



Pathways to
Employment

HR Leaders Compendium Workplan

Design of HR compendium
workplan

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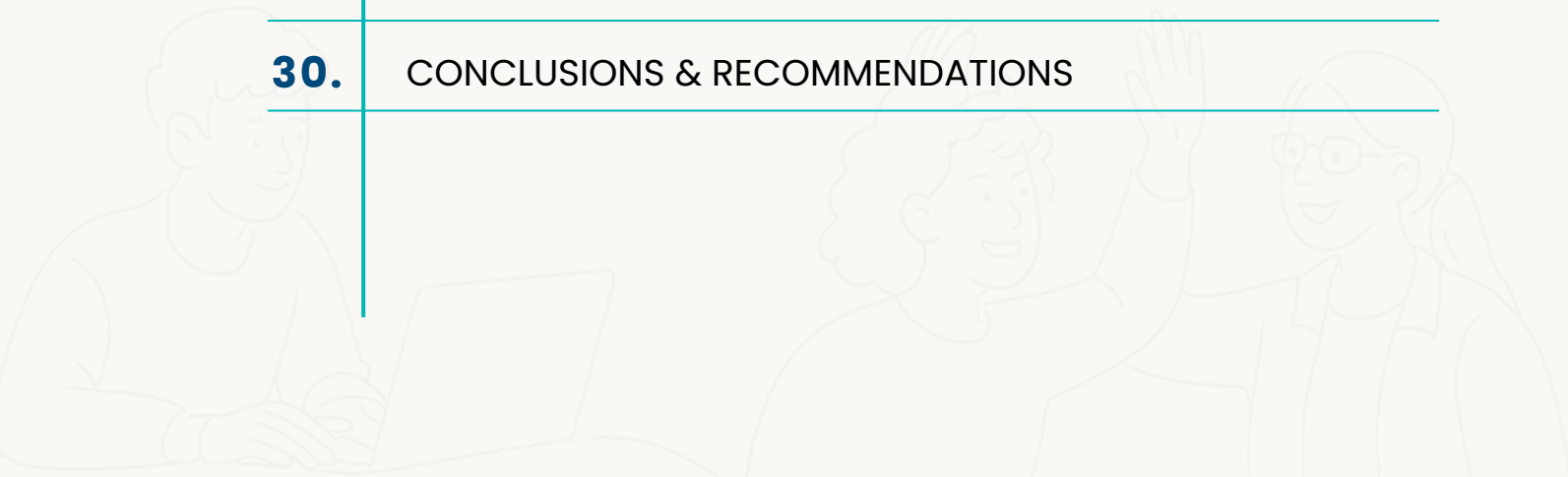


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Executive Summary

The HR Compendium aims to be a key tool to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the workplace inclusion of young people with autism. This document brings together practical guidelines, operational tools, and best practices aimed at improving the selection, management, and adaptation processes in the workplace.

The Compendium **is primarily aimed at HR managers, managers and employers**, providing concrete guidance on creating inclusive work environments, valuing the skills of young people with autism, and ensuring an approach that respects their specific needs.

The main objectives of the document include:

Providing guidelines on inclusive recruitment, **including** accessible job advertisements, **adapted** interview methods, and fair assessment tools;

Supporting SMEs in the management and integration of autistic employees through structured onboarding, **mentoring** and reasonable workplace accommodations;

Promoting an inclusive corporate culture by raising staff awareness and defining clear communication policies and empathetic leadership;

Presenting case studies and best practices from companies that have successfully implemented the inclusion of young people with autism.

The Compendium is therefore a valuable operational tool for SMEs, improving HR practices and helping to create more inclusive work environments that can enhance the talents of young people with autism and promote their sustainable integration into the world of work.

Introduction and context

The inclusion of young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the workforce is one of **the most significant challenges** facing the contemporary European labor market. In line with the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030, the European Union recognizes the importance of **promoting accessible employment opportunities** and work environments that value diversity and reduce barriers to the full social and professional participation of people with autism.

Despite regulatory progress and growing social awareness, data shows that the employment rate for people with autism remains **very low**, ranging between 10% and 20% in European countries (European Commission, 2021). This situation does not reflect a lack of skills or motivation on the part of young people with autism, but rather highlights the need to strengthen **support for businesses and HR professionals** by providing tools and knowledge that enable the creation of more accessible, welcoming work environments that are attentive to neurocognitive diversity.

