

RESPECTING DIVERSITY – SAFEGUARDING EQUITY

Malta's National Autism Strategy for 2021-2030



Easy Read version



This booklet helps you understand more easily, and in short, the things written in the document called ***Respecting Diversity – Safeguarding Equity. Malta's 2021-2030 National Autism Strategy.***



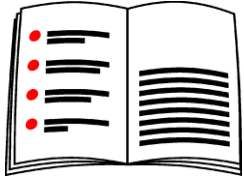
To find out exactly what is written in the full document, you can read it by using the link below:

<https://bit.ly/3GTsvZM>

This booklet was prepared by Lorraine Pleven and Isabel Bonello from the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD). Alistair de Gaetano translated the booklet from Maltese to English.



People on the autism spectrum are all those people who have the condition of autism. Autism affects different people in different ways.



The National Strategy is a document with a list of things the Government will be doing in the coming years.



The **National Strategy** was made so that people can know what will happen in Malta over the next 10 years, for people on the autism spectrum.

This document is the first National Autism Strategy for Malta, and we have been working on it since 2018.

This document was created with the help of the following people:



- people who work in the field of Education (teaching),
- people who work in field of Health
- people working with Government Ministries,
- people from the University of Malta and Agenzija Sapport
- people from the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD)



We held meetings with people on the autism spectrum themselves, and with their families, to be able to make a list of things that we want to work on.



We also went to meetings abroad, to listen to the opinions of other people there about autism, and even talk about our experiences in Malta.



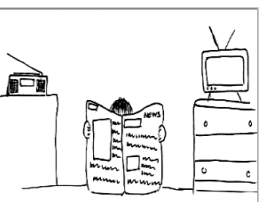
In this National Strategy document, we find a list of things written below, which have to be done in the coming years.

1. WHAT IS AUTISM?

We will work together to provide more information on what autism is.

This information will be given to:

- People who work in the field of education (learning),
- People who work in the field of health,
- People who work in the social support field (for example, social workers)
- People who work in shops,
- People on the autism spectrum and their families,
- The general public.



This information will be given by going to the places where people work, by making advertisements on social media, and also through newspapers and television.



We will make sure that our work is representing the different groups of people in Malta, especially those in a more difficult situation.



We will make sure that people on the autism spectrum, families and those close to them will be part of the lessons that will be learned about autism.



We will work to make sure that this knowledge about autism supports persons on the autism spectrum and their families to be more accepted and included in society, and that it will help to fight bullying and wrong ideas about autism.

We will work to make sure that everyone can take part in all activities, in the classroom, and in outings, and to make public transport and public places accessible to everyone. Examples of public places are public gardens and shops.



We will support those people who have a problem speaking out, and their families, by:

- Supporting them to learn more about things that can help them, such as devices that can help them (for example, tablets), and speech therapy, and supporting them to raise money to pay for these things.
- Seeing that government organisations, the Police and private organisations have the necessary knowledge and equipment for people who need this equipment to speak out.

2. EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND SERVICES FOR AUTISM



Services for young children on the autism spectrum

We will work to make services given to young children on the autism spectrum, and to their families, better, and to increase these services, both those services given by the Government, and those services given by private organisations.

Law on services



We will work to make a law about services given to persons on the autism spectrum.

We will make sure to stop those things and services that are not good or given in a good way.



We will work with the Government, when this law is ready, so that people on the autism spectrum and their families will have the money to be able to get the services that they need.

We will also work to prevent different organisations from repeating the same work when giving services.

We will continue to talk to all those who provide services to children on the autism spectrum, so that these services will continue to be provided in the best way possible.

Health Services

We will be working to ensure that healthcare provided to children and young people on autism spectrum is adapted to their disability and to their age.

We will also see that care provided is given in places familiar to these persons, for example, at home, school or work.

Number of people on the autism spectrum

We will be working with Government organisations and the National Statistics Office, to know how many people are on the autism spectrum in Malta.

