new technologies* • *For transport: train, bus* • *For sport activities: hiking, horse-riding, golf, cycling* • *For community activities: cafés, shopping centres* *Regarding the one-off activities offered by the leisure service which result from the proposals for specific periods made by the service itself, like excursions or complete weeks where the people can rest and enjoy leisure activities in nearby recreational sites and environments (something beneficial both for the family and the users), it is recommended to search for suitable sites and places to carry out these experiences in the area.* *Finally, in order to develop the special activities of the programme specific to the culture of the place where they are carried out, they should be adapted to each area or region where the project is to be developed. For example, in Gandía, developed by Fundació Mira'm, the users participate in a leisure support plan where they can join a sailing school to enjoy different water sports; the programme is made available both by sport professionals duly trained in ASD from the school, and also by the internal professionals of this foundation.*
Additional info	*Each programme has a different sign-in period. For example, leisure on weekend (Saturday) must take place in December and January, while leisure on July must take place in May.* *There is always a worker of the service who contacts the families to confirm attendance, user info sheets, request information on medication, support, etc. The estimated fee is paid when the user signs in.*

Title	*Estrategia regional andaluza para la cohesión e inclusión social, ERACIS - Intervencíón en zonas desfavorecidas (Andalusian Regional Strategy for Cohesion and Inclusion. Intervention in disadvantaged areas).*
Location	*Spain, Seville*
Organisation	*Autismo Sevilla*
Website	*https://www.autismosevilla.org/eracis.php*
Overview	*ERACIS is a Seville Autism Association programme which aim is acting in disadvantaged areas of different populations where there exist serious situations of social exclusion and/or populations with risk factors for suffering these situations.*

	Another objective of the programme is training unemployed people so they can work with people with disabilities and support people with disabilities who live in disadvantaged areas and are at risk of social exclusion. *This association works with social entities and the public government make this happen. Moreover, it provides support to companies interested in including people with ASD.* *The ultimate goal of this association is offering and giving support to people with ASD living in these disadvantaged areas so they can improve their QoL.* ***Methodology:*** *An active search is performed in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to ensure that all people in need (people with disabilities, unemployed people, people at risk of exclusion) can take advantage of these social care systems.* ***Activities:*** • *Accessibility: in public spaces to encourage the use of community resources.* • *Social and professional itineraries: approaches to employment, system coordination* • *Community work: promoting citizen participation* • *Pre-employment workshops: education in self-esteem, professional profiling* • *School for families: providing parents with tools and raising awareness on ASD in the educative context* • *Professionals training: specialised training in disabilities* • *Inclusive leisure activities: promoting the participation of people with ASD and at risk of exclusion in disadvantaged areas* *This programme is designed for the following people:* *The estimated 7,154 people with ASD under 65 years old that live in these disadvantaged areas. The services of this association are aimed to support all these people.* *The ultimate goal of this association is offering and giving support to people with ASD living in these disadvantaged areas so they can improve their QoL.*
Impact and innovation	*This is an innovative project as it works at individual, family and community level. We can therefore highlight the following aspects:* • *Action for young people with ASD living in areas at risk of social exclusion. In the beginning, different areas of the province and the city of Seville were selected, such as:* ◦ *Sevilla: Torreblanca, El Cerezo, Amate, Palmete* ◦ *Alcalá de Guadaíra: North neighbourhoods* ◦ *Camas: La Pañoleta* ◦ *Dos Hermanas: Ibarburu, La Jarana, El Chaparral* ◦ *San Juan de Aznalfarache: Santa Isabel*

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	The risk of social exclusion is one of the risk factors impacting quality of life. Living in an environment with the necessary therapies and material and financial resources increases inclusion possibilities. *There is already people leveraging support therapies, which reflects the efficacy of the project.* *The programme has **another objective:*** - *Training unemployed people so they can work with people with disabilities:* *The objective is supporting people with disabilities by training people who are unemployed; these people will be motivated by the challenge of including young people with disabilities in the community, which will impact on QoL of both stakeholders.* *A percentage of these unemployed people trained in these social and professional insertion courses end up working in the care sector for people with disabilities, a clear marker that these courses are having a relevant impact at different levels.* ***Finally:*** - *Another objective is improving the perception that the community has on these areas: the programme best practices carried out in this area lead to a more positive opinion on these areas and the people living in there.* *Regular feedback surveys are conducted about the programme and the perception about these areas.*

