



IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES OF THE VIS A VIS PROJECT

The Association for Autism of Slovenia successfully applied for the tender for the co-financing of projects within the programme Education, Scholarships, Apprenticeship and Youth Entrepreneurship, which is supported by the Ministry of cohesion and regional development. The subject of the public tender was a selection of projects to be allocated funds from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021



The project holder is the Association of NGOs for Autism of Slovenia, the following partners participated in the project:

- Šentprima, Institute for Rehabilitation and Education Ljubljana
- Alma Mater Europaea - European Center, Maribor
- Elementary school Kozara Nova Gorica
- MIK d.o.o. Celje
- Fjæran-Granums spisskompetanseservice, Norway

The purpose of the project was to obtain data on the number of persons with autism in Slovenia, to train multipliers for the development of a new model of support for employees in education and employers and employees of employment agencies for the successful teaching and employment of persons with autism, and to develop this model as well.

VIS A VIS

The **VIS A VIS** is funded by Norway through Norway Grants 2014 - 2021.
Working together for an [inclusive](#) Europe.

The goals of the project were:

1. Obtained data on the number of people with autism according to age, gender and region of residence.
2. Trained multipliers for the development of a new model of support for employees in education and employers and employees at employment agencies for successful teaching and employment of persons with autism.
3. A new model of support for employees in education, employers and also employees of the employment service of Slovenia for larger competences of employees in teaching and successful employment of people with autism with an emphasis on skills and competences for work and life in the 21st century.

The project comprised seven work sections.

MANAGEMENT



Project management ensures that all project activities run smoothly and in accordance with the goals and expected results set in the project. We have prepared a Management Plan to help us with management, in which all partners were involved. It was about strategic coordination between the project holder and the program holder and between the project holder and the project partners. In addition to the

achievement of set goals and achievements, management also referred to the successful management and implementation of the project, communication procedures within the framework of the partnership and program, reporting and evaluation procedures, procedures for monitoring risks and quality control, the schedule of meetings and work sessions. Project management ensured timely and efficient execution of all project activities. By coordinating the work of the individual partners in the project partnership, the project management ensured that all the results and achievements of the project were completed on time, within the expected scope and with satisfactory quality.

Project management includes:

1. Strategic coordination and project management
2. Technical coordination
3. Financial management and reporting
4. Risk and quality management
5. Archiving and closing the project

The project manager managed all documentation for project coordination and periodic reporting. She led and convened regular coordination of project partners for coordinated and efficient project implementation.



REGISTER OF DATA ON THE PREVALENCE OF AUTISM IN SLOVENIA BY AGE, GENDER AND REGION



We do not have official data on the prevalence of autism in Slovenia. The purpose of this section was to conduct research that will give us an insight into the prevalence of autism according to the age, gender and region of permanent residence of a person with autism. Also, establish a system for monitoring the frequency of autism, which enables longitudinal monitoring. Our expectations regarding the total number of persons diagnosed with autism in Slovenia were that the obtained data would not

reach the estimate of the global frequency of autism, obtained based on already conducted research in the world, i.e. 1% of the population. We assumed that the data on the frequency of autism in Slovenia would be lower than in the world. We estimated that the number of referrals for diagnostic treatment in Slovenia is still lower than in the world. At the same time, the regional coverage of diagnostics is weak. A very small number of clinics have the possibility of team treatment based on appropriate psychodiagnostics tools. As a result, there is also a small number of doctors of the appropriate specialty who provide a diagnosis based on appropriate team treatment.

We estimated that the gender ratio between men and women diagnosed with autism will be approximately the same as the ratio in the world (4,2).