The National Statistics Office is an office that collects information about different things in Malta.

We will do this according to the law, and the reason why we will do this is to be able to understand better what services and assistance are needed by persons on the autism spectrum.

Diagnosis and Services for Everyone

We will work to make sure that everyone can get an autism diagnosis and autism services if they need them, no matter what their age or gender is.



An autism diagnosis means when doctors or other professionals tell you that you are a person on the autism spectrum.



Gender means that a person says that they are, for example, female or male.

Medicine



We will be working with people in general, and with expert people (people who know a lot), about the medicine currently being given to people on the autism spectrum, and about what other medicine can be given instead in the future.

The voices of people on the autism spectrum



We will work so that people on the autism spectrum, their families, and people close to them, will always be involved in planning for assistance and services that they need, starting from when people on the autism spectrum are young.

3. EDUCATION

We will work to make sure persons on the autism spectrum get the education (teaching) that they need, and in a way which they can understand

- We will make sure that every student continues to be supported according to his/her needs, so that these students will be able to continue studying if they want, after they finish secondary school.

- We will work to improve the assistance and services already available in schools right now, including services given electronically (e-learning).

Learning about work

We will be working with different people, with schools, and with employers, so that:

- people on autism spectrum will have support to be able to choose what kind of work they want to do.

- people on the autism spectrum will be able to spend some time with employers to get experience (to see how things are done) of the work environment, while they are still students.

- we can make a system to help people on the autism spectrum to be able start work after they finish and leave school.



Teaching for teachers



- We will be working to teach teachers about autism.
- We will also see that all students and their parents are given training (lessons) about autism regularly.

Learning for students on the autism spectrum



We will work with the Government and with schools to make sure that things are made in a way which is good for everyone, and are done in a way that can be understood by everyone. This is called 'Universal Design'.



We will also work to make sure that students on the autism spectrum will be able to go to the same schools as other students, and that they are given the assistance and other services that they need.



We will work to make sure that children on the autism spectrum who need support, get that support as soon as possible.

- We will also be working harder to make sure that more children on the autism spectrum are included in classrooms with other children.
- We will be checking the teaching programmes (lessons) that schools are giving, and seeing how they can be made better.



We will work to support more children and students on the autism spectrum so that when they move from one school to another, it will be easier for them.

4. EMPLOYMENT

Work and people on the autism spectrum



We will work to see what the needs of people on the autism spectrum in workplaces are, and to ensure that these workplaces are accessible.



We will tell employers how employing persons on the autism spectrum can be good for their business.

We will give training (teaching) to employers and work colleagues of employees on the autism spectrum, including on how the needs of persons on the autism spectrum can be better met at the workplace.



We will work to make sure that more people on the autism spectrum join existing programmes (activities) and training (lessons) that will help them find and do work, including training (lessons) on how to sit for job interviews.

- We will also work so that people on the autism spectrum and their families get to know more about these programmes and this training.



We will work to continue improving services that exist right now, which offer training (lessons) and support to persons on the autism spectrum, so that they can find and keep work.

- Together with employers, we will work on plans for making sure that persons on the autism spectrum can find work that matches the things they are best at doing, and keep their work once they are employed.



We will work to help new companies, especially foreign companies, to keep in mind the needs of people on the autism spectrum, and we will give awards (prizes) to the companies who do.



We will also work hard to make sure that persons on the autism spectrum who are self-employed (work on their own) will pay less tax, in the same way that persons on the autism spectrum who are employees pay less tax.



We will work hard to reduce cases of discrimination faced by with people on the autism spectrum in workplaces.

- Discrimination means when someone is treated worse than other people are treated. This can happen by, for example, the employer.



We will also talk to organisations that defend workers (trade unions), so that they will know more about the needs of people on the autism spectrum.

