



autism building links
with employment

Employer Attitudinal Review

– employing people with autism

Written on behalf of Project ABLE partnership by Misa:

Sara Sadarangani
Malin Östblom
Marie Holmbom
Sofie Szönyi

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Summary

Project ABLE

The Autism - Building Links with Employers (ABLE) project is a partnership project with five members funded by Erasmus+.

The partners of the project are:

- Orchardville Society Ltd (lead partner) from Northern Ireland
- Autism NI from Northern Ireland
- Irish Association of Supported Employment from Ireland
- Misa AB from Sweden
- Theotokos Foundation from Greece

The project is running over a period of two years, starting October 1st, 2015.

The aim of the ABLE project is to enhance the employment of people with autism through improving knowledge and understanding among employers. This will be performed by developing and offering a training course for employers. The main target group is employers wishing to select, recruit and maintain people with autism in the open labour market.

Before developing the training course one objective for the project is to investigate employers' knowledge about autism, their attitudes regarding employing a person with autism and their preferences regarding a training course about autism. The results from this review will lay the ground for the development of the training course.

Results of the employer review

To implement the employer review a web based survey was constructed and sent to employers in Sweden, Greece, Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The target group for the survey were employers from different sized companies operating in different sectors. The project team mainly focused on employers with who the partner organizations had an ongoing cooperation.

The results from the survey regarding the respondents' self-perceived knowledge about autism is *average*, or just above average.

91 % of the respondents answered that they would consider employing a person with autism. 9 % that they would not. Due to the experience each organisation has working with employers we believe these figures are not truly representative, as securing employment for individuals with autism is challenging.

The main reasons why the respondents stated they would consider employing a person with autism are *diversity, equal opportunities* and the persons' *special skills*.

When summarizing the respondents' preferences regarding a training course about autism it shows that in general they would like a combination of formal presentation, web based material and case studies. They would like to spend from half a day to one day on a course and let 1-9 persons take part. The most common requested topics are in the following order:

1. *How to support someone with autism and make reasonable workplace adjustments*
2. *Benefits and challenges of employing someone with autism*

3. *How to get external advice, support and education*
4. *Knowledge of the diagnosis of autism*
5. *Financial support*

Recommendations for developing the training course

Since the results from the survey shows the *self-perceived* knowledge it will be important to create a training course which can be adjusted to different levels of actual knowledge. It will be crucial for the training course to first investigate the level of actual knowledge among the course members to meet their actual needs.

According to the results of the survey the delivery style should be a mixture of formal presentation, web-based material and case studies to meet the preferences stated by the employers. The length of the course should be from half a day to one day, or adjustable to fit different needs. Preferably the content of the course should be adjustable depending on the needs of the employers as well.

The recommendation is therefore to construct a flexible training course that makes it possible to adapt the level of knowledge, content and length of course on the different needs among the employers.

Table of contents

1 Introduction	5
1.1 Terminology and figures	5
1.2 Background of the ABLE Project	5
1.3 Project objectives	6
2 Method	7
2.1 Previous research	7
2.2 Survey design	7
2.3 Selection	8
2.3.1 Distribution of the survey and data collection	8
2.3.2 Northern Ireland/Ireland	8
2.3.3 Greece	8
2.3.4 Sweden	9
2.3.5 Target group	9
2.4 Analysis	10
3 Results of the survey	11
3.1 Knowledge about autism	11
3.2 Attitudes towards employing a person with autism	12
3.2.1 Benefits from employing a person with autism	12
3.2.2 The will to employ a person with autism	13
3.2.3 Factors affecting the decision to employ a person with autism	14
3.2.4 Factors that might change the attitude	14
3.2.5 Attitudes: a comparison between the surveys	15
3.3 Preferences regarding a training course	19
3.3.1 What the employers would like to learn about in a training course	19
3.3.2 Delivery style	20
3.3.3 Time to spend on a training course	21
3.3.4 Number of participants	22
4 Conclusions	23
4.1 Respondents' knowledge	23
4.2 Respondents' attitudes	23
4.3 Training course	23
5 Discussion	25
5.1 Discussion of the results	25
5.1.1 Knowledge	25
5.1.2 Attitudes	25
5.1.3 Training course	26
5.2 Discussion of the method	26
6 Recommendations	28
7 References	29

Appendix:

A. English survey B. Greek survey C. Swedish survey

1 Introduction

The Autism - Building Links with Employers (ABLE) project is a partnership project with five members funded by Erasmus+. The partners of the project are the Orchardville Society Ltd (lead partner) and Autism NI from Northern Ireland, the Irish Association of Supported Employment from Ireland, Misa AB from Sweden, and the Theotokos Foundation from Greece. The project is running over a period of two years, starting October 1st, 2015.

1.1 Terminology and figures

Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) is a term which is used to describe a number of conditions including autism and Asperger's Syndrome. The diagnosis ASC is on a wide spectrum which differs in function and appearance. Different terms and definitions are used in different countries. In this report we have chosen to use the term autism, to be understood as a range of conditions within the spectrum.

Northern Ireland will in occasionally be shortened NI and all figures in the report are presented in integer.

1.2 Background of the ABLE Project

Project ABLE has been based on learning from previous projects including a European project funded through Equal which was led by the Orchardville Society (2005-2008). Further work was conducted on a national project in Northern Ireland over a 5-year period involving people with autism which was funded by Big Lottery Fund (2009-2014). A key barrier to employment for people with autism identified was the employers' lack of knowledge in relation to the characteristics of people with autism and the workplace adjustments that may be necessary to have an inclusive workforce.

The aim of the ABLE project is to enhance the employment of people with autism by improving the quality of knowledge and understanding of the employers via a new and innovative Vocational Education and Training (VET) learning offer. The main target group is employers wishing to select, recruit and maintain people with autism in the open labour market.

European statistics states that 1 % of the European Population are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum¹. In Sweden the 1 % figure is also replicated². Thus an estimated 3 million people in Europe are affected by autism.

The report "Autism and Work. Together We Can" from 2014 confirmed that between 76 % - 90 % of adults with autism are unemployed³. This report also stated the greatest challenges that people with autism face in relation to employment are the lack of access to opportunities and discrimination thus highlighting employers' lack of understanding of the issues around autism.

The above statistics are replicated within Northern Ireland. The National Autistic Society conducted research in 2012 for United Kingdom and estimates that only 15 % of people with autism are economically active. There are no comparable NI statistics but the rate for NI would be expected to be even lower in line with other economic data trends⁴.

¹ www.eu-aims.eu/autism-spectrum-disorder-asd

² Nygren et al., (2012)

³ <http://www.autismeurope.org/files/files/report-on-autism-and-employment-en-online.pdf>

⁴ The National Autistic Society

A scientific study conducted in cooperation between Halmstad University in Sweden and Misa AB, published in the Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, reports that employers view people with autism in a negative light in relation to employability. When the same employers were asked to rank disabilities in order of how they affect employability, autism ranked in the top two. The study also shows that employers rank having the opportunity for training and knowledge about autism as the second most important part in positively impacting the employers' views of employability⁵.

In Ireland the Irish Autism Action (July 2014) outlined that there are no official statistics in Ireland on the number of people who have autism. However, they funded a research study in partnership with Dublin City University, which concluded that the prevalence rate was 1 in 100⁶ thus re-affirming the European statistic.

In Greece there is a similar situation to that in Ireland with no studies being conducted in relation to prevalence and/or employment issues. However general public awareness is low, as autism has emerged as an issue during the last few years as the diagnosis has increased.

In line with the statistics above and the qualitative information a key area identified by all partners was the need for a resource and training for employers. This project will increase the knowledge about autism among employers and thus increase employment opportunities among people with autism. The need for this project at a European level is that the issue is not just a local or national issue but, as the statistics above confirm, a European issue of concern. The European dimension will also bring consistency of approach and quality. With the proposed dissemination strategy it will have the multiplier effect of reaching at least 20 states through the partners' relationship of EUSE.