Regarding the age range of the number of persons diagnosed with autism, we expected the highest number of persons in the age groups 0 - 19 years. Most children and adolescents diagnosed with autism are diagnosed in the Autism Clinic, which operates within the Department of Child Psychiatry at the University Hospital Ljubljana and at the Institute for Autism, Institute for Developmental Medicine, which as a private institution provides diagnostic treatment of children and adolescents in within the scope of services covered by The Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia. In general, referrals for diagnostic treatment are more frequent among children and adolescents, also due to the raising awareness of professionals in education. According to our estimates, the proportion of adults diagnosed with autism is expected to be lower. Diagnostic treatment is currently poorly accessible to adults in the network of public services. In addition, diagnostic treatment in Slovenia has developed more in the last two decades, which means that we can probably expect only a slightly higher proportion of diagnosed persons with autism in the age group of 20 - 29 years (persons who were diagnosed with autism in childhood and are now of legal age). Regarding the number of persons diagnosed with autism by individual region, we expected a relatively even distribution.



Before starting the research, we asked for consent from the Commission for Ethical Assessment of the Appropriateness of the Research at the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia, which gave us consent to conduct the research. Then we developed a web application. We also created a logo for it, for which we previously applied for use and received



approval. The application was sent to the e-mail addresses of 634 outpatient clinics or doctors of relevant specialties (developmental, child/pediatric, paedo-psychiatric, psychiatric and general outpatient clinics). Primarily, 3 outpatient clinics that treat the most people with autism in Slovenia were invited to participate: the Autism Outpatient Clinic of the Pediatric Clinic Ljubljana, the Autism Institute Ljubljana and the Private Pedopsychiatric Outpatient Clinic Nataša Potočnik Dajčman dr. med., spec. psych..

The key findings of the research would make a significant contribution:

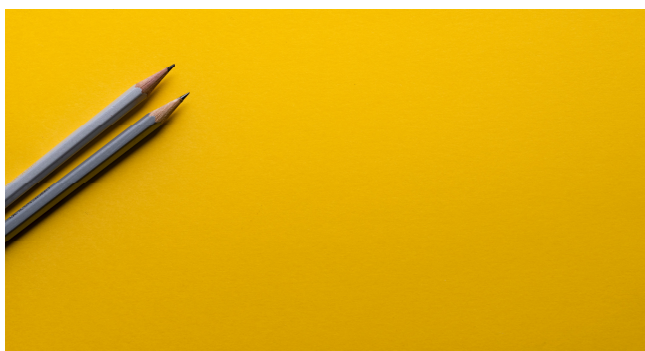
- to establish a model of support for professional workers in education
- to activities in education of persons with autism throughout their entire life span
- to professional training and support in the employment of persons with autism
- to raise awareness about autism - decision-makers, financiers, experts and employers
- to strengthen general awareness of autism in society
- to inform decision-makers about the needs of people with autism
- to establish effective cooperation between different government sectors
- to the implementation of an inclusive approach to the education and employment of persons with autism
- a longitudinal register of the prevalence of autism would be developed and obtained

Institute for Autism Ljubljana and Private Pedopsychiatric Clinic Nataša Potočnik Dajčman dr. med., spec. psych. decided to participate, but the Autism Outpatient Clinic of the Pediatric Clinic Ljubljana did not, just as the other outpatient clinics did not decide to participate in the research either.

The data collected as part of the research did not represent a representative sample of those given diagnoses of autism in Slovenia and we couldn't draw relevant conclusions based on them regarding the frequency of autism in Slovenia according to age, gender, and region of residence.

We informed the three key ministries (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Health) and the Employment service of Slovenia about the results of the research.