5. SPEAKING TO OTHER PEOPLE ABOUT AUTISM

The voices of people on the autism spectrum

We will continue to work with the Autism Advisory Council, which is a group of people working together to hear the voices of people on the autism spectrum, to:

- support people on the autism spectrum to make their voices heard,
- encourage people on the autism spectrum to do this in public
- support people on the autism spectrum to create groups to make their voices heard

We will create groups for families of people on the autism spectrum, that will:

- Give families a chance to be part of the Autism Advisory Council's work
- Work on autism together with other organisations that already exist.

We will continue to organise a meeting every year with service providers to:

- talk about the services that they provide and that people need
- be able to see the work that they do, how they are supporting people.
- be able to talk to these service providers regularly





We will talk to other organisations to see what the needs and difficulties faced by persons on the autism spectrum are, in different places in Malta, including in Gozo.



We will also work with voluntary organisations, and with student and youth organisations, including KNZ – the National Youth Council, to:

- Make sure they work harder to include people on the autism spectrum, including as leaders in these organisations.

The National Youth Council is a group bringing together young people from many different organisations in Malta, to discuss about and work on things that are important to young people in Malta.



We will work hard with schools, so that these will offer more education (lessons) about autism, and about how persons on the autism spectrum can make their voices heard.

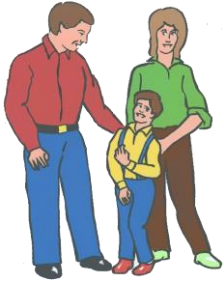
6. AUTISM AND ADULTS



We will work with adults on the autism spectrum, through the Autism Advisory Council, to:

- continue to see what the needs and difficulties of adults on the autism spectrum are, and why these adults feel the need to hide that they are autistic from other people sometimes.
- increase knowledge about autism, and support adults on the autism spectrum so that they will feel more accepted and included.

- create opportunities for adults on the autism spectrum to have fun together and work together, including by setting up a specific group to do this.
- talk to other people or organisations, so they can also give their support.



We will involve families, siblings (brothers and sisters) and others close to adults on the autism spectrum, so that they can support them better.

We will give training (teaching) about autism and adults, to decision-makers and service providers who work in the fields of:

- ⇒ Employment
- ⇒ Being able to live in the community instead of in group homes
- ⇒ Social support (for example, social workers)
- ⇒ Healthcare;
- ⇒ Education;
- ⇒ Entertainment and Culture (for example, people who work in museums)
- ⇒ Voluntary (non-Government) organisations;
- ⇒ Sports;
- ⇒ Justice (for example, Courts) and law enforcement (for example, police).

We will talk to adults on the autism spectrum, and to those persons who are close to them, about how to change different laws, so that:

- adults on the autism spectrum are allowed to make decisions about their lives.
- adults on the autism spectrum will have the support that they need, including the support of people who they trust, when they need.



We will work to make sure that adults on the autism spectrum:



- have the right to discover different things about sex
- have the right to make their choices about their relationships and sexual health.
- are not forced to take contraception (for example, pills), that stop them from having children, if they do not want this contraception.
- are not forced to have an operation, that will harm them or not allow them to be able to have children.
- have the right to have a family and to be parents.
- get education (lessons) about sex that is good for their age, including about when to say no, and how to read body language



We will work to make sure that there is better support when persons on the autism spectrum need to make big changes in life (for example, from one school to another, or from one service to another).



We will also start talking about older people and autism, with people who work in the field of autism, both in Malta and abroad.



We will work to make sure that, in all of the things we just spoke about, everyone is included – women, men and other people who identify in a different way.



7. AUTISM ADVISORY COUNCIL



The Autism Advisory Council will continue to work on the things written in this document, together with:

- The Directorate for Disability Issues (DDI), to make sure that the things written in this document are done. DDI is an office which makes sure that work is done, so that the rights of disabled persons in Malta are protected.
- The Government, who we will talk to, to see how the Autism Advisory Council can do its work better, including by changing the law.