Sustainability	*The resources allocated are as follows:*
	- ***Financial resources**: The programme is co-founded by the European Social Fund through the Andalusian Regional Government. The association Autismo Sevilla, the Andalusian Regional Government, the European Union and Andalusia moving forward with Europe participate in this programme.*
	- ***Technical resources:***
	  - *For accessibility, visual aids to improve the usage of community resources, as well as all the materials required to design such aids (IT, printing material, etc.).*
	  - *For the training activities, including social and professional itineraries, training for professionals, school for families and pre-employment, the needs are public facilities (social centres, councils, etc.), technology hardware (projectors, tablets, computers, etc.), printed material (certificates of achievement, dossiers, training materials, advertising) and IT resources.*
	  - *For inclusive leisure activities, the required technical resources are transport, specific materials for the different activities (football goals, balls, sport clothes, equipment for water activities, etc.) and premises.*

	- ***Human resources***: *These are hired by Autismo Sevilla after a recruitment process depending on the psychologists, social workers, speech therapists, social educators and/or youth workers different profiles. Also, some human resources are dedicated to the creation and promotion of the different activities, like profiles dedicated to social networks such as Community Managers.*
Transferability	*Having in mind that this consists in working in areas at risk of exclusion, it is necessary to perform an analysis of different areas at risk of social exclusion in a huge territory in order to transferring this project to another place, as well as a pre-work of sensitisation and awareness-raising on the community to guarantee that it does not start from scratch, that the project is relevant and that it will be leveraged by the community.* *Moreover, a lot of well-coordinated human resources (political, social, community, etc.) would be needed. For example, all health centres that screen and refer people with ASD to any association that wants to carry out this project, as well as any social entity that handles the contacts of unemployed people, must be coordinated in a central database where data are appropriately managed.* *All spaces should be cognitively and physically accessible as per the tasks and resources noted above.* *In addition, there must be a wide network of resources available in terms of social agents, population, infrastructure, etc. to have an optimal impact on society.*
Additional info	*This project was launched after a a call for proposals from the European Union and the Andalusian Regional Government.* *To be part of the project, it is necessary to sign-in and attend to different inclusive services or activities (schools for families, leisure activities, training for professionals, etc.) presented in a regular basis by Autismo Sevilla in social networks and websites, of filling in a form.*

4. REPORT FROM THE EXISTING INITIATIVE

Title	Lanzatea. Transition to adult life programme.
Location	*Spain, Gandía*

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Organisation	*Fundació Mira'm*
Website	-
Overview	**Lanzatea** is designed as a shuttle to youth and adult life for people with ASD and other neurodevelopmental disorders, aged 16 or older, who do or did not continue their formal education for different reasons. Therefore, **Lanzatea** can be considered as an intensive support resource to transition to a functional and self-sufficient adult life. To achieve its stated aims, an annual content (school year) is designed and developed, and it is divided into four different, interconnected areas of knowledge: • ***Social and personal knowledge:*** *the aim is developing capabilities and skills focused on the person in a social and community context.* • ***Functional conceptual knowledge:****provides linguistic, geographical and mathematical knowledge that is functional and useful in everyday life.* • ***Professional knowledge****: its aim is the development of capabilities, attitudes and skills which are useful and essential for the workplace. Moreover, it also has a vocational discovery aspect (for this purpose, projects of different kinds and fields of knowledge are continuously developed) which will allow the first contacts with the business world.* • ***Leisure and sport:*** *this area is designed to meet the needs for physical development, as well as personal and social leisure, from a general perspective.*
Impact and innovation	Lanzatea, the programme created by Fundació Mira'm, is innovative a the objective is changing the care paradigm for teenagers and young people, in which the educational and social support tends to fade away and the only support remaining is official aid. Lanzatea individually impacts on each user, as it takes into account the preferences and needs of young people with ASD to ease an active participation in society and offer positive value to their lives. In other words, the objectives of Lanzatea are those of the people that participate in the programme. Lanzatea biopsychosocial character offers support taking into account the totality and integrity of the person, and cares for the needs, interests and personal preferences of each participant. This approach is innovative, as means understanding ASD from a wide perspective and promoting positive attitudes, capabilities and behaviours in the personal, social and work contexts from adolescence till young adulthood. The aforesaid is attained by: • *Developing pre-employment capabilities.* • *Vocational discovery.*

