

WIN

Workplace Inclusion: Neurodiversity

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE - Summary

Šentprima & partners

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INTRODUCTION

Project **WIN** (Workplace Inclusion: Neurodiversity) brings together insights from six European countries – Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and Slovenia – to map the landscape of neurodiversity inclusion in education, training, and employment. Moreover, based on all the data collected, we will develop an educational program and mentoring scheme for employers within the framework of the WIN project.

Drawing on national reports and stakeholder feedback, this **Best Practice Guide** highlights **positive developments, persistent challenges**, and **concrete examples of good practice** of fostering inclusive environments for neurodiverse individuals. While there is a growing awareness and commitment to supporting this population, substantial differences exist in policies, societal understanding, and the practical implementation of inclusive measures.

This handbook aims to provide a valuable resource for educators, employers, managers, HR professionals, policymakers, neurodiverse individuals, their families, and support organizations seeking to understand the landscape and promote greater equity and opportunity. This guide includes clear, actionable information on how to create more inclusive environments where neurodiverse individuals can thrive.

NATIONAL SITUATION REGARDING THE EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT OF NEURODIVERSE PERSONS

Across the partner countries involved, efforts have been made to improve education, training, and employment opportunities for neurodiverse individuals. However, significant differences exist in policies, societal awareness, and implementation.

Cyprus shows progress but lacks official data on neurodiversity prevalence beyond ASD. A national ASD screening program is being implemented. ASD prevalence in a study of students aged 5-12 was around 2%, with a 4:1 male-to-female ratio (Kilili-Lesta, Giannakou, & Voniati, 2025). In 2022, 1,190 minors and 228 adults were diagnosed with ASD (Petinou, Vogindroukas, & Christopoulou, 2024). Education involves special schools, support services, and inclusive mainstream models. ICT is integrated into education, but Greek-language resources are limited.

Adult Education Centres are accessible by all, including neurodiverse populations. Employment data for neurodiverse individuals is lacking, but general employment rates are provided. Barriers include stigma and lack of employer awareness. Initiatives to increase awareness exist. Key challenges are limited awareness, educational barriers, and employment obstacles.

Greece faces significant gaps in resources and accessibility in education for neurodiverse individuals, with a lack of trained teachers and infrastructure. In recent years though, many teachers invest in postgraduate education and qualifications in programs relevant to special education, with hope to gain a competitive advantage and enter the job market. Inclusive education is gaining traction, but mainstream schools often lack specialized support. Vocational training is underdeveloped, and employment opportunities are limited by discrimination and inflexible environments. A recent law provides incentives for hiring neurodiverse individuals. Greece has a high NEET rate, especially for those with disabilities. Societal awareness is low, with limited public campaigns. NGOs like Autism Speaks Greece and ARGO are involved in promoting awareness.

Ireland estimates that 4% of the population is neurodiverse, encompassing various conditions (Public Affairs Ireland, n.d.). Neurodiversity Ireland provides educational videos and advocates for more support. Auticon offers neurodiversity e-learning for workplaces. A survey in The Irish Times (2024) indicated that one-quarter of over-18s identify as neurodivergent, but only half have a diagnosis, and many feel their workplace is not inclusive.

Italy emphasizes inclusive education with legislation (Law 104/1992) guaranteeing the rights of individuals with disabilities to education and training. Support includes specialized staff and individualized plans. Employment rates are not well-documented, but initiatives like the [DXC Dandelion Program](#) and [Specialisterne](#) aim to improve outcomes in the IT sector. ASD prevalence was estimated at 13.4 per 1,000 children aged 7–9 (Scattoni et.al., 2023). Challenges include limited specialized services and societal stigma. Awareness is growing through public initiatives.

Poland neurodivergent individuals face significant challenges in education and employment, with a notably lower employment rate. Around 85% are estimated to be unemployed or underemployed globally, likely reflecting the situation in Poland (Autism-Europe, 2023). Only about 2% of autistic individuals are professionally employed (Wiater, & Karcz-Ryndak, 2024). Barriers include limited systematic support in education and a lack of teacher awareness. Awareness is developing mainly in the business sector through initiatives like the [Neurodiversity Center of Excellence at EY Poland](#).

There is a need for broader societal understanding and adaptation of educational conditions to individual needs. Support for parents is also crucial. Neurodiversity is often viewed through a clinical lens.

Slovenia lacks specific employment data for neurodiverse individuals. Research indicates employment challenges due to sensory sensitivities and communication barriers. The education system has inclusive measures, categorizing children with special needs, including ASD, and providing tailored programs. Early intervention is emphasized. However, the system can remain segregated. Professionals observe that individuals with autism need clear communication, structured environments, and predictable routines in the workplace. Workplaces often lack awareness and resources. The [VIS A VIS project](#) highlighted gaps in information, awareness, education, training, and support for employing individuals with autism. Employers show interest in gaining knowledge and support but often lack experience and are unaware of state subsidies. A tailored support model for employers is needed, focusing on information, workplace adaptations, onboarding, mentoring, and financial incentives.

Synthesis of Comparisons Between Countries:

- **Growing Awareness but Persistent Stigma:** There is a general trend of increasing awareness of neurodiversity across partner countries. However, societal stigma and misconceptions remain significant barriers to inclusion in education, training, and employment. Individuals may hesitate to disclose their neurodiversity due to fear of discrimination.
- **Data Gaps:** A significant challenge across multiple countries, particularly Cyprus and Slovenia, is the lack of comprehensive data and registries – particularly outside autism – specifically tracking neurodiverse individuals in education, training, and employment. This lack of data hinders the development of targeted and effective policies and interventions.
- **Education System Adaptations:** All countries acknowledge the importance of inclusive education for neurodiverse students. Efforts are being made to integrate these students into mainstream schools with varying degrees of support, such as resource rooms and individualized education plans. However, challenges persist in providing adequate resources, trained teachers, and truly inclusive environments. Poland and Slovenia, for instance, still see segregation in specialized settings. The need to adapt teaching methods and curricula to diverse learning needs is highlighted.