ASSESSMENT OF THE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL EDUCATION AND GOOD PRACTICE EXCHANGE AMONG TEACHERS AND PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN EDUCATION



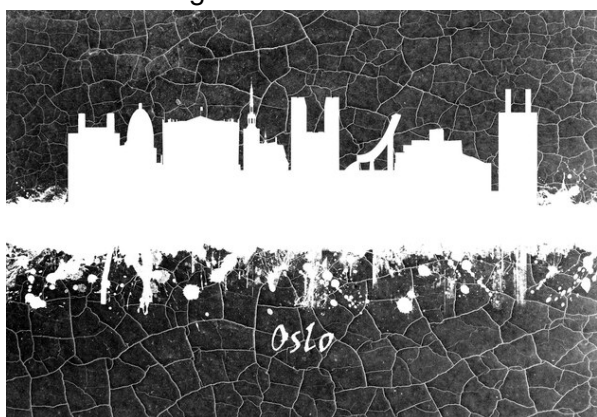
The work package took place in two parts, namely we

- a. first check the needs of employees in education for more successful teaching of people with autism,
- b. furthermore, we carried out training of multipliers to ensure training of employees in education with the aim of improving the competence of teachers.

In the first part, we conducted a survey to review the current situation in the field of teaching people with autism. We created an online questionnaire intended for all employees in education and sent it to various addresses of the project partners. 1516 people, employed at various levels of education -

pre-school education, primary school education, secondary school education, adult education, post-secondary professional education, higher education, and music education, responded. Professional workers and managerial staff participated mostly, while technical and administrative staff participated in a smaller proportion. The respondents were employed in institutions located in all Slovenian regions, therefore, we were able to generalize the obtained data to the whole of Slovenia.

The research participants made a significant contribution to clarifying the situation regarding the additional skills they need for teaching and working with people with autism. The vast majority expressed the need for further education on the topic of autism. Based on information on transitional skills and highlighted areas where respondents highlighted the need for additional skills, we prepared sets of lectures and consultations for individual target groups. They took place partly live and partly online according to the answers obtained.



In the second part, we exchanged good practices and experiences with the SPISS partner from Norway, in September 2022 we made a study visit to their organization and others with which our Norwegian partner cooperates. Also, the Norwegian partner made a study visit to Slovenia in March 2024 and saw our good practices in various organizations where our Slovenian partners work. Also, on March 7, 2024, colleagues from Norway lectured at a full-day training session, which we organized in the SMELT hall.

In the following, we carried out the training of multipliers - mutual online learning, which was carried out by the Norwegian partner SPISS for the project partners. In the months of November and December 2022, he prepared eight online lectures for us and presented the following contents:

- career guidance
- pathological demand avoidance (PDA)
- successful transitions procedures between different levels of education
- cooperation with parents
- IQ and reality
- inclusive education and employment
- gender identity
- refusal behavior

The participants gained new knowledge in individual fields.

MODEL OF SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE IN THE FIELD OF AUTISM



In this part of the project, we developed new learning approaches for teaching and employing people with autism and thus developed an education model for employees in education. With it, we wanted to improve the conditions of education (and employment) of persons with autism, with an emphasis on skills and competen-



ces for work and life, for the acquisition of better social competences and self-initiative, as well as transversal skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, creativity and initiative of persons with autism, which can only be achieved with better competences of employees in education for successfully teaching people with autism. We designed the model in accordance with the answers received in the survey about the needs of employees in education for additional knowledge in the field of autism, partly also based on our previous experience in the field of additional professional education of employees in education in the field of autism, and partly with the support of our Norwegian partner SPISS.

Lectures was held for different target groups:

- principals,
- employed in preschool education,
- employed in primary school education,
- employed in music education,
- employed in secondary education and student dormitories,
- employed in post-secondary professional and higher education.

And on several levels:

- basic level: education to acquire basic skills and competences for teaching for the 21st century in formal education of persons with autism;
- advanced level: training to acquire in-depth skills and competences for teaching for the 21st century in formal education of persons with autism;
- counseling for employees: online counseling for employees in education according to selected topics, which are selected according to individual target groups;
- counseling in practice: we tested the applicability of this model in practice (multipliers provided support in organizations of education to interested employees who have previously attended our lectures and trained them in the inclusion of children and adolescents with autism so that they can also pass on their in-depth knowledge other employees in this organization (we included 14 educational organizations).