As pointed out by Emanuela Zappalà (2021), the inclusion of people with autism in the workplace must be interpreted through an ecological-systemic approach, which considers the interaction between the individual, the work environment, and the social network. From this perspective, professional integration does not depend solely on individual skills, but above all on the ability of the context to adapt and create favorable conditions for acceptance, communication, and collaboration.

For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which make up over 99% of the European economic fabric, this process can be complex for several reasons:

- **the lack of operational guidelines** to make selection and onboarding processes accessible;
- **the difficulty of adapting the work environment** to the sensory and communication needs of autistic employees;
- **the lack of training for HR managers** in managing neuroatypical diversity.

SMEs often face practical difficulties in implementing inclusive HR policies. Many articles emphasize that promoting inclusion requires not only compliance with regulations, but also a proactive approach to adapting the workplace. This includes adopting structured onboarding processes, implementing reasonable accommodations in the work environment—such as quiet spaces, flexible working hours, or assistive technologies—and establishing peer support and mentoring systems to facilitate social integration and skills transfer.

However, experience and best practices show that SMEs that adopt inclusive policies see improvements in their organizational climate, greater staff loyalty, and increased internal innovation, thanks to the promotion of different perspectives and ways of thinking.

In this context, the HR Leaders Compendium aims to:

- ✓ Offer concrete guidelines to promote inclusive selection, management, and adaptation processes;
- ✓ Provide practical and easily applicable tools for HR and managers;
- ✓ Promote an organizational culture based on welcoming and valuing differences;
- ✓ Contribute to the systemic change necessary to ensure equal opportunities for young people with autism to access and remain in employment.

REFERENCE:

Zappalà, E. (2021). Work inclusion of students and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder: An ecological-systemic approach. *Italian Journal of Special Education for Inclusion*, 9(2), 113–120. <https://ojs.pensamultimedia.it/index.php/sipes/article/view/4992>

Understanding Autism in the Workplace

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects how a person perceives the world, communicates and interacts with others. It is referred to as an autism spectrum disorder because the manifestations of this condition differ from person to person.

In the workplace, understanding autism means recognizing that neurocognitive differences can affect certain organizational dynamics, but can also represent significant added value.

Many people on the autism spectrum demonstrate:

Attention to detail and high precision in repetitive or structured activities;

Strong work ethic and reliability;

Honesty and consistency in communication;

Developed analytical and logical skills;

Preference for routine and clarity in procedures.

These aspects can become valuable assets in roles that require rigor, concentration, technical or analytical skills, such as IT, logistics, accounting, research, or quality control.

Areas that may require support or adaptation

At the same time, certain autistic characteristics can affect workplace dynamics and require **more attentive support from HR and colleagues**. Among the most common issues are:

- **Indirect or implicit communication:** some people may have difficulty decoding irony, double meanings, or nonverbal messages.
- **Social interactions:** informal contexts (breaks, social gatherings) can be complex or stressful;
- **Sensory management:** noise, bright lights, open spaces, or unpredictable stimuli can cause discomfort or fatigue;
- **Sudden transitions and changes:** unplanned changes in routine or tasks can cause anxiety;
- **Unclear or overly general feedback** can be difficult to interpret.

For HR and managers, understanding these elements means:

- **Adopting clear and predictable communication**, with explicit instructions and concrete feedback;
- **Structuring work in a transparent way**, with well-defined roles, objectives, and timelines;
- **Fostering a sensorially balanced environment**, offering quiet or flexible work options;
- **Promoting a culture of respect and diversity** that avoids stereotypes and encourages collaboration.

According to the National Autistic Society (2020), the most effective accommodations do not require large investments, but rather awareness and flexibility: small changes in communication, organization, or the environment can significantly improve the work experience for both the autistic employee and the entire team.

REFERENCE:

National Autistic Society. (2020). Autism at work: An employer's guide. Retrieved from <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/employment/employers>

Hedley, D., Cai, R., Uljarević, M., Wilmot, M., Spoor, J. R., Richdale, A., & Dissanayake, C. (2018). Autism and the workplace: An international review of employment and vocational support practices. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 55, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2018.07.003>.

Understanding Autism in the Workplace

The selection process is often the first point of contact between the company and a person with autism. For this reason, an inclusive approach to recruitment not only allows you to reach a wider pool of talent, but also ensures equal access opportunities. Making procedures clearer, more accessible, and more transparent helps all candidates, not just those on the autism spectrum, and improves the overall quality of the selection process.