- **Underdeveloped Vocational Training:** Vocational training tailored to the specific needs of neurodiverse individuals is generally underdeveloped across the reviewed countries. This lack of specialized pathways limits the transition from education to meaningful employment.
- **Employment Barriers and Low Participation:** Neurodiverse individuals face significant barriers in the labour market, leading to high rates of unemployment and underemployment. These barriers include stigma, lack of employer awareness, inflexible work environments, and insufficient support structures like mentoring and job coaching.
- **Emerging Initiatives and Best Practices:** Despite the challenges, positive initiatives are emerging. These include national screening programs (Cyprus), legislation promoting inclusive hiring (Cyprus, Greece, Slovenia), awareness campaigns and support organizations (Ireland, Greece, Italy, Slovenia), and specific employment programs targeting neurodiverse individuals (Italy, Poland, Slovenia). The recognition of the strengths that neurodiverse individuals can bring to the workplace is growing.
- **Need for Employer Engagement and Support:** Several countries emphasize the crucial role of employers in fostering inclusive workplaces. There is a recognized need to educate employers about neurodiversity, provide guidance on workplace accommodations, and offer support for integrating neurodiverse employees. Slovenia's VIS A VIS project provides a detailed example of the support employers require.
- **Importance of Early Intervention and Family Support:** The significance of early intervention for neurodiverse children and the need for support for their families are highlighted, particularly in Slovenia and Ireland.

While there is increasing recognition and some progress in supporting neurodiverse individuals across partner countries, significant gaps and challenges remain, particularly in data collection, educational inclusivity beyond mainstreaming, tailored vocational training, and creating truly inclusive employment opportunities. Addressing stigma and increasing awareness among educators, employers, and the general public are crucial for fostering a more inclusive society that values the diverse talents of neurodiverse individuals.

FOCUS GROUP

Stakeholders (neurodiverse individuals, employers, professionals, relatives) highlighted the following in focus groups:

Across partner countries, **neurodiverse individuals**, a heterogeneous group with diverse needs, **face significant challenges in accessing appropriate education, vocational training, and employment**. A **lack of awareness** and **understanding of neurodiversity among employers and educators** is a common barrier. Consequently, **tailored support, structured pathways from education to employment, and workplace adaptations are often inadequate or underdeveloped**. Issues like transportation and accessibility further compound these challenges. While some progress and initiatives exist in certain countries, there is a general consensus on the **urgent need for increased awareness, better support systems, and more inclusive practices** to improve the employability and integration of neurodiverse individuals.

A **common thread across all the countries is the identified lack of widespread awareness and understanding of neurodiversity among employers and educators**, which acts as a substantial barrier to inclusion. For instance, in **Cyprus**, employers generally exhibit low awareness, hindering employment opportunities. Similarly, in **Greece**, a lack of understanding is noted, particularly among older teachers, alongside societal stereotypes. **Ireland** presents a slightly different picture, with numerous initiatives aiming to build awareness from an early age, yet even there, HR professionals are reported to lack fundamental knowledge about autism. **Italy** also struggles with a lack of understanding in both workplaces and educational institutions. This knowledge gap is particularly pronounced in **Poland**, where professionals, including some medical practitioners, show scepticism and a lack of depth in their understanding of neurodiversity. Finally, **Slovenia** highlights the lack of understanding about autism as a primary obstacle affecting communication and the creation of suitable environments.

The development and implementation of **tailored education and vocational training** for neurodiverse individuals also varies considerably. **Cyprus** explicitly states that such specialized programs are significantly underdeveloped. While **Greece** has made progress with parallel support in education, the overall state support is considered insufficient. **Ireland** showcases a positive example with Aspire Ireland, a social enterprise providing work experience and training for autistic adults. In contrast, **Italy** reports inconsistent access to tailored support in education and underfunded vocational training programs.

Poland is identified as lagging behind other nations in this area, facing challenges in implementing sophisticated training and in addressing the tension between individual needs and group dynamics in higher education. **Slovenia** points out the lack of adequate support within mainstream education, unclear support systems in higher education, and unstructured educational materials.

The **transition from education to meaningful employment** is a critical challenge across all these countries. **Cyprus** emphasizes the urgent need for structured pathways and career guidance, which are currently inadequate. In **Greece**, concerns were raised about "fake-charity" in some enterprises and the need for genuine employment recognition beyond mandatory disability quotas. **Ireland** focuses on developing innovative recruitment processes to leverage the strengths of neurodiverse individuals. **Italy** notes the general difficulty in this transition. **Poland** reveals a significant gap in employment support. **Slovenia** reports a lack of diverse job opportunities beyond sheltered workshops and the need for better transition support between educational levels.

Regarding **workplace inclusion and accommodations**, the sources reveal varying levels of progress and understanding. **Cyprus** identifies workplace adaptations and accessibility as urgent practical needs. In **Greece**, the need for inclusive workspaces and accommodations tailored to individual neurodivergent needs, similar to those for physical disabilities, was highlighted. **Ireland** underscores the importance of understanding the limitations faced by autistic individuals in neurotypical environments to provide reasonable accommodations, while also noting that disability policies can inadvertently create barriers. **Italy** reports limited access to personalized working accommodations. **Poland** emphasizes the need to appropriately address neurodiversity in workplaces to utilize talents without causing favouritism or isolation, and suggests formal support structures like employee groups. **Slovenia** points to the detrimental effects of unstructured workplaces and sensory sensitivities, advocating for simple, individualized adjustments and the role of a dedicated mentor.

The influence and effectiveness of **government policies and support** also differ. While **Cyprus** has state policies with economic incentives, their leverage needs improvement through employer education. **Greece** offers some state support, but it's deemed insufficient, and mandatory employment quotas exist. **Ireland's** disability policies are noted as potentially creating structural barriers. **Italy** has education policies, but their implementation is inconsistent, and employment support is lacking. **Poland** is seen as significantly lagging in overall support, questioning the link between neurodiversity and disability status and the fundamental infrastructure needed.

Finally, certain countries highlighted **specific initiatives and challenges**. **Ireland** showcases positive work by Neurodiversity Ireland and Aspire Ireland but also notes the danger of focusing on the diagnosis rather than the individual and the need to distinguish between mental health and autism. **Greece** raised concerns about "fake-charity" initiatives. **Poland** faces scepticism from medical professionals and difficulties in balancing individual needs within group settings in higher education. **Slovenia** emphasizes the challenges individuals with autism face in self-advocacy and the potential for misinterpreting their needs. For all countries, the prevalence of autistic spectrum disorders with respect to neurodiversity initiatives might overshadow other types of neurodiversity.

In conclusion, the comparison reveals a **shared recognition of the importance of supporting neurodiverse individuals across partner countries, coupled with a pervasive lack of adequate awareness, tailored support systems, and inclusive practices**. While some countries have specific initiatives and have made certain advancements, there is a general consensus on the **urgent need for more comprehensive and individualized approaches to enhance the education, training, and ultimately, the meaningful employment of neurodiverse individuals**.