In the period from August 2023 to March 2024, we held 35 lectures. They were carried out both by experts participating in the project and by external lecturers.



In this part of the project, we also prepared a manual for employees in education and for employers, which will be permanently available on the website of the Association of Non-Governmental Organizations for Autism of Slovenia and permanently accessible to the general public even after the completion of the project.

The manual:

- a. provide permanent information and recommendations for teaching, training and employment of persons with autism

- b. contain theoretical starting points and practical experiences for everyone who meets people with autism (professional workers in education, employers, employees of the Employment service of Slovenia and others)
- c. help employees in education and others with information for successful teaching, training, and work with people with autism
- d. offer support for the placement of the new program and new teaching practices.

The manual was created in cooperation between the consortium partners: Association of Non-Governmental Organizations for Autism of Slovenia, Kozara Primary School and Šentprima. We printed it in 1000 copies and publish it as an e-book.



On 30 May 2023, the Association of Non-Governmental Organizations for Autism of Slovenia together with partners in the VISAVIS project held a Round Table.

We presented:

- an application for managing the number of persons diagnosed with autism with the aim of establishing the register of persons with autism.
- review of the state of needs for knowledge and competences of employees in education for teaching people with autism.
- an overview of the needs of employers in the employment of persons with autism.

We organized the event online, it was attended by 95 participants.

On March 7, 2024, during the Norwegian partner's study visit, we conducted a full-day training for professionals entitled Model of support for employees in education and training - examples of good practice. Experts from the Norwegian partner SPISS gave lectures on the following topics:

- Refusal behavior (Steinar Skomedal),
- Girls with ASD + Early signs of ASD (Nine Jentoft Traeland),
- IQ scores and reality (Torill Fjaeran – Granum),
- Use of force and coercion (Silje Gislefoss Netland).

239 participants took part in the training.

MODEL OF SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE IN THE FIELD OF AUTISM FOR EMPLOYERS IN SLOVENIA



In this part of the project, we focused on education, training for a suitable profession and subsequent employment, and developed a model of effective support for employers in the employment of persons with autism with the aim of employing a greater number of persons with autism.

In the first part, we presented an overview of the state of employment of persons with autism. 69 employers participated in the research from 2021

(Bratuš Albreht Ksenija (2021): Employment of people with autism: employers' perspective, master's thesis).

Findings: employers involved in the research:

- they have insufficient knowledge in the field of employment of persons with autism
- have attitudes towards people with autism that are not necessarily realistic.
- they need more knowledge in the field of employment of persons with autism.
- they are not ready to employ people with autism.
- who employ persons with the status of disabled, are no more inclined to employ persons with autism.
- they gained most of their knowledge about people with autism from the media

The education of employers in the field of job adaptations and specifics in the employment of persons with autism is of vital importance.

In Slovenia, there is no education for employers that would focus on informing and raising awareness about the benefits and needs of people with autism, as a result, there is a need in Slovenia to raise awareness and develop the skills of HR professionals and others who manage recruitment processes and manage employees in the workplace. This would empower employers to embrace neurodiversity and tap into the untapped potential of people with autism.

In the second part, we prepared an online questionnaire, with which we wanted to investigate the opinions, attitudes, needs, knowledge, and willingness of employers to employ people with autism. 93 different organizations responded to the questionnaire (of which 14 have the status of a disability or social enterprise or employment center). After completing the quantitative part of the research, we conducted in-depth interviews (live or online) with ten organizations that expressed their willingness to participate.

Research findings showed that

- most participating organizations do not have the status of Companies for people with disabilities or an employment center or a social enterprise (82%)
- most participating organizations have no experience with recruitment or job training of persons with autism (75% or 85% of normal companies).