Writing inclusive job advertisements

An inclusive job advertisement is the first step in attracting neurodivergent candidates, and to make it effective, you need to:

- **Use simple, direct language**, avoiding vague or metaphorical expressions unless strictly necessary.
- **Focus on the technical skills and specific objectives** of the role, clearly indicating the daily activities.
- Specify whether the company promotes **diversity and inclusion policies** or whether any forms of support or accommodation are provided.
- **Provide transparent information** on timelines, selection stages, and assessment methods (e.g., tests, interviews, practical tests).

Practical example:

"We are an inclusive company and welcome applications from people with different ways of thinking and learning. If you have specific needs in order to participate in the selection process, please let us know: we will be happy to adapt."

Writing inclusive job advertisements

HR Tool 1 – Inclusive job advertisement template

POSITION INFORMATION

Job Title: _____

Department: _____

Location: _____

Working Arrangement:

- ☐ On-site
- ☐ Hybrid
- ☐ Remote

Working Hours: _____

ROLE OVERVIEW

Briefly describe the purpose of the role in clear and simple language:

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES

List the key tasks using concrete and direct language: _____

Writing inclusive job advertisements

ESSENTIAL SKILLS

List only the skills that are genuinely required for the role.

Technical Skills:

Knowledge: -----

Experience: -----

Preferred Skills (Optional):

WORKPLACE ACCESSIBILITY

Our organisation is committed to creating an inclusive recruitment process.

Please indicate which adjustments can be offered:

- ☐ Interview questions available in advance
- ☐ Flexible interview scheduling
- ☐ Online interview option
- ☐ Quiet interview environment
- ☐ Additional time for practical assessments
- ☐ Other accommodations upon request

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STATEMENT

Example:

"We welcome applications from people with different experiences, backgrounds and ways of thinking. If you require any adjustments during the recruitment process, please let us know. We are committed to providing an accessible and inclusive selection process for all candidates."

Conducting accessible interviews

Traditional interviews can be a barrier for people with autism, especially when they are based on implicit assessments of social communication or spontaneity.

To make the interview more fair and predictive of actual skills, certain factors must be taken into account:

Environment: organize the interview in a quiet space, free from sensory distractions. If possible, allow for online meetings or preliminary visits.

Clarity and structure: explain the stages of the meeting in advance (duration, topics, participants).

Feedback: provide clear answers about the next steps and when the outcome will be communicated.

Practical tests: When possible, include practical exercises or tests that allow you to assess skills more objectively.



Best practice:

Allowing candidates to receive the interview format in advance (number of questions, duration, participants) reduces anxiety and improves performance.

HR Tool 2 – Example of an accessible interview guide:

Position:

Administrative Assistant

Interview duration: approximately 40–45 minutes

Interviewers:

- HR Manager
- Department Supervisor

Stage	Duration
Welcome and introduction	10 min
Questions about experience	10 min
Candidate questions	5 min
workplace tour	10 min
Explanation of next steps	5 min

HR Tool 2 – Example of an accessible interview guide:

Interview Questions

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself and tell us about your previous work or study experience?
2. What type of work tasks do you enjoy the most?
3. Can you describe a task or project that you completed successfully?
What was your role?
4. How do you usually organise your work when you have several tasks to complete?
5. If you receive instructions that are not completely clear, what would you normally do?
6. This role involves working with colleagues every day. What helps you communicate effectively with other people?
7. Is there anything that helps you perform at your best in a work environment?

What Happens Next?

We will review all interviews.

You will receive feedback by (date).

Notes for HR Professionals

Before sending this interview guide, remember to:

- ☐ Send it at least 2–3 days before the interview.
- ☐ Explain the duration and structure of the interview.
- ☐ Invite the candidate to request any reasonable adjustments if needed.

Tools for assessing skills

Many traditional selection tools focus on social skills or presentation abilities, which do not always reflect a candidate's actual competence in performing job tasks.

To make the assessment more fair and predictive of performance, it is useful to integrate **work tests or practical simulations** directly related to the activities of the role, so that people can demonstrate their skills in a concrete way.

Individual interviews can be supplemented by **assessments based on specific tasks**, such as problem solving, accuracy, and logical skills, allowing for direct observation of the required competencies. At the same time, it is advisable to avoid psychometric or personality tests that could penalize atypical communication or cognitive styles, as they do not necessarily reflect actual job skills.

Finally, it is essential **to train HR staff** and recruiters on unconscious biases related to neurodiversity in order to promote a more equitable and inclusive selection process that respects individual differences.

Some best practices:

- Allow for longer response times or extra breaks during tests, if necessary, to ensure equal opportunities;
- Awareness sessions and practical workshops can help recruiters recognize their own implicit expectations and adopt more objective and inclusive assessment methods.