EXISTING NATIONAL LEGISLATION, POLICIES, STRATEGIES IN THE AREA OF EQUAL INCLUSION OF NEURODIVERSE PERSONS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Partner countries have implemented various national legislations, policies, and strategies to promote the equal inclusion of neurodiverse individuals in education, training, and employment. However, differences in approach, implementation, and effectiveness exist. A key similarity among most nations is their alignment with international frameworks, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which establishes principles of dignity, non-discrimination, full participation, and accessibility. Despite this common ground, differences emerge in policy execution.

Cyprus prioritizes the inclusion of neurodiverse students in mainstream schools and has established special education units and various national plans and committees addressing the needs of persons with disabilities, including neurodiverse individuals. Teacher training and advocacy are also emphasized. In employment, there are quotas in the public sector, but with limitations.

Greece introduced the Inclusive Employment Law 5053 of 2023, which includes tax incentives for employers, mandatory workplace adjustments, and training and awareness programs.

Ireland has several laws and policies promoting equal inclusion for people with disabilities, including the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 and the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015. Employers are required to make reasonable accommodations.

Italy has a long-standing commitment to inclusive education (Law 104/1992) and legislation mandating the employment of individuals with disabilities (Law 68/1999). In 2023, significant changes were introduced, including the establishment of a National Guarantor Authority for the rights of persons with disabilities.

Poland has a National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, primarily focusing on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Some typical conditions that are part of the term “neurodiversity” are classified as mental disorders in ICD-10, nevertheless no specific policies directly target neurodiverse individuals.

Slovenia promotes inclusion through the Social Inclusion of Disabled Persons Act (2019). Neurodiverse individuals have equal employment rights, but are not explicitly addressed in legislation concerning the employment of persons with disabilities. Various laws (Act on Employment Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons, 2006) provide support, including employment rehabilitation and social services.

Synthesis of Comparisons Between Countries:

- Approach to Legislation and International Conventions:** All partner countries have expressed commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities by aligning with international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the EU Disability Strategy 2021–2030.
- Inclusion in Education:** Cyprus and Italy emphasize the integration of students with disabilities into mainstream schools. Cyprus actively prioritizes inclusion in regular classrooms over special schools. Poland has a national strategy focusing on educational accommodations primarily for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Ireland also aims for inclusive education through the EPSEN Act.
- Promoting Employment:** Several countries have specific legislation to promote the employment of persons with disabilities. Italy has Law 68/1999 which mandates employment quotas for persons with disabilities, and Slovenia has the Employment Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act. Greece recently introduced the Inclusive Employment Law 5053/2023 with tax incentives and mandatory workplace adjustments. Cyprus reserves posts in the public sector, but with limitations regarding formal education. Poland focuses on mental health legislation rather than specific employment policies for neurodiverse individuals.
- Definition and Scope of Neurodiversity:** Approaches to defining and addressing neurodiversity vary. Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Slovenia appear to have a broader view of neurodiversity within the context of disability. Poland's national strategy is explicitly limited to Autism Spectrum Disorder. Slovenian legislation on the employment of persons with disabilities does not explicitly address neurodiverse individuals.
- Support Services and Action Plans:** Cyprus has established several national committees and action plans specifically addressing individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism, as well as broader national disability action plans that include neurodiversity. Slovenia provides social services and employment support through various laws such as the Social Inclusion Act and Employment Rehabilitation law.

- **Financial and Practical Support:** Greece offers tax incentives for employers. Cyprus provides grants for hiring social assistants and financial assistance through the Guaranteed Minimum Income scheme. Ireland requires reasonable accommodations, including quiet spaces and assistive software. Slovenia offers subsidies and support services for employers and employees with disabilities.

Areas for Improvement: Several countries acknowledge areas needing improvement. Cyprus highlights the need for expanded early intervention, increased funding, better accessibility, teacher collaboration, parent involvement, more effective Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and post-secondary support. Italy notes the need to increase awareness, ensure consistent teacher training, and provide targeted employment support. Slovenia also considers that further steps are needed to fully address the unique challenges of neurodiverse individuals in the workplace. Strengthening enforcement, monitoring, and employer guidance could bring about considerable results.

In conclusion, the partner countries demonstrate a general commitment to the inclusion of neurodiverse individuals through various legislative measures, policies, and strategic frameworks. Many of these efforts are aligned with the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Cyprus and Italy particularly emphasize inclusive education in mainstream settings, while Greece has recently introduced specific employment legislation with incentives and mandatory adjustments. Countries with stronger legislative backing, financial incentives, and structured employment programs, such as Italy and Slovenia, see better inclusion outcomes, while those still facing stigma and lack of policy specificity, such as Greece and Poland, require further refinement in their legal frameworks. Despite the progress, common areas for improvement across these countries include the need for enhanced early intervention, increased funding and resources, better accessibility and accommodations, improved teacher training and collaboration, and more comprehensive support extending beyond primary education into further education and employment. Broadening “disability” definitions to explicitly include neurodiversity would also be helpful to increase the reach of effective policies. Continued efforts and targeted strategies are crucial to ensure the effective implementation of inclusive practices and to fully realize the potential of neurodiverse individuals in education, training, and employment across these European countries.

FOCUS GROUP

Stakeholders (neurodiverse individuals, employers, professionals, relatives) highlighted the following in focus groups:

Cyprus: Participants highlighted the absence of specific legislation explicitly targeting neurodiverse individuals, who often fall under broader disability categories, potentially leading to their unique needs being inadequately addressed. They suggested adopting explicit measures tailored for neurodivergent conditions, including tax incentives for employers, structured regulations for workplace accommodations, and employer education. Key areas for improvement include explicit legislative recognition of neurodiversity, clearer guidelines and incentives for workplace support and accommodations, better financial incentives for employers, and greater cross-sectoral collaboration. Overall, there is a clear need for dedicated legislative initiatives, robust financial incentives, widespread employer training, and structured support systems.

Greece: The discussion revealed that while legislation generally protects people with recognized disabilities, there is a lack of awareness regarding non-visible disabilities and the need for individual needs recognition. Concerns were raised about the criteria for placing children in different educational settings and the effectiveness of current support systems for neurodivergent students. Participants shared examples of supportive and unsupportive approaches in universities and emphasized the lack of standardized procedures, especially in oral examinations. A consensus emerged on the need for patience, persistence, recognition, respect, understanding, and a well-structured toolkit for educators.

Ireland: Irish disability policies are perceived to create structural barriers that discourage people with disabilities from taking up employment if policymakers do not understand or intentionally ignore their limited capacities.

Italy: Italy has strong anti-discrimination laws (Law 68/99) promoting workplace inclusion of disabled individuals, including neurodiverse persons, and some organizations implement inclusive hiring strategies and accommodations. However, there is a need for stronger enforcement and monitoring, greater incentives for businesses, more structured vocational training pathways, and streamlined bureaucratic processes.