	- *Accessing to an employment with support.* - *Social, communicative and personal development.* - *Self-autonomy development.* - *Development and understanding of civil rights and responsibilities.* - *Social inclusion and participation in community.* - *Functional concept learning and its generalisation.*
Sustainability	**Lanzatea** is under the umbrella of Self-Autonomy Fostering services under the Equality and Inclusive Policies Office of the Valencian Community (official government support for people with a certificate of dependent care-disability). The families can manage the cost for **Lanzatea** by means of these services or privately.
Transferability	The participation of professionals and social agents in the area is required to run the project. For the correct development of this project, it is required to enter into partnership agreements with educative (schools) and social (soup kitchens) entities. Furthermore, it must be performed during the mornings in order to find the real leisure and pre-employment motivations of young people with ASD. The professionals involved in the project should be flexible and open to deal with all kind of institutions in order to gain access to community resources.
Additional info	A personal and family interview for profiling and customising the service is required to register in **Lanzatea**. The groups are formed taking into account the characteristics and needs of the participants, and also their interests, dreams and desires.

Title	ATHLETICS INITIATIVE OF ASTEA SAFOR
Location	Gandía (Valencia).
Organisation	- ASTEA SAFOR (Asociación de familias de personas con Trastorno de espectro autista de la Safor). - CLUB ATLETISMO SAFOR TEIKA
Website	
Overview	*The following initiative is designed and developed by the association Astea Safor, with the support and advice of the Club Atletismo Safor Teika and Fundació Mira'm de la Comunitat Valenciana.* *This initiative has been held the city sports centre of Gandía since 2017 up today.* *This project is designed for children and young people with ASD members of ASTEA SAFOR and its **initial objectives** are as follows:* - *Improving participants' physical well-being.* - *Practising physical and sport activities in an inclusive community context.*

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	The initiative is divided in different groups according to the need for support. Each group is formed by specialised monitors of athletics, members of the Club de Atletisme Safor TEIKA and volunteers from the association Astea Safor. All professionals and volunteers are previously trained in Fundació Mira'm in all topics related to ASD. *The aforesaid groups may consist of people with ASD alone or people with ASD included in groups of neurotypical people.* *The initiative is held two days a week and each person with ASD attends in his/her reference group, depending on his/her support needs.* *The participants learn different athletic specialities (running, jumping, throwing, etc.) under the guidance of TEIKA instructors and supported by participating volunteers according to their needs. People with ASD develop the aspects and motor skills required to practice this sport.*
Impact and innovation	*This initiative is having a positive impact on the quality of life of participants with ASD and their families, and also on participating professionals, volunteers and the community in general. This is made possible by bringing awareness and inclusion of people with ASD in sport activities in community and public environments.* *People with ASD have the opportunity to enjoy sport activities in an inclusive way, in a inclusive way, in an appropriate environment, and with the necessary and individualised support. Moreover, practising sport with a regular basis offers both physical and emotional health benefits.* *On the other hand, this initiative is an opportunity for employment and training in ASD for the TEIKA club monitors.* *Finally, the initiative fosters the sensitisation of society by:* • *Bringing awareness and inclusion for people with ASD in sport activities with other groups of people.* • *Training in ASD for specialised volunteers.* *The initiative is an innovation in the province of Valencia and in the region of La Safor, as there exist only a few opportunities and proposals, both from private entities and the public government, for the participation of people with ASD in different activities for young people. These activities should be tailored to their characteristics and needs, and designed and developed by professionals with the required experience and training to provide quality initiatives.*
Sustainability	*The* ***technical and physical resources*** *required to implement this initiative are:* • *The specific sport facilities for athletics (athletics track, sand pit, etc.).* • *The required materials to perform the activities (balls, cones, adapted javelins, disks, etc.).* • *Sport clothes.*