1.3 Project objectives

The project objectives are as follows:

- To conduct and complete an Employer Attitudinal Review.
- To conduct a Peer Analysis of the existing training courses in each partners' country.
- To develop and design a training course and resources.
- To adapt/customize the training course for the partners.
- To agree on minimum standards for delivery and system for quality control for the training material.
- To test the training course with at least 10 employers in each of the partner states.
- To further adapt the training materials based on the results of the testing.
- To produce a final training material and training resources.

This report relates to the first objective of the project, which is to conduct and complete an Employer Attitudinal Review. The aim of the Employer Attitudinal Review was:

- To obtain insight into the employers' self-perceived knowledge of autism.
- To review the employers' attitudes on employing a person with autism.
- To review the employers' opinions on the contents and design of a training course.

⁵ Andersson et al., (2015)

⁶ <http://www.autismireland.ie/about-autism/what-is-autism/>

2 Method

The study has a quantitative approach and is based mainly on the analysis of survey responses. Several questions in the survey had room for personal comments to enable qualitative data to be captured from the respondents. The survey in its entirety is attached in the appendix. The following section contains a description of the study's approach and the limitations that in different ways may have influenced the outcome.

2.1 Previous research

The study started with a review of relevant existing literature, research and reports regarding why people with autism often are so far from the labour market and also the employers attitudes towards autism and employing persons with autism.

There is a limited amount of research in the area of *work and disability*. However, the research available clearly shows that most people with disabilities are willing and able to work. Although there are a number of methods to support people, the possibilities for them to secure and maintain employment in the open labour market are limited⁷. According to Copeland et al. employers' attitudes are a major reason why people with disabilities still have a hard time getting and maintaining a job on the regular labour market⁸.

The importance of the employers' attitudes is also highlighted in the earlier mentioned study by Andersson et al⁹. This study examined employers' experiences and attitudes to employing people with different type of disabilities. The results shows that there is limited interest regarding employing people with disabilities. The interest is affected by the kind of disability a person has and also by the employers' previous experiences. Thus the interest is increased if the employer has previous experience of employing a person with disability.

2.2 Survey design

To collect the relevant data a survey was created and distributed to employers in each of the partners' countries. The survey was designed with three main areas as headlines: *knowledge, attitudes* and *training course*. Each of these headlines contained a number of questions.

The draft of the survey was circulated to the project members and then tested on a group of Swedish employers, leading to a lot of valuable feedback. After this a period of evaluation followed when questions were changed, removed and added.

The survey was written in three versions, in English, Greek and Swedish. The translations into Greek and Swedish were made by the project partners themselves. The survey was put into a web based survey tool called Survey Monkey. The respondents received a web link to the first page of the survey and then responded to the survey online.

⁷ Hendricks, 2009, Corbière & Lanctot, 2011 or Humber, (2014)

⁸ Copeland et al., (2010)

⁹ Andersson et al., (2015)

2.3 Selection

Since social media and networks were used as one of the means to distribute the survey it is impossible to calculate the total response rate. Although we distributed the survey to random group of employers as well as to employers we already work with, we can assume that the response rate from the employers we know is significantly higher. We are aware that the interest among employers to answer these kind of surveys in general is very low. Therefore it is possible that the respondents of this survey do not represent the average employer. Due to the links the respondents have with the partner organisations, they probably have more knowledge about autism, a more positive attitude towards autism and are more open to the idea of employing a person with autism, than the average employer.

2.3.1 Distribution of the survey and data collection

In total there were 195 respondents who started the survey and 129 who completed it. 37 of them were terminated after the qualification question. The qualification question was; “Are you owner, CEO, board member, head of department or working with human resources, recruitment etc.?” The purpose of the question was to make sure that they belonged to our target group; those in position to make decision regarding employing. This also means that 29 respondents chose not to finish the survey for another reason. The 129 answers are spread between the countries as follows: Ireland and Northern Ireland had 58 respondents (45 %), Sweden 49 (38 %) and Greece 22 (17 %).

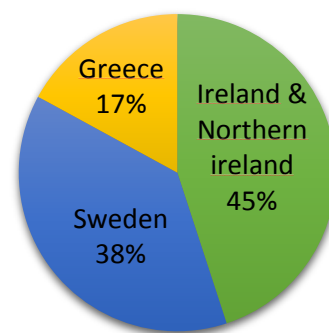


Table 1: Answers from the three surveys; the Swedish, the English and the Greek survey.

The partner organizations have taken different approaches when distributing the survey, and therefore we will describe the data collection of each organization separately.

2.3.2 Northern Ireland/Ireland

The Orchardville Society sent out 75 surveys on behalf of the Northern Irish group. This was agreed with Autism NI as Autism NI do not work directly with employers. 90 % of these employers had an active collaboration with the Orchardville Society, the remaining 10 % were employers they wished to collaborate with.

IASE distributed the survey to existing and new employer contacts in Ireland via direct e-mails. They also used different social media including, Linked In, Facebook and Twitter, to get in touch with employers.

2.3.3 Greece

The Theotokos Foundation distributed the survey by e-mail. Participants first received an introductory e-mail, which explained the aims of the survey and that they would receive an e-mail with a link to the survey in a few days. The main selection of employers was random and the Theotokos Foundation used a mailing list including several national federations and confederations. These associations have thousands of members but it is unknown how many members received the e-mail, as the survey had to be distributed to them by their managers. The survey was also distributed to two existing employers.

2.3.4 Sweden

The survey was distributed by e-mail to a number of employers, both new and existing contacts. In the same e-mail they received a short introduction to the ABLE project. Misa has a lot of existing contacts and an assumption is that these companies have a more positive attitude towards autism and a higher level of knowledge about the diagnosis than companies in general. To counter this, the survey was also sent to random employers who advertised for new co-workers on the Swedish employment agency's website. It is not possible to know how many of the new and how many of the existing contacts that responded. But it is reasonable to assume that the organization's existing contacts have a higher response rate.

The Swedish group also posted the link to the survey on Misa's web page, Twitter account and on the project group members' different Linked In and Facebook accounts to get in touch with a large variety of employers.

2.3.5 Target group

Employers from various company sizes are represented among the respondents in the study. 33 % of the respondents represented a company with more than 250 employees. 26 % of the respondents came from companies with 50-249 employees, 21 % from companies with 10-49 employees and the smallest number, 20 %, is for the companies with 1-9 employees.

66 % of the respondents were found in the private sector. 21 % in public sector, 8 % in non-profit organizations, 4 % in social enterprise and 1 % in special interest groups.

The Greek organization targeted only respondents in the private sector (97 %), whereas the Swedish organization and the organizations in Ireland and Northern Ireland targeted different sectors. Sweden had respondents in the private sector at a percentage of 59 and in Ireland and Northern Ireland it was 48 %. Sweden had 29 % respondents in the public sector and Ireland and Northern Ireland had respondents at 28 % in the public sector.

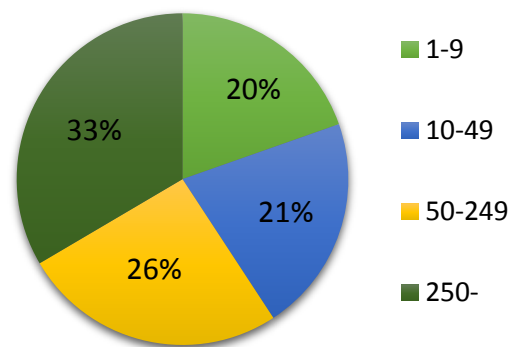


Table 2: Company size among the respondents (Q3)

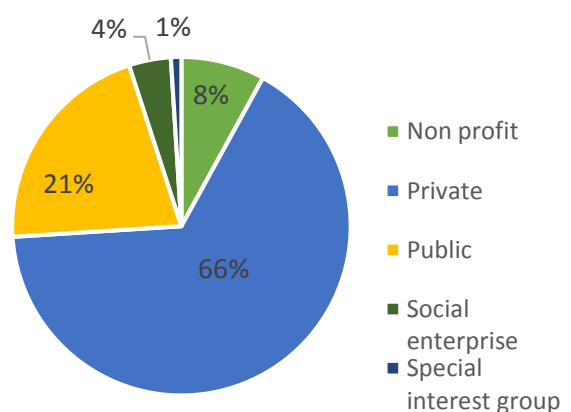


Table 3: Respondents from each sector (Q4)

As for whether the companies already have employees with an autism diagnosis, 23 % answered *yes*, 46 % *no* and 31 % *don't know*.