Slovenia: While there is a general consensus that existing legislation is good, its implementation faces significant challenges. Issues include varying interpretations of legislation, difficulties in accessing adult diagnostic services for autism, an inadequate assessment process for obtaining disability status, and increasingly strict criteria. In education, the practical implementation of support is lacking, with unclear structures and coordination. In employment, there is a need for more opportunities and for companies to prepare inclusive environments, as negative experiences are common. Other key issues include a lack of awareness, inconsistent funding and support, accessibility of legal documents, overly long rehabilitation programs, a lack of trust between employers and neurodiverse individuals, and a need for greater employer awareness and willingness to hire. Collaboration is emphasized as crucial.

Here is a synthesis of comparisons between the countries, highlighting similarities and differences:

- **Lack of Specific Neurodiversity Legislation:** Both Cyprus and Greece (indirectly through the discussion on non-visible disabilities) highlight a gap in specific legislation explicitly addressing the needs of neurodiverse individuals. In Cyprus and Slovenia, neurodiverse individuals often fall under broader disability categories.
- **Challenges in Implementing Existing Legislation:** Slovenia explicitly states that while legislation exists, its effective implementation is a significant challenge due to varying interpretations, inadequate assessment processes, and a lack of coordination. Similarly, the discussions in Greece point to inconsistencies and a reliance on individual educators' judgment, suggesting implementation gaps. While Italy has strong laws, the need for stronger enforcement and monitoring indicates implementation challenges there as well.
- **Need for Workplace Accommodations and Support:** Cyprus explicitly identifies a substantial gap in guidelines and incentives for workplace adaptations. The experience shared in Greece about a student needing decompression time after office work also points to the need for understanding and accommodating individual needs in the workplace. Slovenia notes that companies need preparation to create inclusive environments to avoid negative experiences for neurodiverse employees.
- **Importance of Financial Incentives for Employers:** Cyprus specifically mentions the potential benefit of tax incentives for employers who hire neurodiverse individuals and identifies a need for clearer financial incentives. Italy also suggests a need for greater incentives for businesses to employ neurodiverse individuals.

- **Employer Awareness and Training:** Cyprus emphasizes the need for regular training for employers and staff to foster understanding. Slovenia highlights the lack of knowledge and fear among employers as a barrier to hiring neurodiverse individuals and the need for greater awareness.
- **Education System Inclusivity:** Greece raises concerns about the criteria for placing students in different educational settings and the effectiveness of support. The contrast between the general education system in Greece and the youth schools in Denmark suggests potential models for more inclusive educational approaches for neurodivergent students. The personal experience in Greece highlights the variability in support received by neurodivergent students in higher education. Slovenia also notes issues with the practical implementation of support in education and a lack of support at the university level. In contrast, Cyprus places students in special schools only for severe disabilities.
- **Diagnostic and Assessment Challenges:** Slovenia explicitly details difficulties in accessing diagnostic services for adults with autism. The discussion in Greece about the recognition of non-visible disabilities also touches upon assessment challenges.
- **Cross-sectoral Collaboration:** Cyprus emphasizes the necessity for greater collaboration between educational institutions, employers, vocational training centres, and NGOs. Slovenia also highlights the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and communication.
- **Systemic Barriers:** Ireland suggests that disability policies themselves can create structural barriers to employment if the capacities of people with disabilities are not understood. The example from Greece of a person with quadriplegia being required to physically sign documents points to systemic insensitivity.

While all partner countries have some level of legislation and awareness concerning the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, including neurodiverse persons, there are **significant and common challenges in effectively ensuring their equal inclusion in education, training, and employment**. Key issues highlighted across the countries include a **lack of specific legislation explicitly addressing the unique needs of neurodiverse individuals**, leading to their needs being potentially overlooked within broader disability frameworks. Furthermore, even when legislation exists, **challenges in its practical implementation** are prevalent, stemming from issues such as inconsistent interpretation, inadequate assessment processes, and a lack of coordination between relevant entities.

The need for **improved workplace accommodations, financial incentives for employers, and enhanced employer awareness and training** is consistently emphasized as crucial for promoting employment opportunities for neurodiverse individuals. General public awareness could also be considered as an additional pressure point for workplace inclusion. In education, concerns exist regarding the **effectiveness of current support systems, the criteria for educational placement, and the variability in support received**, particularly in higher education. Finally, the importance of **cross-sectoral collaboration** between educational institutions, employers, and support organizations is underscored as a vital element for creating more inclusive pathways for neurodiverse individuals. Ultimately, they suggest a **need for more tailored, explicit, and effectively implemented policies and practices**, coupled with a shift in societal attitudes and increased awareness to truly foster the equal inclusion of neurodiverse individuals.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR NEURODIVERSE PERSONS AND EMPLOYERS IN THE FIELD OF EQUAL INCLUSION IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Support services for neurodiverse individuals and their employers vary significantly across European countries, with both similarities and differences in approach. A common theme is that most countries offer a combination of public, private, and NGO-led initiatives to support neurodiverse individuals in education, vocational training, and employment. However, these services often face challenges related to accessibility, funding, and societal awareness.

Cyprus: Offers a range of services through public institutions (primarily the education system and the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities), NGOs, and private initiatives. Key areas include early intervention and diagnostic services, educational inclusion through mainstream and special schools, subsidies and therapy support, vocational training and rehabilitation programs, and employment support including incentive schemes and sheltered workshops. Challenges include limited capacity, funding constraints, and geographic disparities in service availability.

Greece: The focus is primarily on Autism Speaks Greece, an NGO that provides awareness and education campaigns, training programs for professionals and families, family support, advocacy for policy changes, research initiatives, and community engagement events. Their practical impact includes improving the quality of life for individuals with autism and building inclusive communities.

Ireland: There are rich resources offering useful tips for employers and families regarding neurodiversity in the workplace, such as the publication by the [National Council for Special Education on inclusive education](#), as well as the information shared by [Eversheds Sutherland](#).

Italy: Support services are delivered by both public and private organizations. Public schools offer inclusive education with specialized teachers and individualized education plans. Public employment centres assess work skills to facilitate job placements under Law 68/1999. Private initiatives like [Specialisterne](#) and the [DXC Dandelion Program](#) focus on assessing and training neurodiverse individuals, particularly in IT, and collaborating with businesses to create inclusive work environments. Areas for improvement include increased awareness and training for employers and educators, consistent access to services across regions, and sustained funding.