	• *The digital and analogical resources required to design and use alternative and augmentative communication systems.* • *Printed materials to design and develop adapted visual aids.* *The* ***human resources*** *required to implement this initiative are:* • *The monitors from Club de Atletismo Safor Teika.* • *The volunteers from ASTEA SAFOR.* • *The professionals from Fundació Mira'm to perform the advisory and training tasks for the people involved in this initiative.* *The* ***financial resources*** *required to implement this initiative are:* • *Astea Safor member families' fees.* • *Fees of Astea Safor member families participating in this initiative.* • *Financial support provided by Club de Atletismo Safor Teika.*
Transferability	*The initiative is transferable to other third sector entities and organisations that support and care for people with ASD. To attain this, the technical, human and financial requirements and needs listed in section above must be taken into account.* *Therefore, the* ***needs*** *are:* • *A non-profit organisation to be the first responsible of this initiative.* • *An entity focused on athletics practice.* • *An entity to advise in everything related to ASD to the above entities, above. This entity should also train the different people involved in the initiative.* *Finally, it must be noted that other entities working with ASD (ASPAU, INTEGRA VALLDIGNA) are currently interested in this initiative. To honour this interest, the initiative is to be transferred and supported in its initial design and development steps.*
Additional info	*You can find more info on ASTEA SAFOR in the website www.asteasafor.es* *On the other hand, the Club de Atletismo Safor Tekia also offers a website with more information, www.atletsimesafor.es* *And finally, Fundació Mira'm website is: www.fundaciomiram.org* ***NEWS RELATED TO THE INITIATIVE*** *https://www.lasprovincias.es/safor/rock-deporte-ganar-20181219004520-ntvo.html* *https://saforguia.com/art/55142/the-soulomonics-actuara-en-el-vii-rock-solidario-a-beneficio-de-astea-safor*

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5. FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Findings from the interviews with youth workers

All youth workers surveyed say that currently, there is not much offer or possibilities for participation of people with disabilities in youth associations. In *La Safor region* we can find two associations performing youth activities with people with disabilities, but these are activities specifically developed for people with disabilities. Therefore, these services are not offered as inclusive participation services.

On the other hand, they consider that it is important to raise awareness and educate teenagers and young people on people with disabilities. In this age bracket, people with neurotypical development do not usually pay attention to people with disabilities. Furthermore, they are usually not empathic nor aware of the needs of those people.

Finally, the youth workers surveyed say this education and awareness initiative in relation to people with ASD is positive to streamline their inclusion in their associations, since they currently think they do not have the tools, resources or expertise needed to provide good service for these people, may it be the case that they participate in their activities.

Findings from the interviews with the individuals with ASD and family members

As per the families of people with ASD surveyed, they claim they often need the support of professionals to inform them about the best practices offered by the entities specialised in ASD or disabilities, because not all the initiatives proposed are adequate enough to meet the needs of these people. That summarises the perception of the families.

As per the results of the survey, it seems that families especially value the activities performed in the community which take into account the interests of their relatives with ASD. The experiences ranging several days (camps, respite trips, etc.) are positively valued both by people with ASD and their family, as these positively impact on the overall quality of life.

The participation in inclusive activities with people of same age is perceived as a perfect opportunity to extend the circle of social relationships and discover future inclusive opportunities.

The families show however some concerns on the commitment to fulfil the individual needs of their relatives with ASD, such as individual communication, anticipation and positive behavioural support. They are concerned about the coordination of the people supporting the individual with ASD to enable the generalisation of the tools used in the individual support plan.

Due to the geographical influence of the area, families are specifically interested in sailing and water activities, as their relatives with ASD can enjoy the sea environment in a safe and adapted way to their needs. Paddle surf, surf, sailing and kayak are just a few of the most demanded experiences.

