



ASD-EAST



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ASD-EAST: Empowering Teachers to Work with Autism in Eastern Europe

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• ASD-EAST project - rationale

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong condition affecting approximately 1% of the population
- Education has been identified as a key intervention for this group, and meaningful access to effective education is crucial
- Due to the diverse nature of the autism spectrum, there is no single educational intervention that is effective or appropriate for all, and therefore teachers need a range of skills and strategies
- However, many teachers do not have access to appropriate training; a particular need for support has been identified within Eastern Europe and the Balkans, where there are significant training and developmental needs
- Therefore developed this 2-year EU-funded project led by UoN (Sept 2018-Aug 2020)

• ASD-EAST project - objectives

- Undertake initial mapping activity to identify
 - country-specific and Europe-wide good practice
 - areas needing development with regard to the effective educational inclusion of children with ASD in Croatia, North Macedonia and Poland
- Develop locally appropriate training and materials for specialist educators to support the educational inclusion of primary-age children with ASD (in both special education and mainstream/inclusive settings)
- Use these materials to:
 - pilot the training with specialist educators from both special and mainstream settings across Croatia, North Macedonia and Poland
 - evaluate the impact of this training on teachers' skills and practice
- Share the materials with stakeholders and professionals

• ASD-EAST partnership

- 9 partners:
- 4 x academic partners:
 - University of Northampton, University of Zagreb, Pedagogical University of Krakow, Autism Macedonia Blue Firefly
- 3 x schools
 - Centre for Autism, School No 12, Zlatan Sremec
- 1 x training organisation
 - Target Autism
- 1 x dissemination lead
 - Autism Europe



• ASD-EAST project – activity so far

- Activity has focused on the mapping the ‘state of the art’ regarding existing models and practice regarding teacher education in ASD, as well as identifying the current knowledge, attitudes and training needs of teachers.
- Academics from the University of Northampton in the UK have reviewed the literature regarding teacher education in ASD in general
 - Partners from Croatia, North Macedonia and Poland have led on reviewing local policy and practice on this topic.
- To gather data from practicing teachers a structured questionnaire was developed in autumn 2018 by academic partners

• ASD-EAST project – survey of teachers

- The survey tool collected quantitative data regarding:
 - teachers' knowledge and understanding of ASD
 - their attitudes towards different types of educational approaches in ASD (and the extent to which they are used)
 - their confidence in addressing the educational needs of such children
 - their evaluation of their own training needs
- The questionnaire was distributed to teachers between November 2018 and February 2019: in total 560 questionnaires were distributed and 340 were returned. After data cleansing, the sample comprised 294 usable questionnaires (103 from Croatia, 73 from North Macedonia, 118 from Poland)
- In addition, focus groups gathered qualitative data from teachers in special education and mainstream/inclusive settings from Krakow, Skopje and Zagreb in December 2018.

• ASD-EAST survey – who responded?

- Respondents – n = 294: 94% were female, 6% male
- Age: 41% were 20-35, 44% were 36-50, 14% were over 50
- 53% worked in special schools, 47% in mainstream/inclusive schools
- 93% worked in urban settings, 7% in rural
- 80% had an MA or higher degree, 20% had a BA
- 66% had received training about ASD at university; 66% had received further training
- Experience: <1 year: 29%; 1-5 yrs: 32%; 6-10 yrs: 19%; >10 yrs: 20%

• Teachers' attitudes and understanding

- Responses to attitudinal questions revealed that there were differences in attitude between the three countries towards both:
 - the nature of autism
 - the needs and potential of children with autism
- There were also statistically significant differences between mainstream and special school teachers in many areas
- Mainstream teachers were more likely to hold inaccurate beliefs – such as that children could 'grow out' of ASD
- They were also more likely to:
 - hold pessimistic views regarding the education of children with ASD
 - minimise the importance of specialised approaches.

• ASD-appropriate strategies – training and use

- Very low level of previous training (3-15%) – or perceived competence (1-8%) – in any methods
- Special school teachers – slightly higher levels of training (3-21%)/competence (2-16%) than mainstream teachers, but still extremely low
- However, despite the low levels of training and perceived competence, many specific approaches used within the three countries
- Higher use of specific approaches in ASD in special schools than in mainstream schools
- In many mainstream schools, ASD-specific approaches were never used
- This suggests that many teachers are using specific approaches either without training or without feeling competent in their use.

• Confidence in dealing with typical issues and challenges

- More than half of all teachers expressed confidence in only two of 22 identified domains of working (9%)
- Special education teachers were generally more confident than their mainstream counterparts in working with autism
- More than 50% of mainstream teachers did not express confidence in any of the 22 domains, while more than 50% of special educators were confident in only six of the 22 domains (27%)
- Teachers in focus groups identified particular challenges in managing challenging behaviour, adapting the curriculum and classroom environment, facilitating inclusion and working collaboratively with other professionals and parents
- >90% expressed desire for further training, based around practical strategies

• Next steps

- Mapping activity has highlighted the importance of and need for the training
- ASD-EAST curriculum currently being developed to cover 6 topic areas:
 - Supporting communication
 - Emotional understanding
 - Social skills
 - Sensory needs
 - Modifications and adaptations
 - Challenging behaviour
- Training materials being developed by the partnership, and trainings will take place in autumn 2019

• Thanks

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