In the case of organizations with the status of Companies for people with disabilities and social enterprises or of the employment center, 71% of organizations have experience with recruitment or job training of persons with autism. Almost half of all (49% and 58% of ordinary companies) participating organizations do not know the specifics of employing people with autism; 15% know these specifics very well. In the case of organizations with the status of Companies for people with disabilities and social enterprises or the employment center has much more information and knowledge. Most participating organizations do not have any knowledge or information about the employment of persons with autism (38% or 45% of ordinary companies); and those who have them, to the greatest extent obtained them from education (21%).

Organizations with the status of Companies for people with disabilities and social enterprises or of the employment center are obtained the most information based on the experience of other employers who employ persons with autism (29%), from own experience (21%) and the same amount from education. The vast majority of respondents (86%) believed that people with autism are employable, the rest answered, "I don't know". None of the respondents thought that people with autism are not employable.

Participating organizations are the main reasons why they would NOT want to employ a person with autism, stated:

- inadequate workplace and working environment
- lack of skills for working with people with autism
- ignorance of the specifics of people with autism
- people with autism need too many adaptations, help and support
- prejudice and stigma in the work environment
- specifics of people with autism
- reduced working capacity and efficiency of persons with autism

The main reasons why they WOULD want to hire a person with autism

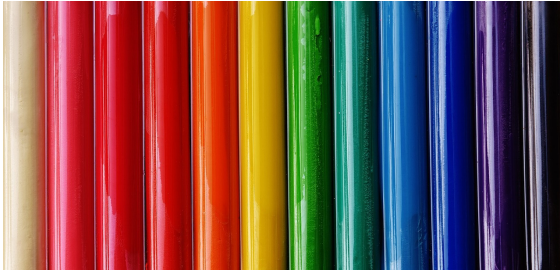
- respect for diversity and equal opportunities
- employment based on skills and knowledge, regardless of diagnosis
- specifics of people with autism

Based on the obtained data, opinions, views, demonstrated interest and exposed needs, we concluded that employers in the Slovenian area urgently need a model of support and assistance in the field of autism, which will be based on information, awareness, counseling, and education about:

- specifics of the inclusion of persons with autism in training and employment
- specific adjustments to the workplace and working environment for people with autism
- formal introduction of new colleagues to work and education
- creating a mentoring scheme and implementing mentoring
- legislation and state financial incentives in the employment of persons with autism
- and constant support from an external expert or a support team that will provide support, help and guidance to a person with autism, colleagues and management, and cooperate with relatives and everyone else relevant organizations and individuals.

For this purpose, we prepared a one-day seminar, which we conducted live in Ljubljana and online. It was intended for employers, employees of the Employment service of Slovenia and employees of University for Adult Education. A total of 105 participants took part of the seminar.

EMPLOYMENT AND EVALUATION



In the last phase of the project, we tested whether the model of support and assistance to employers for the successful employment of people with autism, which we developed in the previous phases of the project, is successful or not, where it needs changes, corrections or additions, which we meaningfully included in the preparation of the

manual, which was created throughout the entire period of the project.

We agreed to employ one young person with autism in the company of our project partner MIK d.o.o. Celje.

Zavod Šentprima carried out the following activities before employing a person with autism:

- a visit to the workplace was carried out to get to know the new working environment and agree on appropriate adjustments
- we met and talked with the management, the HR department, the job candidate, the head of the department where the candidate was employed and other close colleagues from the department
- we educated the employer and familiarized him with the specifics of the first job interview for a person with autism
- we informed the HR department of the employer about the legislative framework of employment of persons with autism (quota system, disabled status according to the Employment Rehabilitation Act)
- together with the company MIK d.o.o. we selected a suitable mentor, who was, together with other colleagues, involved in education for dealing with the specifics of autism at workplace
- support counseling services provided by project professionals to the employer, mentor, and employed persons with autism were implemented throughout the employment period. Professional workers carried out monitoring at the workplace and offered consulting services and education also for close and wider colleagues of a person with autism.