Poland: NGOs play a crucial role. [Fundacja JiM](#) provides diagnosis and therapy centers for autism and ADHD, specialized educational facilities, awareness campaigns ("Jestem neuroróżnorodn"), parent support and other support groups, resource centres, professional training, and public advocacy. [Fundacja Atypika](#) focuses on public awareness campaigns, educational programs (including postgraduate courses with [Uniwersytet SWPS](#)), academic research, innovative projects, professional training, eLearning courses, and resource centres hosting workshops and seminars.

Slovenia: Employment rehabilitation is regulated by the Employment Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities Act ([ZZRZI](#)). This law grants the right to specific rehabilitation services outlined in an individual rehabilitation plan, aiming to prepare individuals for suitable work and enable them to secure and retain employment. When referred by the Employment Service of Slovenia, these services are primarily funded by the Ministry of Labour. Key provisions include a comprehensive assessment of work abilities by a multidisciplinary team and individualized plans. Supported employment with wage subsidies for employers, and sheltered employment in employment centres, are available. Social inclusion programs support those deemed unemployable after rehabilitation. The Disability Fund provides subsidies to encourage the employment of people with disabilities. Areas for improvement include comprehensive career path planning, better workplace preparation, targeted support for

employers, expanded job coaching, increased awareness among employers, and better collaboration between institutions and employers.

Synthesis of Comparisons Between Countries:

- Government Involvement:** Most countries demonstrate government involvement in providing support services, particularly in education and through dedicated departments or legislation (Cyprus's Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, Italy's public schools and employment centers under Law 68/1999, Slovenia's ZZRZI and Employment Service, and Poland's collaboration with NGOs). However, the extent and nature of direct public provision versus support for NGOs and private initiatives vary. Cyprus relies heavily on its education system, while Poland sees a strong role for NGOs.
- Early Intervention:** Cyprus explicitly highlights early intervention services for children with neurodevelopmental disorders, involving public services (Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education) and NGOs. While other countries emphasize educational inclusion, specific details on early intervention programs are less exposed.
- Educational Inclusion:** Inclusive education is a stated goal in several countries (Cyprus, Italy). Special schools and tailored programs are also mentioned in Cyprus. Poland has NGOs providing specialized educational facilities. Ireland's [NCSE](#) publication focuses on inclusive education.
- Vocational Training and Employment Support:** All countries (except Greece, where the focus is on autism-specific support) have initiatives aimed at vocational training and employment. Cyprus has government schemes, special school programs, and NGO involvement. Italy has public employment centres and private programs focused on IT skills. Poland has NGOs providing professional training. Slovenia has a comprehensive legal framework for employment rehabilitation, supported employment, and sheltered employment with financial incentives for employers.
- Role of NGOs and Private Sector:** NGOs and private organizations play a significant role in Cyprus and Slovenia (early intervention, therapy, vocational training, sheltered workshops), Greece (Autism Speaks Greece - awareness, support, advocacy), Italy (Specialisterne, DXC Dandelion Program - employment in IT), and particularly in Poland (Fundacja JiM and Fundacja Atypika offering a wide range of services).

- **Challenges and Areas for Improvement:** Common challenges include funding limitations (Cyprus, Italy), geographic disparities in service availability (Cyprus, Italy), the need for increased awareness and regular training for professionals (HR, line managers, and colleagues) and employers about neurodiverse strengths and needs (Italy, Slovenia), and the importance of better coordination and comprehensive support systems (Cyprus, Slovenia). Slovenia also notes the challenge of encouraging participation in rehabilitation programs and the desire for alternative pathways to access services without requiring formal disability status. Adapted hiring processes using task-based assessments, clear job descriptions, and advance sharing of interview formats can reduce the bias against neurodivergent candidates. Similarly, workplace adjustments that could be easily implemented include flexible hours, quiet spaces, structured routines, and the use of assistive technologies where needed. Onboarding plans, peer buddies, and regular check-ins are needed to ensure retention and growth for employees with neurodiversity. The need for regulatory improvements in sheltered workshops was also highlighted by Cyprus.

While all partner countries are working towards supporting neurodiverse individuals, they employ different approaches with varying levels of public and private sector involvement. Countries that prioritize employer incentives, structured vocational training, and public-private collaboration—such as Italy and Slovenia—show better outcomes. Meanwhile, those with fragmented support systems, inconsistent funding, and low employer engagement—such as Cyprus and Poland—require further policy refinement to achieve true equal inclusion in education, training, and employment. There's a shared recognition of the importance of inclusive education and employment, but challenges related to funding, accessibility, awareness, and coordination persist across several contexts.

FOCUS GROUP

Stakeholders (neurodiverse individuals, employers, professionals, relatives) highlighted the following in focus groups:

Cyprus is characterized by a lack of centrally coordinated support services and fragmented initiatives. While some support structures exist through NGOs offering protected employment and vocational rehabilitation, there's a recognized potential for the Human Resource Development Authority (ANAD) and OUC to provide tailored vocational training through specially designed lifelong programs. Financial subsidies from the Ministry of Labor are deemed insufficient. Good practices include protected workshops, public-private partnerships, and ANAD vocational training initiatives. Areas for improvement include better coordination, increased financial support, specialized training for professionals, improved accessibility, and broader awareness campaigns. Stakeholders emphasize the need for stronger governmental leadership.

In **Greece**, despite legislative advancements, full participation in employment remains a challenge. The Public Employment Service (DYPA) offers specialized services and subsidy programs for hiring individuals with disabilities. KEDASY supports students with disabilities but the criteria for recognizing neurodiversity as a "special group" are unclear.

Ireland has many support services primarily provided by charities and community groups, with some professional-led organizations having limited membership criteria.

Italy features a mix of public (INPS, job placement) and private (NGOs) support services, including mentoring and coaching. Financial support is often inadequate and inaccessible. There's a need for more specialized staff, expanded funding, national guidelines, and enhanced collaboration between NGOs and companies. Some universities offer dedicated neurodiversity support.

Local support availability in **Poland** seems to present a gap from international standards. While basic support exists, more advanced assistance is challenging. There are noteworthy initiatives such as specialized training by external experts, university Accessibility Centers, and organizations like the Atypika Foundation. Postgraduate studies focused on neurodiversity in the workplace are emerging. Key challenges include an insufficient number of qualified specialists and the lack of a comprehensive national system, while the debate on whether to integrate support with existing disability structures or create a separate system is ongoing.

Slovenia is characterized by a perceived absence of public support (except employment support), with NGOs being the primary providers. These NGOs face funding challenges and a lack of awareness among decision-makers. Areas for improvement include increased and more consistent funding, legislative changes, better transition support, adapted personal assistance programs, and improved training for mentors. Good practices include the empowerment provided by NGOs and the benefits of supported employment. Issues with mentor quality and a general call for respect are noted.