70 % of the respondents in the Greek survey responded *no* to the question if they had any employees with autism among their staff and 4 % answered *yes*. In the Swedish survey 35 % answered *no* and 29 % answered *yes*. In the English survey 45 % answered that they do not have an employee with autism, whereas 25 % answered that they do have a person with autism in their staff.

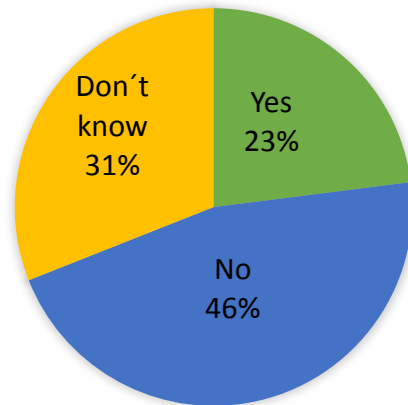


Table 4: The respondents' answer to the question if they have an employee with autism or not (Q7).

2.4 Analysis

The analysis of the results was divided into several steps since the material contained quantitative parts, i.e. the survey answers, as well as qualitative parts, i.e. the comments to the answers provided by the respondents.

The quantitative results of the survey was analysed in two steps. When the survey was closed the results was exported into a program which made it possible to manually search for connections and deviations. Each of the four members of the Swedish project group responsible for the survey was presented with the results separately, to avoid being influenced by each other's interpretations. Next the Swedish project group discussed the results. The outcome of this discussion was a presentation held at the international meeting with the ABLE group in Stockholm on March 14-15, 2016.

During the meeting there were conversations in smaller groups to analyse the results through prewritten questions. A discussion followed involving all the international group which concluded the analysis of the results of the survey.

The qualitative material (the respondents' personal comments to the survey answers) has been analysed with a method inspired by the scientific method content analysis. The project group read the comments several times and distinguished the words and sentences that reoccurred. These comments were coded and formed four categories: diversity, equality, social contribution and skills.

3 Results of the survey

This chapter presents the results of the survey. The survey contains three parts and the results are presented in the same way:

- Knowledge about autism
- Attitudes towards employing a person with autism
- Preferences regarding a training course for employers

The total result for the three versions of the survey, the Greek, the Swedish and the English survey is presented first, followed by a comparison of the results.

3.1 Knowledge about autism

The survey starts with a question about the employers' self-perceived knowledge about autism.

The majority of the respondents perceived their knowledge to be around *average*. There is only a small variety between the countries, as around 40 – 50 % of the respondents in each country state that their knowledge is *average*.

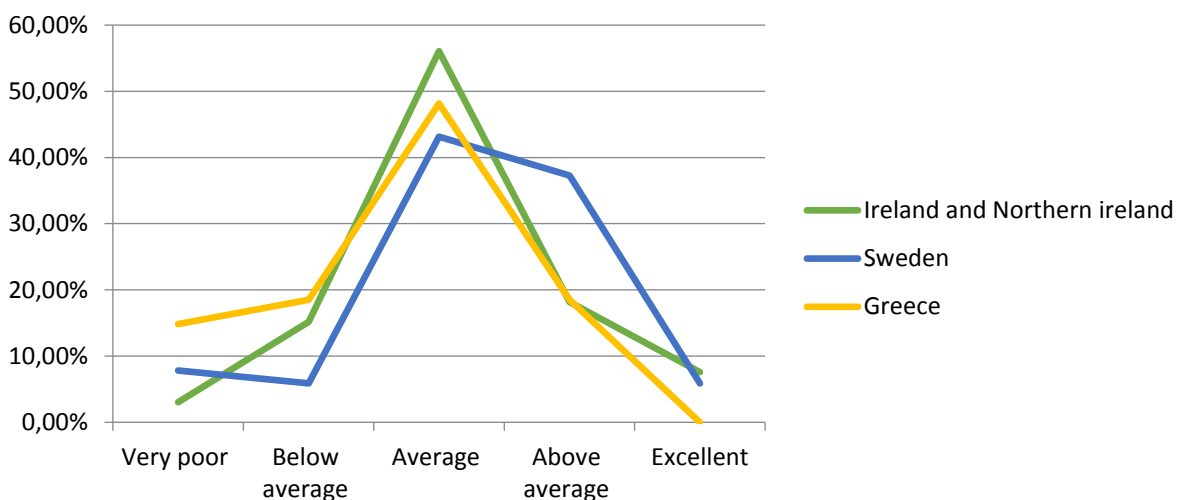


Table 5: Answer to the question: In your opinion, how is your knowledge about autism? (Q8)

The respondents in Sweden perceived their knowledge as slightly higher than those in the other countries. 37 % of them responded *above average* to the question about knowledge, compared to the respondents in Greece (19 %) and Ireland and Northern Ireland (18 %).

There is no great difference between the three surveys in this matter. The majority of the English respondents (56 %) perceived their knowledge as *average*, compared to 48 % of the Greek respondents and 43 % of the Swedish respondents. When it comes to the highest level of knowledge, *excellent*, the English survey is also on top with 8 % of the respondents. 6 % of the respondents in the Swedish survey perceived their knowledge as *excellent* and in the Greek survey the *excellent* level of knowledge had zero answers. The surveys show that the respondents in the Greek survey had the highest percentage who perceived their knowledge as *very poor*: 15 %. This compares to 8 % of the respondents in the Swedish survey and 3 % in the English survey.

The results show that the respondents in the Greek survey seemed to perceive their knowledge lowest, as they had 19 % at *below average* and 15 % at *very poor*. This gives a total of 34 % *lower than average* knowledge compared with 18 % in the English survey (15 % *below average*) and 14 % in the Swedish survey, 14 % (6 % *below average*).

When adding the percentage for the options *above average* and *excellent*, the respondents in the Swedish survey perceived their knowledge higher compared to the other countries. The Swedish survey has a total percentage of 43 % (37 % *above average*) for these options. The numbers for the same options added up in the English survey are 26 % (18 % *above average*) and in the Greek survey 19 % (19 % *above average*).

Overall the self-perceived knowledge seems to be quite equal between the surveys. The results show a few differences in either direction, but most of the respondents still perceived their knowledge as generally average.

3.2 Attitudes towards employing a person with autism

The next part of the survey contained four questions about employers’ attitudes towards employing a person with autism:

- *What could you benefit from employing a person with autism? (Q9)*
- *Would you consider employing a person with autism? (Q10)*
- *How important is the following support when you consider employing a person with autism?(Q14)*
- *Would any kind of support make you more likely to employ a person with autism? (Q12)*

3.2.1 Benefits from employing a person with autism

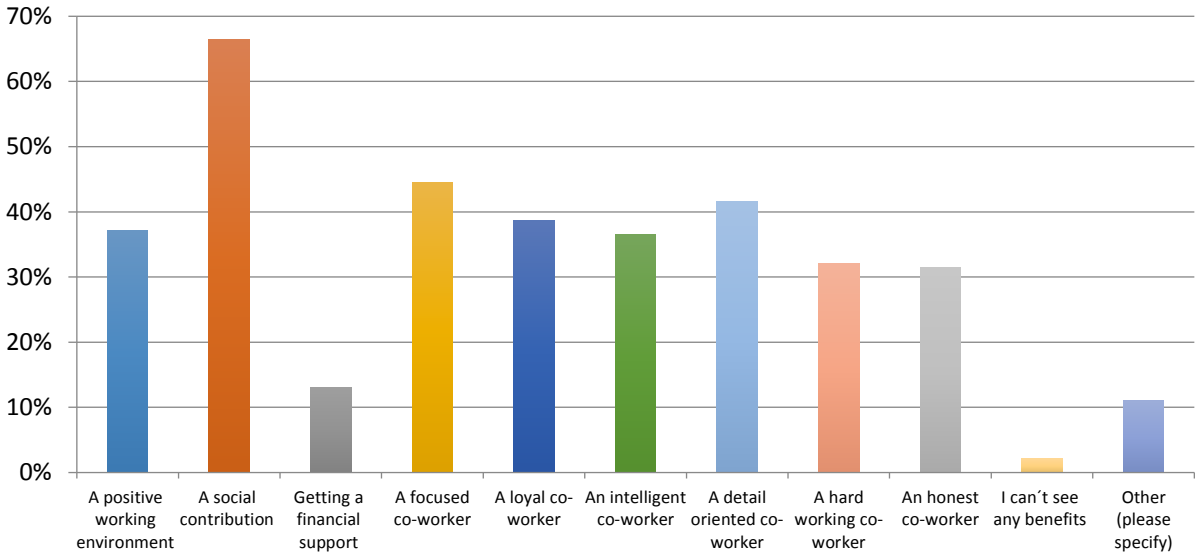


Table 6: Answer to the question: What could you benefit from employing a person with autism? (Q9)