Contents of training and counseling for employers:

- Informing and advising the employer/direct work environment about dealing with the specific needs of an employee with autism
- Advising the employer and the work environment on the most appropriate methods of learning for the employee when changing jobs
- Education and advice to the employer about the specifics of autism and teamwork, roles in the team, the role of a mentor, adjustments to the workplace and work environment, the legislative framework, dealing with diversity in the work team
- Counseling on the principles of behavior modification (management of behavioral problems...)

- Consulting on methods for managing specific deficits and creating compensatory strategies, on methods, techniques and strategies of systematic coaching
- Familiarizing the work environment with the principles of positive feedback and error correction strategies
- Education of the employer about the specifics of autism and teamwork

COMMUNICATION



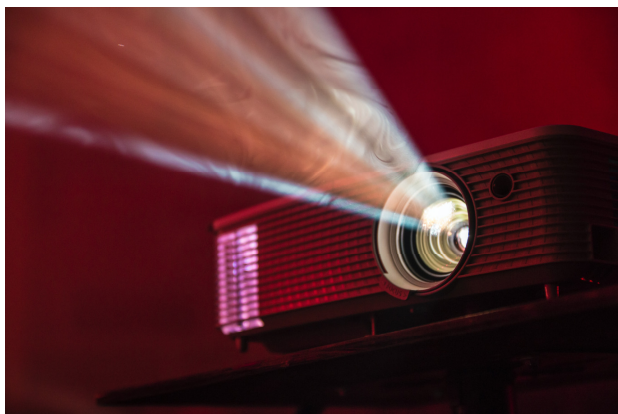
In this work package, we ensured that the target groups were informed about the progress and results of the project, and we informed the public about information regarding the co-financing of the project. At the same time, we raised awareness and informed about the possibilities of active action and motivated stakeholders, about the goals of financial mechanisms and bilateral cooperation with entities from Norway, and about the implementation, achievements, and impact of

financial mechanism support for the project.

For this purpose, we created the project website www.visavis.si, where we presented the project and the achieved results. We also created the FB page VIS A VIS of the Autism Association <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100085130336912>, where we published current events.

We prepared a Communication Plan, in which we defined

- objectives and target groups, including relevant stakeholders at national, regional and/or local level and the public
- the strategy and content of information and communication measures, including activities, tools for communicating with the public and the relevant time frame
- information activities/events that inform the public about the progress, achievements, and results of the project
- administrative bodies responsible for the implementation of information and communication measures of the VIS A VIS project
- an evaluation plan for information and communication measures regarding the achievement of greater visibility and public awareness of the project and financial mechanisms, their goals and impact, and the role of the donor country Norway



In March 2023, we participated in the international conference "It's about people" organized by our project partner Alma Mater Europaea, where we presented the results of our three studies in the field of the frequency of autism in Slovenia, in the field of the needs of employees in education for additional knowledge and competences in teaching of persons with autism and in the field of employment of persons with autism.

As part of the project, a professional article was also prepared, which was submitted for publication in one of the professional magazines of the Institute of Education of the Republic of Slovenia. The article summarizes the main activities of the project and their results. It presents in more detail the developed model of support for employees in education and employment, as well as guidelines for its further implementation.

On April 15, 2024, we organized the Closing Conference. We presented the project partners, our roles in the project and project achievements. We focused on the field of work integration of people with autism, listened to experiences and good practices. Through a video connection, we connected with Olav from Oslo, a person with autism, and we also listened to Luka, who, under the auspices of the VIS A VIS project, got a pilot job at the company MIK Celje, and the director of the company MIK Celje, who spoke about the employment experience of persons with autism.

In the following, we presented to the participants the Manual for working with people with autism from pre-school education to employment, which brings a wealth of quality and useful knowledge, strategies, and tools for working with people with autism.

In the last part, we listened to a lecture on Unconscious Bias.

We prepared a bulletin that was given to all participants of the Closing Conference.

Prepared by
Patricija Lovišček
professional project worker