The landscape of support services for neurodiverse individuals across partner countries presents both similarities and distinct challenges. **A significant overarching theme is the frequent disconnect between the need for comprehensive and coordinated support and the reality on the ground.** For instance, while **Ireland** showcases a multitude of support services primarily driven by charities and community groups, countries like **Cyprus** and **Poland** explicitly point out a **lack of centrally coordinated strategies**, leading to fragmented initiatives. Similarly, **Slovenia** notes a perceived absence of public support in the field of awareness raising, relying heavily on NGOs.

The **role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)** appears crucial across most nations. In **Slovenia**, they are the **primary lifeline for support**, offering services in various aspects of life. NGOs also play a significant role in **Cyprus**, particularly in providing protected employment and vocational rehabilitation, and in **Italy**, where they offer mentoring, coaching, and employment programs. However, the reliance on NGOs often comes with **funding challenges and instability**, as highlighted in **Slovenia** and implicitly in other nations where financial support is deemed inadequate.

Financial support emerges as a critical area needing improvement across the board. While **Cyprus** and **Greece** have government subsidies aimed at incentivizing employers, these are often perceived as **insufficient** in covering the real costs of workplace adaptations and integration. **Italy** explicitly states that available funding is often inadequate and not easily accessible, and the funding challenges faced by NGOs in **Slovenia** further underscore this issue.

Regarding **training and awareness**, there's a recognized need for greater understanding of neurodiversity among both employers and professionals. **Cyprus** emphasizes the necessity of broadening employer awareness and providing specialized training. **Poland** echoes this, noting a gap compared to international standards and highlighting initiatives involving specialized training for recruiters. The emergence of academic programs in **Poland** and potential training initiatives through OUC/KEDMA in **Cyprus** indicate a growing awareness of this need.

In contrast, **Slovenia** points out that even some mentors lack sufficient understanding and sensitivity. Despite the challenges, **good practices and promising initiatives** exist. **Cyprus** highlights protected workshops, public-private partnerships, and ANAD training initiatives. The development of university accessibility centers in **Poland** and **Italy**, along with organizations like the Atypika Foundation in **Poland**, showcase positive steps. **Slovenia** identifies the empowerment provided by NGOs and the benefits of supported employment as valuable.

However, **key challenges persist**, often cutting across national borders. **Lack of coordination and systemic frameworks** are evident in Cyprus and Poland. The **unclear definition and recognition of neurodiversity** within existing disability support systems in Greece and Poland pose further hurdles. Moreover, the call for more substantial and consistent financial support resonates across multiple countries.

In conclusion, the support systems for neurodiverse individuals in Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and Slovenia are diverse and evolving. While some good practices and dedicated initiatives exist, there is a consistent need for more coordinated, adequately funded, and better-informed approaches. Many countries grapple with the challenge of moving beyond fragmented services towards comprehensive national strategies that truly promote equal inclusion in education, training, and employment for neurodiverse individuals.

NATIONAL SITUATION REGARDING EMPLOYMENT OF NEURODIVERSE PERSONS - GOOD PRACTICES OF EMPLOYERS IN THE FIELD OF INCLUSIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

The employment of neurodiverse individuals and good practices in fostering inclusive workplaces vary across partner countries, with both shared challenges and unique national approaches. A common feature across many nations is a growing recognition of the value neurodiverse individuals bring to the workforce, yet significant barriers remain in access to employment, employer awareness, and workplace accommodations.

In **Cyprus**, while the employment of neurodiverse persons is a pressing issue with limited publicly accessible examples of employer good practices, governmental policies mandate that public sector organizations reserve 10% of vacant posts for individuals with disabilities, leading to the employment of over 150 neurodivergent individuals. Initiatives from the private sector, NGOs, and parent associations, such as vocational placement services, and social enterprises such as confectionery workshops and neurodivergent-run cafés. Large corporations like Alpha Mega and McDonald's have also implemented social responsibility programs that include employing neurodivergent individuals and providing accommodations.

In **Greece**, companies like Sklavenitis supermarket chain and OTE Group are proactively creating inclusive hiring practices for neurodivergent individuals. Sklavenitis focuses on training staff, adjusting interview formats, providing sensory-friendly environments, and offering flexible work hours. OTE Group emphasizes skills-based assessments, mentorship programs, coaching, tailored training, flexible working hours, and remote work options.

Ireland is mentioned as having several publications that provide tips for employers to promote good practices for the neurodiverse.

In **Italy**, examples of good practices include social inclusion projects like [Numero Zero restaurant](#), where over 50% of the workforce is neurodivergent, and [PizzAut](#), which runs restaurants, provides training, and advocates for autistic individuals. The [NEW project](#), an Erasmus+ initiative with partners from multiple European countries including Italy and Ireland, aims to support SMEs in creating more inclusive working environments for neurodivergent people.

Poland showcases several companies actively building neuroinclusive work environments. Accenture Poland implements training programs, information campaigns, adapted recruitment processes, individual support plans, mentoring, adapted office spaces, and flexible working hours. [Auticon Poland](#) focuses on employing autistic individuals as technology consultants, adapting recruitment, providing job coaching, offering neurodiversity training, and designing autism-friendly offices. [SAP Poland](#) tailors interviews, partners with NGOs, provides dedicated job coaches and mentorship, customizes workspaces, offers flexible work arrangements, and conducts employee and leadership training. [EY Poland](#) has launched a Neurodiversity Center of Excellence, collaborates with organizations like [AsperIT](#), provides therapist support during recruitment, offers customized workspaces and job coaches, and has developed an e-book on neurodiversity.

In **Slovenia**, there's a growing recognition of the need for specialized guidance and support for neurodiverse individuals in employment rehabilitation services. A good practice is the "[Development and Implementation of the Transition of Youth with Special Needs to the Labor Market](#)" project, which provides career guidance during schooling. The employment rehabilitation system offers a comprehensive support framework for both employers and neurodiverse employees, including guidance, training, financial support for employers, and personalized assistance like job coaching and career counselling for individuals.