The respondents could see a variety of benefits from employing a person with autism. It was possible to choose more than one option when answering this question. The most selected option is *to be able to make a social contribution* by employing a person with autism. It is interesting to notice the difference

between *social contribution* and *financial support*. 66 % of the respondents found it positive to be able to make a *social contribution* by employing someone with autism. That compares with only 13 % who chose *financial support* as the factor that makes it beneficial to employ a person with autism.

11 % of the respondents chose the option *other (please specify)*. Some of the comments are general and include that the focus should be on the individual. The following two comments were typical from respondents:

“Even autistic people are individuals. The benefits can be different and nothing I can generalize about like this”.

“I am focusing on the individual, and their contribution to the workplace – and it is not possible to generalize. I.e. an honest co-worker can either have or not have autism.”

Several of the respondents stated that the diversity and inclusion that the employment of a person with autism can bring to a workplace is something they value highly. For example:

“Many of the above benefits could be true when employing someone with autism, however the main benefit is a diverse work environment.”

“An inclusive working environment where diversity is embraced.”

3.2.2 The will to employ a person with autism

91 % of the respondents answered that they would consider employing a person with autism, whereas 9 % answered that they would not. Judging by the survey comments to this question it seems important for the employers to consider the value of diversity and equality when they are employing. Two comments exemplify this:

“Having a diverse work environment which is a positive experience for employees and customers can only be achieved through a diverse workforce.”

“I would employ someone with autism as I believe in inclusion and equal opportunities and education.”

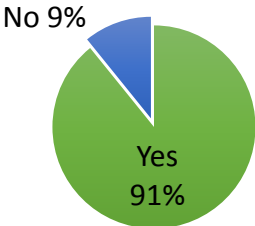


Table 7: Answer to the question: *Would you consider employing a person with autism?* (Q10)

The comments also confirm the answer to the previous question; that social contribution is important when employing a person with autism. A majority of the respondents further confirm this when describing how employing a person is beneficial both for the individual’s wellbeing, as well for society in a larger sense. In this case the employment of a person with autism is a part of the company’s bigger ambition to uphold social responsibility:

“In the context of our company’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) we support these initiatives.”

“It is a part of responsibility for the community for a culture institution to employ co-workers with disability. A work place should also be welcoming for everybody.”

In the survey it is possible to identify other aspects which are important to respondents when considering employing a person with autism. Many of the respondents find that the most important issue is to find the right person that fits the organization and the position. To achieve that, the potential

diagnosis becomes irrelevant. A statement from one of the respondents illustrates this in a clear and succinct way:

“If I can find the right person for the job that is all that matters.”

3.2.3 Factors affecting the decision to employ a person with autism

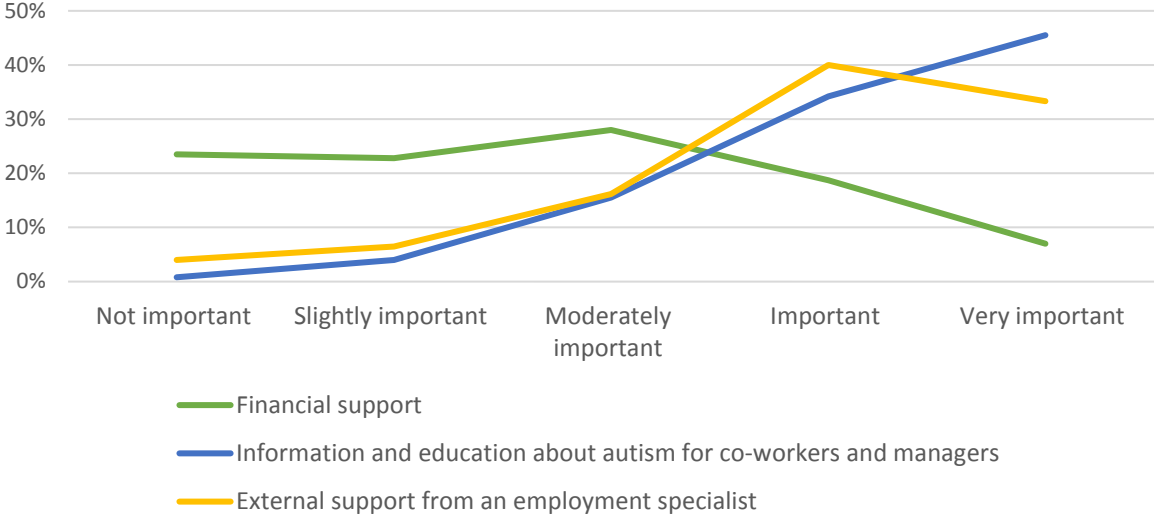


Table 8: Answer to the question: How important is the following support when you consider employing a person with autism? (Q14)

The respondents who would consider employing a person with autism were directed to this question, regarding what kind of support would make them more likely to employ someone. This shows that *financial support* has little impact on the decision. Instead the respondents found it important to get *information and education* and also some *external support*.

3.2.4 Factors that might change the attitude

As already mentioned, 9 % of the respondents answered that they would not consider employing a person with autism. The main reasons stated are connected to the employers’ level of knowledge about the diagnosis and a wish to not subject the individual to any risk of harm. The working environment also appears to be one of the reasons to not consider employing a person with autism:

“My knowledge about the illness is not good enough. I would feel it would be putting the individual in an unsafe environment.”

“I think that our work place, pasta and salad café, is too messy and too many people, both employees, attendants and customers.”

“The environment is competitive and without "routine" and rhythm. I consider it a difficult environment for recruitment. The staff need training for correct communication and environment.”

Even though 9 % of the respondents answered that they would not consider employing a person with autism, the survey demonstrates that the majority of the respondents would be more inclined to employ someone with autism with the right kind of support. Those respondents wished to have more *information and education* (80 %) to be able to support a person with autism in the workplace and help create a good work situation. The possibility of receiving financial support had quite a small impact. They also request *external support*, possibly from an employment specialist or similar, to feel confident that they manage to create a good and thriving work environment for the individual with autism.

