

PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until 00:01 Thursday 30th March 2017

Autism-Europe calls for the removal of barriers for autism in order to build an accessible society

On World Autism Awareness Day (2 April), Autism-Europe will launch the second stage of its twofold campaign “Break Barriers Together for Autism”. In its first stage it sought to inform people of what accessibility barriers people with autism and their families typically face in society. From April 2, the campaign will then work as a call for action to decision makers, service providers, business leaders and society as a whole, to work alongside the autism community in order to remove these barriers and open our society up to provide fuller inclusion of people on the autism spectrum.

The EU’s current legislative context means that the subject of accessibility for persons with disabilities is high on the EU agenda. The European Accessibility Act proposed by the European Commission is currently being negotiated. The Act will set minimum accessibility requirements for a series of products and services across the European Union. Furthermore the 30 March 2017 also marks the 10th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’ (UNCRPD) opening for signature. The Convention’s Article 9 states in particular that States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure persons with disabilities have access to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including ICT systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public.

It is therefore a crucial time to bring to the forefront the access needs of people with autism. Although the Accessibility Act does not prescribe technical details regarding how to render a product or service accessible, it provides for the development of standards or technical implementing measures wherever more detail is needed. Beyond the Accessibility Act, considering universal access should be a key priority for States Parties to the UNCRPD.

For its 2017 campaign, Autism-Europe is thus seeking to promote the removal of common barriers faced by people on the autism spectrum. In the first stage of the campaign, which ran prior to World Autism Awareness Day on April 2, Autism-Europe asked people on the autism spectrum and their families to share their experiences of the barriers they face. Participants were invited to share photographs or videos of themselves holding a banner or piece of paper bearing a word or a description describing their greatest barrier.

Now, as of April 2, participants are invited to symbolically break their barriers by photographing or filming themselves holding the same banner, before showing themselves breaking through it or ripping it up. People can also show solidarity by breaking through a plain banner, or simply appearing holding the campaign logo. This second stage of the campaign will be accompanied by a global call for action to European decision-makers, service providers, and business leaders. The campaign will call on them to take note of these barriers, and to work together with autistic people, their families and their representative organisations, in order to remove them.



Recent studies suggest autism affects approximately one per cent of Europeans,¹ which represents over five million people in the EU. Autism is often referred to as an invisible disability, because people can often be unaware that a person is autistic. It also means that it can be difficult to comprehend the barriers people with autism are faced with, let alone foresee ways of breaking down these barriers to improve accessibility. More awareness and understanding are therefore needed in society.

On World Autism Awareness Day, Autism-Europe is therefore calling on people to join them in bringing home the crucial importance of breaking down barriers to accessibility for people with autism. Engaging with people on the autism spectrum and hearing their experiences is key to understanding the hurdles still faced by the autism community, and it is only by working together that we can remove them, and foster a society in which everyone is included.

[World Autism Awareness Day](#) was declared by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007 as an annual day to draw attention to the urgent needs of people with autism around the world.

Autism is a complex lifelong disability. People on the autism spectrum experience persistent difficulties with social communication and social interaction, and might display restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests. Currently, around 1 in 100 people in the European Union have autism.

Autism-Europe aisbl is an international association whose main objective is to advance the rights of people with autism and their families and to help them improve their quality of life. It ensures effective liaison among more than 80 member autism organisations in more than 30 European countries, including 26 Member States of the European Union, governments and European and international institutions. Autism-Europe is a member of the European Disability Forum and the Social Platform.

- More information and interviews, please do not hesitate to contact Aurélie Baranger, Director of Autism-Europe, in Brussels. Tel: +32 (0)2 675 75 05 Email: aurelie.baranger@autismeurope.org
- Follow us on social media and spread the message using the hashtag:

#AutismDay2017



World Autism Awareness Day social media campaign: Breaking through paper

To help show support for our campaign, we ask people to symbolically break barriers by writing a short description of what make society inaccessible for you on a banner or a piece of paper. Then they can photograph or film themselves holding their banner, before showing themselves breaking through it or ripping it up.

For more information on how to get involved, or to see the campaign toolkit, or to download the campaign banner, go to: <http://www.autismeurope.org/>.

Or contact AE Communications Officer, Cristina Fernández:

Tel: +32 (0)2 675 75 05 Email: communication@autismeurope.org

¹ Elsabbagh et al. 2012; Fombonne, 2011; ADDM 2012; Mattila et al. 2011; Saemundsen et al. 2013; Baird et al. 2011