Synthesis of Comparisons Between Countries:

- Governmental Policies and Public Sector Initiatives:** Cyprus stands out for its mandatory quota in the public sector for individuals with disabilities, which has led to the employment of a significant number of neurodivergent individuals. Slovenia also mentions laws supporting children with special needs in their transition to the labour market. This suggests a foundational level of support driven by government in these regions.
- NGO and Social Enterprise Initiatives:** Several countries showcase strong involvement from NGOs and social enterprises. In Cyprus, examples include vocational placement services and social enterprises focused on vocational training in confectionery and hospitality. Italy presents Numero Zero and PizzAut as successful models for employing neurodivergent individuals in the restaurant industry, combined with advocacy and training. Poland highlights Auticon Poland as a social enterprise specializing in employing autistic individuals as tech consultants. These initiatives demonstrate a grassroots effort to create employment opportunities and foster inclusion.
- Large Corporation Social Responsibility:** Both Cyprus (Alpha Mega, McDonald's) and Greece (Sklavenitis, OTE Group) have examples of large corporations implementing CSR programs and inclusive hiring practices for neurodivergent individuals. Poland provides several detailed examples like Accenture, SAP, and EY, showcasing a more widespread adoption of neurodiversity initiatives within large corporations, including tailored recruitment, support programs, and workplace adjustments.

- **Focus on Recruitment and Onboarding:** Several countries emphasize adapting recruitment processes to be more inclusive. Sklavenitis and OTE in Greece have adjusted interview formats. Accenture, Auticon, SAP, and EY in Poland detail tailored interview formats and support during recruitment. EY Poland even provides therapist support during interviews.
- **Workplace Accommodations and Support:** Providing a supportive work environment is a common theme. Sklavenitis offers quieter work environments and flexible hours. OTE provides flexible working hours and remote work options. Accenture, SAP, and EY in Poland all mention creating quiet zones, adjusting lighting, and providing ergonomic furniture. The provision of job coaches and mentoring programs is also highlighted in Poland (Accenture, SAP, EY, Auticon) and Slovenia's employment rehabilitation system.
- **Training and Awareness:** Training for employees and managers on neurodiversity is a key strategy across several countries, particularly in Poland (Accenture, SAP, EY, Auticon) and Greece (Sklavenitis). This indicates a growing understanding of the importance of education in fostering inclusive workplaces.
- **Transition from Education to Employment:** Slovenia specifically addresses the crucial transition from the school system to employment for neurodivergent youth through dedicated projects and professional support. This highlights a proactive approach to early career guidance.

In summary, while Cyprus is in the earlier stages with a strong public sector mandate, Greece and Italy showcase specific company and social enterprise initiatives. Poland appears to have a more mature landscape with numerous large corporations actively implementing comprehensive neurodiversity programs. Slovenia emphasizes systemic support through government programs and employment rehabilitation. Ireland focuses on providing guidance and resources. Overall, there's a growing trend across partner countries towards recognizing the value of neurodiversity in the workplace and implementing various strategies to promote inclusive employment. The rise of private-sector initiatives, particularly in retail and technology sectors, signals a shift toward greater inclusion. To enhance employment outcomes, further investment in employer training, structured vocational pathways, and workplace accommodations are essential.

FOCUS GROUP

Stakeholders (neurodiverse individuals, employers, professionals, relatives) highlighted the following in focus groups:

In **Cyprus**, the landscape is significantly shaped by the proactive engagement of foundations like the Christos Stelios Ioannou Foundation and Apostolos Loukas, which actively employ neurodiverse individuals in protected workshops and facilitate their integration into the open labour market. These organizations have established long-term collaborations with a range of employers, including supermarkets and municipalities, demonstrating a degree of sustainability. Employers in Cyprus often provide tailored positions aligned with individual capabilities and ensure fair compensation. The ongoing support from specialized institutions is crucial for the effectiveness of these employment arrangements. However, areas needing improvement include the development of structured onboarding and mentoring programs, better alignment of job roles with individual skills, and the creation of clear career advancement opportunities. Stakeholders believe that experienced NGOs could assist smaller organizations in these areas. Overall, while strong foundational work and partnerships exist, there is a need for more formalized employer training and comprehensive support systems for neurodiverse individuals.

In **Greece**, the emphasis appears to be on individualized accommodations within organizations, particularly NGOs. The experience shared by an individual on the autism spectrum highlights the value of hybrid work models and flexibility in meeting formats to suit individual needs. A significant initial step identified in Greece is the need to convince employers to hire individuals with disabilities and to ensure that the workplace environment is appropriately adapted, including reducing sensory stimuli and fostering understanding among staff. Providing employers and colleagues with different training is also considered important.

Ireland presents a context where support networks exist but there is a relative scarcity of organizations actively focused on securing work placements for neurodiverse individuals. There is a recognized need for more enabling support practices to enhance the skills of those working with neurodivergent individuals.

In **Italy**, good practices are more evident within multinational companies, especially in the tech and creative sectors, which are implementing inclusive recruitment processes and adapting work environments with features like flexible schedules and quiet spaces. Job coaching and mentorship programs have shown positive results. However, these inclusive practices are not yet widespread, and there is a lack of comprehensive corporate training on neurodiversity and limited employment opportunities beyond specific niche fields. Furthermore, the need for clearer frameworks for career advancement remains.

Poland showcases a more systematic and multidimensional approach exemplified by Motorola Solutions. Their [Neurodiversity Hub](#) team is developing initiatives ranging from education and awareness campaigns to infrastructure adjustments like quiet zones and HR process adaptations, designed to benefit all employees and foster a truly inclusive culture. Notably, they are training their management in neurodiversity and are adopting practices like including questions about special needs in recruitment forms to better understand and accommodate candidates. Research participants in Poland also emphasized the importance of precise and inclusive job descriptions, clear communication during recruitment and onboarding, and transparency about the company's openness to neurodiversity. The need to balance individual needs with fair treatment for all employees was also highlighted.

Slovenia emphasizes the fundamental need for structured work environments, which many employers may not fully understand how to create. Inadequate workspaces with sensory overload are identified as a significant challenge. Employer education and a willingness to learn about the specific needs of neurodiverse employees are crucial. Providing individualized quiet workspaces and ongoing support through mentoring and clear communication are highlighted as good practices. Slovenia stresses that inclusion should be seen as an ongoing process, requiring a long-term commitment and a recognition of the significant effort neurodiverse individuals may exert. Education should also focus on what not to do when working with neurodiverse individuals, and it's vital to find the right fit between the individual, employer, and job. Ultimately, understanding the internal experience of neurodiverse individuals is key to providing effective support.