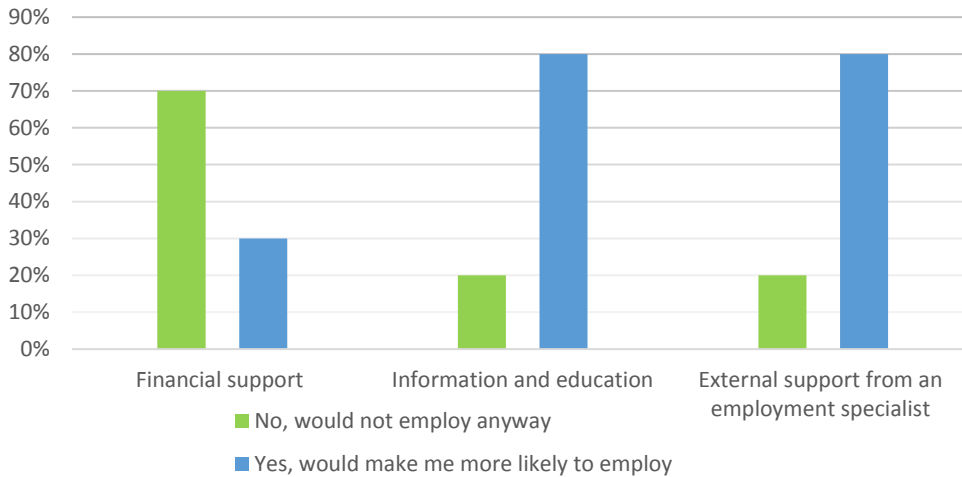


Table 9: If you answered that you don't consider to employ a person with autism; would any kind of support make you more likely to employ? (Q12)

3.2.5 Attitudes: a comparison between the surveys

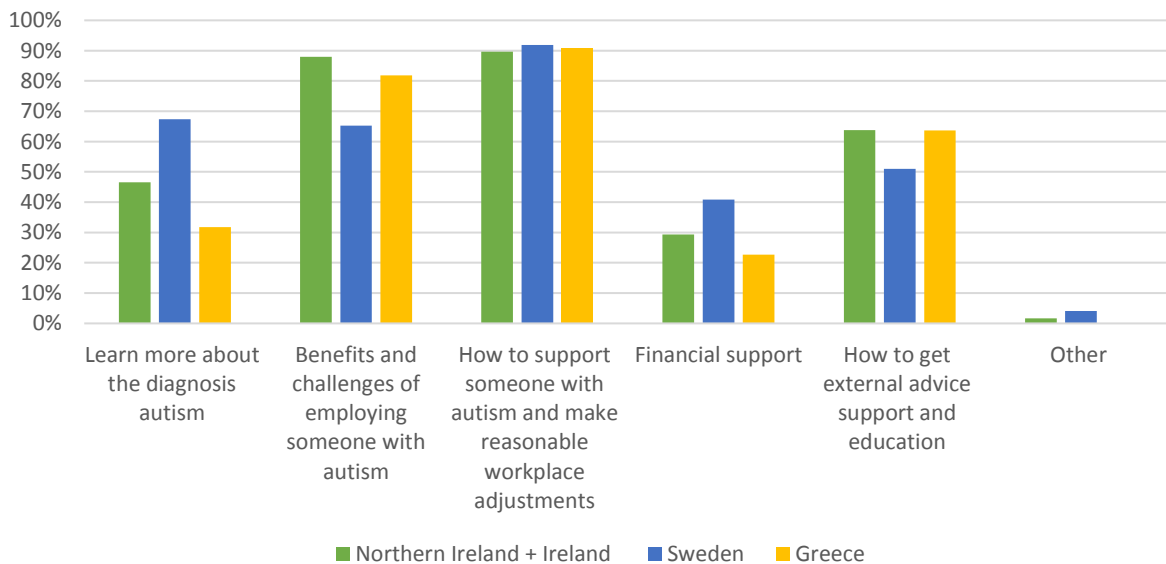


Table 10: Attitudes: a comparison between the surveys (Q15)

In the English and the Swedish survey the perceived benefits from employing a person with autism are more diverse, than in the Greek survey. The Greek survey shows that the benefit of making a *social contribution* when employing a person with autism is rather prominent with 76 % of the respondents choosing this answer. As the second most beneficial aspect of employing a person with autism the Greek survey found two alternatives, a *detail oriented co-worker* and a *loyal co-worker* 32 % each. The other alternatives were around or less than 20 % in the Greek survey.

As previously stated, the answers in the English and the Swedish survey were more diverse. The benefit of making a *social contribution* was seen as most important in both surveys: 73 % in the Swedish survey and 57 % in the English survey. In addition to that, the Swedish survey also shows that around 50 % of the respondents found a *focused co-worker* and a *loyal co-worker* as benefits of employing a person with autism. More than 30 % of the respondents in the Swedish survey found a *detail oriented co-worker*, an

honest co-worker and an *intelligent co-worker* beneficial from employing a person with autism. In the English survey between 30 – 50 % of the respondents saw a number of six alternatives as benefits of employing a person with autism. The alternatives are *a detail oriented co-worker, a hard working co-worker, a focused co-worker, an intelligent co-worker, a loyal co-worker* and *an honest co-worker*.

The English survey differs significantly from the other two. 52 % of the respondents answered that employing a person with autism generates a *positive working environment*, placing that option in the top two in the English survey. The Greek and the Swedish surveys show this answer as significantly lower, 24 % in both the Swedish and the Greek survey. An interesting point is that in all the three surveys, the benefit of *getting financial support* is one of the lowest rated alternatives. None of the surveys gave this alternative much significance. In both the Swedish and the English surveys 14 % of the respondents chose this answer and in the Greek survey only 8 % found a *financial support* beneficial.

Some of the respondents in the Swedish survey as well as in the English chose to specify the answer *other*. The comments indicate that *diversity* is an important benefit when employing a person with autism. Also some of the respondents find it hard to generalize and state that the individuals' characteristics are more important than the diagnosis. Two comments from respondents:

“I’m thinking that everything surely will fall into place with the right person.”

“I don’t see how autism would have an effect, positive or negative, on the listed attributes.”

Most of the respondents stated that they would consider employing a person with autism (91 %). The results show that there is very little difference between the countries. 94 % of the respondents in both the Swedish and the English survey stated that they would consider employing a person with autism. The Greek survey differs from the others as 80 % of the respondents answered that they would consider employing a person with autism.

In the Swedish survey the respondents highlighted the importance of diversity, the possibility to make a social contribution and support a struggling individual as a reason to employ a person with autism. A couple of respondents exemplified like this:

“We believe in diversity and the value of inclusion. Think that if we create a work place that works for people with special needs then it will be better for everybody.”

“Diversity means for us not only a difference in ethnic origin, it also means that we are all different with different needs and preconditions. Obviously a person with autism fits in with us as well, and contributes to our work as much as the ones without diagnosis. The diagnosis doesn’t have more importance than for us to know how to relate to it. The rest is up to the individual and us to handle.”

The respondents also valued the contribution that a person with autism can make to the work place. When employing someone with autism the employer is focused on getting a resource and a competent co-worker. One respondent exemplified:

“I have had two persons with autism employed. They are extremely competent at ‘their’ tasks and handle them with brilliance. Often also a positive effect for the other members of the team.”

The Swedish survey also shows that access to a support system that gives the employer both *information and education about autism for co-worker and managers* and *external support from an employment*

specialist are factors that weigh in when the employers consider employing a person with autism. 74 % of the respondents found that *information and education* was important or very important when making the decision to employ. 59 % of the respondents found *external support* to be important or very important.

The English survey shows that a majority of the respondents value the *diversity* a person with autism can bring to the workplace. With a diverse group of staff the team and the environment of the work place improve. As a couple of respondents describe:

“Keen to support positive workplace diversity.”

“Healthy for any organization to have a well-diversified mix of people contribution to towards the organizations over all goals.”

“Have somebody already employed and staff became more team members once working with this person.”

Many of the English respondents highlighted that a person with autism can be a good resource in the work place as well as the importance of employing based on merits and qualifications. The comments showed that the match between the employee and the job is valued as a keen aspect of employing a person with autism.

“From previous experience working with people with autism I have found them to be very focused and having great attention to detail and an excellent level of accuracy.”

“Providing a good person – job role match will ensure that the prospective employees’ skills are optimally utilized and ensure longevity of the employing decision. Taking on an employee with ASC could provide unique skills to certain areas in the organization, as well as providing a loyal employee and extending equal opportunities to all.”

“We use a competency-based recruitment, if someone meets the requirements for the role we employ on that basis. The majority of the time we would not be aware of a person having autism. We would be happy to work with colleges/universities to provide placements to help the students and ourselves.”

The results of the English survey do not differ from the results of the Swedish survey as a majority of the respondents found *information and education about autism*, as well as *external support from an employment specialist*, as factors to consider when making a decision to employ a person with autism. 82 % of the respondents found *information and education* to be important or very important. 81 % of the respondents found *external support* to be important or very important.