More than half of the relatives with ASD from the families surveyed participate in sport activities (athletics and swimming). Those activities are part of collaborative projects between sport entities associations or foundations, such as ASTEA SAFOR or Fundació Mira'm. These projects show a social change in relation to people with disabilities. However, families state that many times there is no real inclusion with peers, because despite the activities take place in the community, most of the groups are made up only by people with ASD. This is an issue to be addressed.

Findings from the interviews with the professionals working with people with ASD

We interviewed active professionals with more than one year of experience. Beyond the experience they acquired, all of them have been extensively trained in aspects related to people with ASD and have participated in workshops, training programs and congresses related to that key topic.

In general, a high percentage of those interviewed considered that, despite families and individuals with ASD receive some financial allowances from the central Government or Autonomous Communities, these aids do not cover all the support needs that these people require. Therefore, on many occasions the families must bear the cost of the services they use to improve the quality of life of their family member with ASD, and also of the complete family. On the other hand, there exists a need for social, health and educational support adapted to the stage of life of people with ASD to cover their needs in their respective reference centres or daily life. So, despite the positive progress of recent years, interviewees consider that there is still a long way to go in terms of meeting the support needs required by people with ASD.

Likewise, ASD awareness in our society is increasing along with its incidence, that has raised exponentially over the last 20 years. However, the interviewees consider that society has a very biased view of this disorder and in most cases is related to the information received from films, press reports and other media. On many occasions, the opinion represented in those media does not match the characteristics of ASD and the needs of people with this disorder.

In terms of the communicative aspects, the professionals interviewed consider that they are important stakeholders (as in any other interaction) in order to maintain a two-way and reciprocal interaction. To this end, and according to the linguistic and communicative characteristics of the people they work with, they use either oral language alone or accompanied by an AACS (augmentative and alternative communication system) or only an alternative communication system (if there is no oral language). Not in all cases is necessary to specify a standalone communication system, since people with ASD, by definition according to their disorder, will have problems to communicate socially and, in order to promote communication, we must reinforce any communicative act that is presented in whatever form it is presented (always within certain limitations). The relational learning to the communicative aspect is promoted from the educational, health and social fields, and it should aim to be generalized to all contexts in which people actively participate, as being able to communicate is a basic and universal right.

On the other hand, the professionals interviewed think that the communication skills and capabilities of the people they work with are closely related to potential challenging behaviours, since in many cases these may appear precisely due to the lack of communicative resources. In this sense, and thanks to their education, all the interviewees agree that the best way to address such challenging behaviours is by means of the Positive Behavioural Support, which is based on changing the contexts (at physical, social and methodological levels) and on teaching socially adapted communicative behaviours.

Finally, and regarding which kind of training they consider more recommendable to facilitate the inclusion of people with disabilities, in general they agree that face-to-face training is preferable since it allows meeting with other people; also, the communication between teacher and students flows better than with other kind of training, such as online, and of course better than delayed media (such as online platforms, training materials, etc.). On the other hand, in a face-to-face training it is possible use dynamics that facilitate learning from a motivational and playful perspective. In all cases, the training should take 10-20 hours minimum so it can cover those aspects of ASD considered as essential and basic (ASD characteristics related to communication and social interaction, as well as restricted interests and repetitive behaviours; visual supports; augmentative and alternative communication systems; and cognitive theories in relation to ASD).

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As observed in this National Report, families of people with ASD and direct care professionals and monitors positively value the initiatives that help establishing meaningful relationships between people with ASD and their peers. This is right provided in the Constitution and other relevant law and rules (LISMI/LINDAU).

The issues addressed in desk research and field research allow to study the national context, from which we can briefly conclude the following:

- Community support professionals specially trained in ASD are needed.
- Successful projects can be easily transferred to other zones.
- All stakeholders involved benefit from the projects.
- The impact on different dimensions of QoL is positive and specially relevant in terms of social inclusion and interpersonal relationships.
- The authorities must guarantee the right to participate in community.
- The proposals for activities should be managed by associations and/or foundations.
- Political agents need to participate in communication and fund-raising activities.

However, the proposals largely depend on the association movement of third sector entities, mediated by families. This is why investing in long-term projects with the necessary funding for human and material resources is crucial to guarantee the aforementioned rights.

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