While promising initiatives and good practices exist, often driven by dedicated organizations or forward-thinking multinational companies, **common challenges persist, particularly around the need for more structured support systems, greater employer education and awareness, and a more holistic understanding of the needs and potential of neurodiverse individuals.** The examples from Poland and the foundational work in Cyprus offer potential models for more

systematic and sustained inclusion, while the emphasis on individual adjustments in Greece and the call for fundamental workplace adaptations in Slovenia underscore the importance of creating environments that are truly supportive and understanding of neurodiversity. **Moving forward, a greater focus on formalized training, long-term commitment, and the development of clear career pathways will be crucial for fostering meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities for neurodiverse individuals across Europe.**

FOCUS GROUPS – SIDE ISSUES AND OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The focus group discussions across Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and Slovenia reveal several common themes and country-specific nuances regarding the inclusion and employment of neurodiverse individuals. A significant emphasis is placed on the **heterogeneity within neurodiverse populations** and the need for **individualized support**. A recurring concern across multiple countries is the **potential underutilization of skills** of neurodiverse individuals, who are often assigned low-skilled tasks. **Safety issues in the workplace and family fears** also present barriers to employment. Practical issues like **transportation and access** are highlighted as crucial for sustainable employment.

A strong call for **legislative and policy improvements** that specifically recognize neurodiversity and provide workplace inclusion guidelines is evident. The need for **clearer and more substantial financial incentives for employers** to hire and retain neurodiverse individuals is also a common recommendation. **Structured and regular training programs** for employers, educators, and mentors are deemed essential for fostering understanding and integration strategies. Improved **cross-sectoral coordination and centralized support** systems are advocated to streamline the integration process. Enhancing **public and employer awareness** about neurodiversity and its benefits through advocacy is seen as critical for changing attitudes. **Tailored employment and career development pathways**, including structured onboarding and mentoring, are considered crucial for long-term retention.

Several countries also highlighted specific challenges. **Ireland** emphasized the prevalence of **misconceptions about autism** in society and among HR professionals, leading to a lack of autism-friendly recruitment infrastructure.

They also pointed out how **social protection schemes can disincentivize employment** and the disparity between policy and governmental action in supporting the transition from education to employment. The importance of distinguishing between mental health and autism was also noted. **Italy** highlighted the role of **family support**, challenges related to **co-occurring mental health conditions**, the **digital divide**, **ethical concerns regarding disclosure**, and the potential of **AI and assistive technologies** to both decrease as well as increase the gap between neurotypical and neurodiverse employees. **Poland** broadened the perspective of neurodiversity as a **universal trait**; thus, creating support for neurodivergent individuals can benefit all employees. They emphasized **concrete, tangible solutions designed in partnership with neurodivergent individuals** and the importance of a "neuro-friendly" culture that utilizes their unique capabilities. **Slovenia** identified a significant **lack of understanding** of neurodiversity among employers and educators, **inadequate work environments**, difficulties in **diagnosis and assessment**, and a lack of consistent **funding and support**. They stressed the need for **structured environments, employer education, individualized approaches, mentoring, and supported employment**.

Synthesis of Comparisons Between Countries:

- **Awareness and Understanding:** A lack of awareness and understanding of neurodiversity, particularly autism, is a significant barrier identified in **Greece, Ireland, and Slovenia**. In contrast, **Poland** offers a more flexible view of neurodiversity as a universal aspect of human variation.
- **Policy and Legislation:** The need for clear and properly implemented legislation and policies is a consistent demand across **Cyprus, Greece, and Italy**. **Ireland** notes a disparity between policy development and governmental actions.
- **Financial Incentives:** **Cyprus** and **Italy** explicitly mention the need for clearer and more substantial financial incentives for employers. This is implicitly supported by the general call for making it easier for businesses to hire neurodiverse individuals across other countries.
- **Training and Support:** Structured training for employers and support staff is considered crucial in **Cyprus, Italy, and Slovenia**. **Ireland** highlights the lack of fundamental understanding among HR professionals, indicating a need for targeted training. **Greece** emphasizes the need for psychological support strategies.

- **Individualized Needs vs. Universal Design:** While all countries acknowledge the heterogeneity of neurodiverse individuals and the need for individualized support, **Poland** stands out by advocating for creating universally beneficial workplace environments that recognize diverse ways of thinking, potentially reducing the sole focus on individual accommodations.
- **Specific Barriers:**
 - **Transportation** is specifically mentioned as an overlooked barrier in **Cyprus**.
 - **Misconceptions about autism** and the impact of media stereotypes are highlighted in **Ireland**.
 - The **digital divide** is a specific concern raised in **Italy**.
 - **Social protection disincentives** are noted as a structural barrier in **Ireland**.
 - Difficulties in **adult diagnosis** are a particular challenge in **Slovenia**.
- **Strengths-Based Approach:** **Ireland** and **Poland** explicitly emphasize the inherent strengths and unique capabilities of neurodivergent individuals, advocating for workplaces that leverage these talents. **Cyprus**, **Italy** and **Greece** also show awareness of this issue, by raising concerns on the underutilization of the skills of employees with neurodiversity.

In conclusion, while there is a shared understanding of the challenges and a common vision for greater inclusion, the specific barriers and proposed solutions reflect the unique socio-economic and policy landscapes of each country. The focus groups underscore the necessity of a multi-faceted approach involving legislative changes, financial support, education and training, and a shift towards more inclusive and understanding workplace cultures across all the participating nations. The successful collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and social enterprises can play a vital role in all aspects of interest in this report, from early diagnostics, job coaching and work placement, to fighting stigma and promoting inclusivity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this overview reveals a **shared recognition of the importance of including neurodiverse individuals** in education, training, and employment across the partner countries. While various initiatives and legislative efforts are underway, persistent **challenges remain in areas such as data collection, societal stigma, educational inclusivity beyond mainstreaming, tailored vocational training, and the creation of truly inclusive employment opportunities**. A recurring theme is the **need for increased awareness and understanding of neurodiversity** among educators, employers, and the general public, coupled with **more coordinated and better-funded support systems**. **Financial Incentives** such as subsidies, tax credits, and awards can be useful tools to promote social responsibility and reward best practices among enterprises. Moving forward, **tailored policies, employer engagement, comprehensive training, and a shift towards recognizing and leveraging the unique strengths of neurodiverse individuals** are crucial steps in fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

The findings from this report can provide **action points and initiatives** that local and EU authorities can pursue, to increase their effectiveness in the inclusion of neurodiversity in the workplace. Such initiatives include:

- Systematic and regular **data gathering and sharing**.
- Building **national registries to monitor neurodiversity outcomes** across education and employment.
- Investing in **training and lifelong learning**.
- **Embedding neurodiversity modules** in teacher - education curriculums and HR certification programs.
- **Standardizing accommodations** that can close the gap between neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals.
- Developing clear, **sector-specific guidelines and toolkits** for workplace adjustments.
- Fostering **Cross-Sector Partnerships**.
- Encouraging **collaboration** between ministries, universities, vocational centres, employers, and NGOs.

- Elevating **success stories** and publicizing **case studies** of businesses that have benefited from neurodiverse talent to inspire peers.

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