The results of the Greek survey highlight the *social responsibility*, the *social contribution* and *diversity* as key reasons to employ someone with autism. The respondents wanted to make a contribution for the individual, and create opportunities for a group of people who otherwise would have smaller chances of getting an employment. Some of the comments also highlight equal rights and equal opportunities for all:

“Providing equal rights, achieving integration into the workplace and society as a whole, use of resources that otherwise would be lost.”

"People with particularity provide significant benefits and receive respective benefits from the workplace. They familiarize the other employees with accepting diversity.

"For the reasons of equal opportunities to all, based on skills and not based on prejudices and ignorance."

In the Greek survey the majority of the respondents (85 %) found *information and education about autism* and *external support from an employment specialist* to be important or very important when deciding to employ a person with autism.

The results show almost no difference between the Swedish survey and the English survey regarding the unwillingness to employ a person with autism. 6 % of both the English and the Swedish respondents answered that they would not consider employing a person with autism. However, there is a difference within the Greek survey as 20 % answered that they would not consider employing a person with autism.

The main reasons among the employers for not wanting to employ a person with autism seems to be the perception of lack of knowledge and the opinion that the specific work place will not be suitable for the individual. In the Swedish survey the respondents expressed the worry that the work place will not be suitable for a person with autism. In the English survey the respondents' focus is on the view that her/his knowledge about the disability is not high enough.

"I think that our work place, pasta and salad bar, is too messy and too many people, both employees and customers."

"My knowledge about the illness is not good enough. I would feel it would be putting the individual in an unsafe environment."

Among the Greek respondents the opinion is also expressed that some work places may not be suitable for a person with autism (among the respondents who answered no). Some respondents worried that managing the work would be too hard for the person. The respondents exemplify like this:

"The environment is competitive and without "routine" and rhythm. I consider it a difficult environment for recruitment. The staff need training for correct communication and environment."

"Difficulty adapting to the requirements of the position."

"The current size of the company, I believe it won't be able to provide the necessary support for the colleague so that he/she can have a pleasant and creative vocational experience."

The results also show that some of the respondents who answered *no* to considering employing a person with autism, thought that they would be more likely to change their minds if they had access to *information and education about autism for co-workers and managers* and *external support from an employment specialist*. In both the Swedish and the English survey 67 % of the respondents (who answered *no* to question 10) stated that they would be more likely to employ if they had more knowledge and external support. In Greece 100 % of the respondents (who answered *no* to question 10) gave the same answer. The results show that the possibility of financial support does not have the same importance. In both the Swedish and the English survey there were 33 % who found that a financial support would make them *more likely to employ* a person with autism. The Greek percentage for the same alternative was 25 %.

3.3 Preferences regarding a training course

The third and last part of the survey contains four questions about the employers' preferences regarding a training course:

- If your company would participate in a training course, what would you like to learn about? (Q15)
- If your company would participate in a training course, what delivery style would you prefer? (Q16)
- If your company would participate in a training course, how much time could you spend on it? (Q17)
- If your company would participate in a training course, how many people could take part? (Q18)

3.3.1 What the employers would like to learn about in a training course

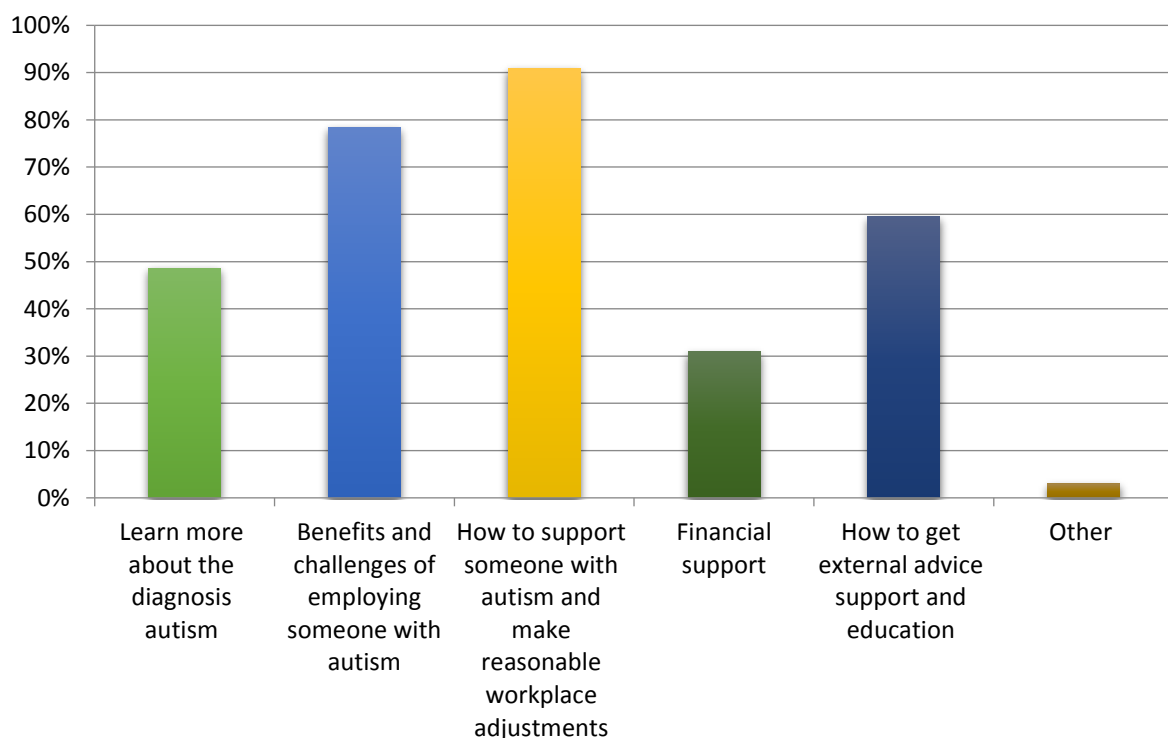


Table 11: Answer to the question: If your company would participate in a training course, what would you like to learn about? (Q15)

This question refers to what content the respondents find most important for a training course. The respondents were able to choose more than one option. The results show that 90 % of the respondents found it most important to learn about *how to support someone with autism and make reasonable workplace adjustments* and the *benefits and challenges of employing someone with autism*. Also 60 % wanted to know more about *how to get external advice, support and education*. 52 % stated that they want to *learn more about the diagnosis of autism* if they attended a training course. One respondent described it:

“A lot of information to increase the acceptance.”

The results show that the least requested part of a training course would be information about *the financial support* the employer can receive from the government when employing someone with a

disability. Though one respondent described the importance of the financial support for the company as making it a little easier to balance the finances when taking on such responsibility:

“In the beginning a financial support since my workload is increasing initially.”

When comparing the surveys, the results show that the majority of the respondents in each survey wanted to learn about *benefits and challenges* and *how to support someone with autism and make reasonable workplace adjustments*. In the English survey 88 % of the respondents wanted to learn about *benefits and challenges* and 90 % wanted to learn about *how to support someone with autism and make reasonable workplace adjustments*. In the Greek survey 82 % of the respondents wanted to learn about *benefits and challenges* and 91 % wanted to learn about *how to support someone with autism and make reasonable workplace adjustments*. In the Swedish survey 65 % of the respondents wanted to learn about *benefits and challenges* and 92 % wanted to learn about *how to give support to someone with autism and make reasonable adjustments*. In addition to this approximately 60 % in the English survey wanted to learn about *how to get external advice support and education* and around 50 % in the Swedish survey gave the same answer. The results also show that in the Swedish survey almost 70 % of the respondents wanted more knowledge *about the diagnosis of autism*, compared to approximately 45 % of the respondents in the English survey and approximately 30 % in the Greek survey.

