



Autism Spectrum Disorder – Empowering and Supporting Teachers (ASD-EAST)



OBJECTIVES

- Map current good practice and scope areas needing development with regard to the educational inclusion of children with ASD in Croatia, FYR of Macedonia and Poland
- Develop a model training programme and materials for specialist teachers supporting the educational inclusion of children and young people with ASD in these countries
- Use these materials to pilot the professional development/training programme to specialist teachers from mainstream and special schools in Croatia, FYR of Macedonia and Poland
- Evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of the materials and the impact of the training using quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis
- Share the programme, tools and materials with stakeholders and make recommendations to national policy-makers in these countries.

METHODOLOGY

The project undertaken by this strategic partnership will utilise a collaborative, action-based methodology, and will be evaluated using a mixed-methods, evidence-based programme evaluation approach to data collection and analysis. This methodology has been designed to meaningfully identify impact and to realise practical and practicable 'real world' outcomes. The length of the project is 24 months. The project will be undertaken in four phases (Sep 2018 – Aug 2020):

Phase 1 Sep 2018 – Mar 2019	Mapping activity: identification of good practice and areas requiring development
Phase 2 Jan 2019 – Aug 2019	Development of training programme and materials
Phase 3 Sep 2019 – Mar 2020	Implementation of pilot training programme. Evaluation of programme
Phase 4 Feb 2020 – Aug 2020	Dissemination of training programme and materials, and recommendations

AIM OF THE PROJECT

To empower teachers in Croatia, FYR of Macedonia and Poland to support the effective inclusion of children with ASD in education, by providing them with appropriate knowledge, effective strategies and locally-appropriate training.

THE PARTNERS	Lead partner: University of Northampton (UK)	Target Autism (UK)	ERF, University of Zagreb (Croatia)	Centar za Autizam (Croatia)
	Pedagogic University Krakow (Poland)	Sina Svetulka (FYR of Macedonia)	Special School Dr Zlatan Sremec (FYR of Macedonia)	Autism Europe (Belgium)

CONTEXT

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a lifelong condition which affects about 1 in every 100, and which impacts all aspects of the individual's experience, including how they learn. Children and young people with ASD share common education needs with all other children, and are entitled to the culturally valued skills, knowledge and understanding that will enable them to participate and be included in their society. However, they have specific and special needs regarding the characteristic difficulties in ASD regarding communication, social understanding, inflexibility and sensory processing. Education has been identified as the key area of intervention for those with ASD, and meaningful access to effective education is crucial.

Due to the diversity within the autism spectrum, there is no single educational intervention that is effective for all; teachers need to possess a range of skills and be able to utilise a range of strategies to meet the needs of these learners. Providing such effective education has been identified as challenging throughout and across Europe. Work undertaken by project partners in previous and current strategic partnerships has identified both areas of good practice and training/development needs. This partnership has a focus on developing appropriate training to support effective teaching to ensure the inclusion of these learners in three Eastern European countries: Croatia, FYR of Macedonia and Poland.

ACTIVITIES

Mapping and scoping – an initial mapping and scoping exercise

- a review of the literature regarding teachers' training needs regarding ASD in Eastern Europe and more widely
- a review of local policy and practice (including classroom practice) with regard to teacher training regarding ASD
- a review of existing models and practice regarding teacher education in ASD
- identify areas of good practice as well as training needs, barriers, and opportunities to support development.
- an investigation (via survey and focus groups) of the attitudes and perceptions of specialist teachers in Croatia, FYR of Macedonia and Poland regarding their skills, understanding and training needs with regard to ASD

Development of curriculum and training programme – this activity will inform the development of a curriculum and training programme for teachers working with learners with ASD

- a core curriculum of information and strategies identified as essential for all specialist educators working with students with ASD
- differentiated information and strategies to take account of the range of settings in which children with ASD may be educated (e.g. mainstream schools, special schools) as well as other local contextual factors and needs
- the curriculum and materials will be collectively co-created by the partnership

Development of training materials – training materials will be locally revised and differentiated

Pilot training events – pilot training events for teachers supporting learners with ASD will be held in Croatia, Poland and FYR of Macedonia

- 1 x training event for special educators supporting the inclusion of learners with ASD in mainstream schools (n=15-20)
- 1 x training event for educators supporting the inclusion of learners with ASD in special schools (n=15-20)

Evaluation – this will be undertaken using a mixed methods programme evaluation methodology

- pre-and post-training and follow-up survey of all teachers receiving training
- follow-up interviews (3 months) with sample of teachers
- focus group with training teams from each country

Revision and finalisation of materials

- training materials revised as necessary again following pilot training(s) and evaluation

Dissemination

- local stakeholder conferences will be held in Croatia, Poland and FYR of Macedonia to share and publicise the work of the partnership, and present the intellectual outputs
- policy recommendations will be developed alongside the curriculum and materials



David Preece said, 'This project arose out of our previous ESIPP Erasmus+ project, where we developed training for parents in south-east Europe. In our evaluation, it became clear that there was also a great need for training for professionals. It is a pleasure to be continuing to work with Croatian and Macedonian colleagues, and we look forward to developing our relationship with our Polish partners'.



RESULTS EXPECTED AND LONGER-TERM BENEFITS

The final programme and materials will be made available via the Erasmus+ dissemination platform, as well as via individual partners' and the project websites.

Supporting teachers in these countries to understand ASD and effective evidence-based approaches and strategies to effectively include children and young people with ASD in education will have significant benefits with regard to educational and social inclusion, educational achievement, equality of opportunity and teachers' professional competence. As such, this project will contribute to the development of a more equitable and inclusive Europe in the short, medium and longer terms.

INTELLECTUAL OUTPUTS

Mapping report	ASD-EAST teacher training curriculum/programme
ASD-EAST teacher training materials	Programme evaluation
Journal articles	Policy recommendations