3.3.2 Delivery style

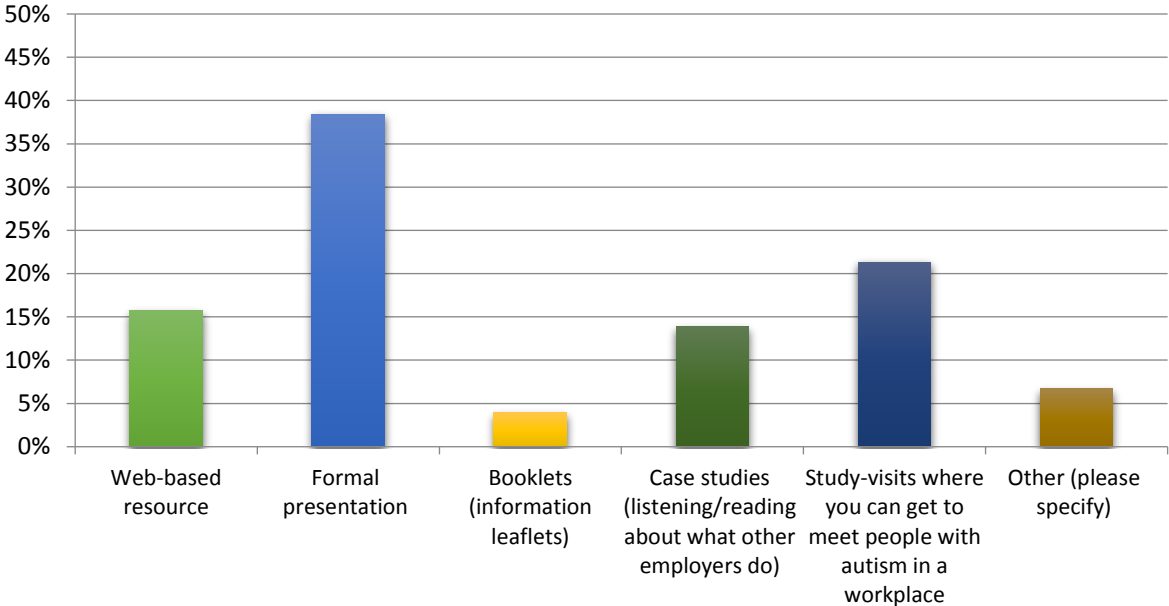


Table 12: Answer to the question: If your company would participate in a training course, what delivery style would you prefer? (Q16)

According to the answers to the question about what delivery style the employers prefer, the majority of the respondents wanted the training course delivered as a *formal presentation* (38 % of the respondents). 23 % of the respondents chose the alternative *study visits* where they can meet people with autism in a workplace and get examples from real life to learn from. Some of the respondents chose to select the alternative “*other*” and described the wish to learn from employers with real life experiences:

“A mixture of a number of the above sounds ideal. We should definitely seek formal presentation and work groups where other employers share advice and experiences.”

“A mix of web-based info, resources and formal presentations which could include presentation from people with autism.”

16 % of the respondents wished to have a web-based training program. As shown in the comments above, some of the respondents have stated that they want a combination of delivery styles. Here are similar proposals:

“A combination of presentation, case and study-visits.”

“Combination of above, depending on situation.”

A majority of the respondents in the Swedish survey (53 %) wanted the training course to be delivered as a *formal presentation*. Approximately 25 % of the respondents in the Swedish survey wanted to be able to make *study-visits where you can meet people with autism*.

In the other surveys the results are a little more diverse. Around 35 % of the respondents in the Greek survey wanted the training course to be delivered as a *formal presentation*, compared to around 25 % in the English survey. Another 25 % of the English respondents wanted to have *study-visits* compared with around 13 % of the Greek respondents. Regarding a web-based resource as a delivery style, around 15 % in each of the surveys would like to attend that kind of training course. The Greek survey differs a little from the others as almost 30 % would like *case-studies (listening/reading about what other employers do)*. This alternative was selected by around 10 % in the English survey and around 5 % in the Swedish survey. In the English survey some of the respondents (approximately 15 %) also specified that they wanted a mix of the alternatives as a delivery style. For example:

“A mixture of the above sounds ideal. We would definitely seek formal presentation and work groups where employers share advice and experiences.”

“A combination of web-based resources and formal presentations which could include presentation from people with autism.”

“A combination of presentation, case and study-visits.”

3.3.3 Time to spend on a training course

49 % of the respondents answered that they want to spend around half a day on a training course. Other less common options were respondents who wanted to spend 1 hour on the training course (24 %), and those who wanted to spend 1 day (19 %).

A comparison between the three surveys shows a very similar results in the English and Greek surveys. A majority of the respondents answer that they could spend half a day if they were to attend a training course (53 % of the respondents in the English survey and 45 % of the respondents in the Greek survey). In the English survey, the results shows that 12 % of the respondents could spend 1 hour, and 24 % could spend 1 day. The results in the Greek survey show that 14 % of the respondents would like to spend 1 hour, and 32 % answered that they would prefer to spend 1 day.

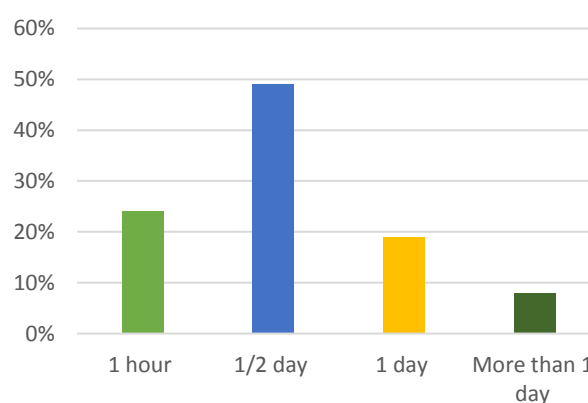


Table 13: Answer to the question: If your company would participate in a training course; how much time could you spend on it? (Q17)

The Swedish survey differs from the others as the respondents who answered that they could spend *1 hour* are almost as many as those who could spend *half a day*. In the Swedish survey 45 % state that they could spend half a day and 43 % state that they could spend 1 hour. There are less respondents in the Swedish survey who answered that their company could spend 1 day than in the other surveys (8 %).

All three surveys show a similarity regarding the respondents who would like to spend *more than one day*, between 5-10 %.

3.3.4 Number of participants

The results show that a majority of the respondents prefer to let *1-9* employees attend the training course.

In the Greek survey the respondents who would let *1-9* employees take part in a training course are 77 %, in the English 71 % and in the Swedish 59 %.

Looking at the three surveys in total 26 % of the respondents would prefer to let *10-49* employees attend a training course. The results show that only a few percentages would let more than 49 employees take part of a training course, 6 % and less than 1 % would like more than 250 employees take part.

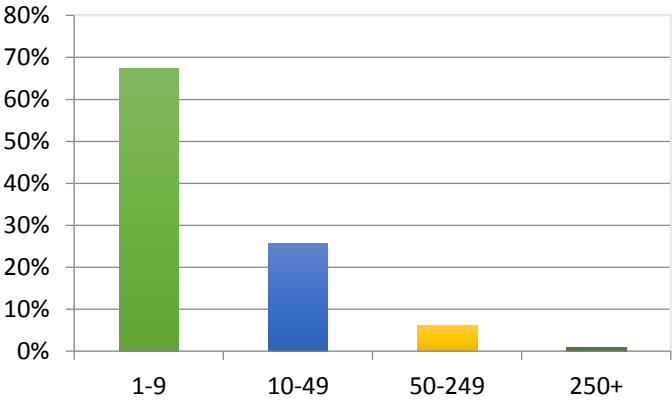


Table 14: Answer to the question: If your company would participate in a training course; how many people could take part? (Q18)

4 Conclusions

This chapter summarizes the conclusions of the survey results. Among the respondents, the will to create opportunities for people with autism in the labour market is high. Since we mainly addressed employers' with whom the partner organizations of the project had an existing relationship, we can assume that their knowledge is higher, and that their attitude towards employing a person with autism is more positive than the average employer. (The reason why this group was targeted is explained in the report.)

4.1 Respondents' knowledge

Around half of the respondents perceived their knowledge of autism as *average*. The other half is spread out on either the alternatives *above average* and *excellent*, or *below average* and *very poor*. It is important to remember that this is in fact self-perceived knowledge and may not say anything about the actual level of knowledge among the respondents. Our conclusion is that before starting the training course it will be of great importance to find out the employers' level of knowledge regarding autism with the purpose to be able to adjust the content of the training course.

4.2 Respondents' attitudes

A majority of the respondents are positive about employing a person with autism. 91 % of the respondents answered that they would consider employing a person with autism and 9 % said that they would not. The reasons that the respondents gave as to why they would consider employing a person with autism are that they want to make a contribution for the individual and for the society, achieve diversity in the workplace, and employ people with special skills. The possibility of financial support for the employer when employing a person with autism has little impact on the decision to employ. Our conclusion is that the respondents of the surveys are probably more positive than the average employer, but that the reasons stated also mirror a trend in the European countries where social contribution is important. The reasons mentioned by respondents regarding employing a person with autism will be useful to keep in mind while constructing the training course to meet their demands.

4.3 Training course

When summarizing the respondents' preferences regarding a training course about autism we find that they would prefer a *formal presentation*. The next option is *study visits* to meet employees with autism and their employers in the workplace, to learn from their experiences. The third selected option is a *web based resource*. When we read the comments we have several respondents who mention that they would prefer a training course in a mixed format. Our conclusion is that a combination of formal presentation, web based material and case studies would be a good way to meet the requirements of employers.

The respondents would like to spend from half a day to one day on a course and allow 1-9 people to take part. The requested topics for the training course are in following order:

1. How to support someone with autism and make reasonable workplace adjustments
2. Benefits and challenges of employing someone with autism
3. How to get external advice, support and education
4. Knowledge of the diagnosis autism
5. Financial support

The majority of respondents want to learn about *how to support someone with autism and make reasonable workplace adjustments*. This confirms the earlier conclusions that the respondents prime reasons for employing a person with autism are to make a contribution for the individual and to give the person a reasonable chance to be able to keep and manage their job. Since the wish to learn about *benefits and challenges of employing a person with autism* is a close second, and *how to get external advice, support and education* is the third chosen option, it is safe to conclude that more knowledge about these factors is seen as a mean to achieve the goal to give the person the right support in a workplace and to give them a fair chance. There are less respondents who want to learn about financial support, rather than the other options which again follows the earlier results. Even if financial support is chosen as the least important reason among the options, 30 % of the respondents ask for this to be included in the training course. Our conclusion is that the employers would like to know about a range of topics associated with employing a person with autism in order to make the work place a more welcoming and supportive environment.

5 Discussion

This final chapter of the report begins with a discussion of and reflections on the results and ends with a discussion of the methods that were used.

The objective of this part of the project was to conduct and complete an Employer Attitudinal Review. It was already decided to use a survey to collect the data. The results were to be processed and presented in a report. The requirement was to distribute a minimum of 80 surveys, 20 in each project country. This was performed, and in total the survey was completed by 129 respondents.

The survey was designed with three main areas as headlines: *knowledge, attitudes and training material*. The following discussion of the results follows the same structure.

5.1 Discussion of the results

5.1.1 Knowledge

The majority (50 %) of the respondents perceived their knowledge about autism as average. The other 50 % are spread out over the alternatives *above average* and *excellent* as well as *below average* and *very poor*. The number of respondents who found their knowledge as *average* seems surprisingly high, which suggests that the results are affected by the selection of the respondents and the way the survey was distributed. The employers who we already cooperate with and have on our contact lists can be thought of as having a higher level of knowledge regarding autism than the average employer. This was confirmed by the Greek numbers. The Greek group distributed the survey to a random group of employers' and they had a higher rate of respondents who perceived their knowledge as *very poor* and none responded *excellent*.

5.1.2 Attitudes

A large majority (91 %) of the respondents are positive to employing a person with autism. We note that this is a very high number. In this subject, as in the one about knowledge above, we think that the results most likely are affected by the group of respondents selected. They are most likely more positive to employing than a group of random employers would be.

We need to assume that when it comes to the results of the question about the employers' attitudes to employing a person with autism, they may have been affected by a further parameter. We formulated the question "would you *consider* employing a person with autism". A different way of formulating it could have been "*would you employ* a person with autism". Most likely this would have generated a different result as there is a big difference between considering to employ someone and actually doing it.

Another finding in the section of the review regarding attitudes is the will among the respondents to make a social contribution by employing a person with autism. A follow up question that may have been interesting to explore could have been what limits there are to this contribution (if the organisation is struggling economically, for example). It is also interesting to consider how this answer is compatible with the respondents' answers that they base their choice to employ on competency and capability. On one hand employers say that a person with autism is an individual as competent as anyone else but on the other hand their answers suggest that they seem to see the employment as some kind of charity.

5.1.3 Training course

The respondents could send 1-9 employees to take part in a training course that lasts for half a day to one day. This is the main opinion. The majority wants a formal presentation or a mix of ways to learn. In this subject the comments from the respondents have been very valuable. We can draw the conclusion that the respondents would find it valuable to be able to hear employers and employees talk about their experiences regarding autism and employment. Respondents also asked to learn more about support and adjustments in the workplace. The international project group had hypothesised that the answer to the question of which delivery style was preferred was going to be web-based, but this was not the most common preferred method. This may have been due to respondents wanting to meet with a specialist face to face to discuss concerns and ask questions, rather than only having a web based resource as a standalone resource.

The main theme regarding the training course seems to be to create a presentation that is flexible both when it comes to length and content. The training course needs to be adaptable to each employers' level of knowledge, interest and needs. Since the course is going to be used in four different countries we also have to take into consideration laws and regulations, culture, labour market and of course language.

5.2 Discussion of the method

The main method when performing the employer attitudinal review was to use a survey, either on actual paper or web-based. This method was stated in the application form of the project. The requirement was to distribute a minimum of 80 surveys, 20 in each project country. This target was achieved and in total the survey was completed by 129 respondents.

A survey is a good way to collect a large amount of data. At the same time there are a few limitations to collecting data this way.

At first we considered including a knowledge test in the survey, but since the survey is anonymous that data would not be useful. When we investigated the level of knowledge about autism among the employers' we could never link the answers to a specific respondent. We needed to ask ourselves when creating the survey: why do we want to know how much the respondents know about autism? When we processed the results we needed to remind ourselves that the numbers show the respondents self-perceived level of knowledge and these numbers may be skewed because of the selection of the respondents that were contacted and completed the survey.

When creating the survey we were very aware of the fact that it could not contain too many questions. If the survey was too long it would mean a higher risk of respondents not finishing it. We had to balance this against getting the facts we required.

The first question of the survey: *"are you owner, CEO, board member, head of department or working with human resources, recruitment etc.?"* served as a qualification question. This question was probably formulated in an unfortunate way. Employers who are known to belong to the surveys target group, working as a team manager or department manager but do not have the title CEO or HR manager, there by ticked *"no"* as reply to the first question and were dismissed from the survey. It would have been better to be clearer about that the survey targeted respondents who manage people or teams.

We have mentioned earlier in the report that we have reason to believe that the question *"would you consider employing a person with autism?"* gave a misrepresentative result. It is easy to say yes to

consider something, but future barriers may prevent you from actually doing this. This was probably another unfortunate way to formulate a question.

When it comes to the selection of the respondents, this has come up several times in the report, we should have thought about this before distributing the survey. Maybe we should have made a decision in the international project group to invite the same amount of existing and new contacts, although this may not have been possible. We could have considered putting a larger emphasis on finding new contacts but this may have been difficult in relation to the time constraints of the project. In any case, we are aware that the selection has had an impact on the result.

6 Recommendations

The main task regarding creating the training course should be to find out what area each employer wants to learn more about, since this probably differs. Ideally, finding out their approximate level of knowledge would have been useful but there was no way to find out these things in an anonymous survey.

We would like to recommend a training course based on different levels of existing knowledge. The delivery form should be a mixture of formal presentation, web-based material and case studies to meet the preferences of the responders. The length of the course should be from half a day to one day.

Our recommendation is therefore to construct a flexible training course. It needs to be adaptable to each employers' level of knowledge, interest and needs. Since the course is going to be used internationally we also have to take into consideration domestic laws and regulations, culture, labour market and language.

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