Practical tips and checklists for HR

AREA	GUIDING QUESTION FOR HR	GOOD PRACTICE
JOB ADVERTISEMENTS	<i>Is the language clear and unambiguous?</i>	Avoid vague terms and prefer operational, concrete descriptions.
COMMUNICATION	<i>Have you informed the candidate about the interview format?</i>	Send information in advance about duration, participants, and objectives.
ENVIRONMENT	<i>Is the interview environment calm and accessible?</i>	Reduce sensory distractions and provide opportunities for breaks.
ASSESSMENT	<i>Am I evaluating concrete skills rather than impressions?</i>	Prioritize practical tasks and objective criteria.
FEEDBACK	<i>Have I provided clear feedback with specific timelines?</i>	Send concise, respectful, and timely communications.

REFERENCE:

Autismeurope. (2023). INFUSE Compendium of best practices: Bridging the autism employment gap in Europe [PDF]. Retrieved from https://www.autismeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ENG_INFUSE-Compendium-of-best-practices.pdf

Inclusive HR Management & Workplace Adaptation

Structured and Gradual Onboarding

Clear and well-organized onboarding could help new young hires understand expectations, company procedures, and team dynamics. To make this happen, some solutions could be: providing **written or visual materials** on the company's tasks and internal rules, introducing the new employee **gradually** based on activities and avoiding information overload, and finally assigning an **internal tutor or mentor** who can guide the new hire and answer daily questions.

Reasonable Workplace Adjustments

Some reasonable adjustments allow the physical space, tools, and schedules to be adapted to individual needs. For example:

- **Quiet workspaces** or workspaces separated from excessive sensory stimuli;
- The possibility of **using support tools** (specific software, noise-canceling headphones, adjustable lighting);
- **Flexible working hours** or the possibility of extra breaks, particularly during learning phases or complex task.

Daily management and wellbeing monitoring

Daily monitoring of the well-being of employees with autism is essential to prevent stress and ensure sustainable performance. It is useful to establish regular **check-ins with the employee**, creating opportunities for them to share any difficulties, concerns, or suggestions about their workload and the organization of activities.

Clear and predictable communication about tasks, deadlines, and changes avoids anxiety and misunderstandings. It is also advisable to document the adjustments already implemented, so as to ensure continuity even in the event of changes in the team or direct supervisor. These measures help create an environment where the employee **feels supported** and where any critical issues can be addressed promptly.

Peer support and mentoring

Peer support is key to facilitating inclusion and promoting the integration of new hires. Assigning a **colleague as a tutor or mentor** can help autistic employees navigate both the practical aspects of the job and the social dynamics of the team. At the same time, promoting a **culture of collaboration** and mutual respect encourages the team to understand individual differences and value each person's skills. Short training sessions for the group on clear communication, neurodiversity, and ways of collaborating can help consolidate an inclusive climate, facilitating daily work and improving the overall cohesion of the team.

REFERENCE:

Autismeurope. (2023). INFUSE Compendium of best practices: Bridging the autism employment gap in Europe [PDF]. Retrieved from https://www.autismeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ENG_INFUSE-Compendium-of-best-practices.pdf

HR Tool 3 – Employee Wellbeing & Support Check-in Form

Purpose:

This form is designed to support regular conversations between managers and employees, helping to identify challenges early, review workplace adjustments and promote a positive and inclusive working environment.

Employee Information

Employee Name:

Position:

Department:

Manager:

Date of Check-in:

1. Overall Wellbeing

How have you been feeling at work over the past few weeks?

2. Workload

Do you feel your current workload is manageable?

☐ Yes

☐ Mostly

☐ No

3. Communication

Are the instructions and expectations clear?

☐ Always

☐ Usually

☐ Sometimes

☐ Rarely

Comments:

HR Tool 3 – Employee Wellbeing & Support Check-in Form

4. Workplace Environment

Are you comfortable with your current work environment?

Consider aspects such as:

- ☐ Noise
- ☐ Lighting
- ☐ Workspace organisation
- ☐ Breaks
- ☐ Other

5. Workplace Adjustments

Are the current workplace adjustments meeting your needs?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Partially
- ☐ No

Additional adjustments requested:

6. Team Relationships

How are your interactions with colleagues?

Next Review Meeting

Date: _____

Manager Signature: _____

Employee Signature: _____

Practical Tools for HR and MANAGERS

To support HR and managers in the inclusion of young people with autism, it is essential to provide practical and easily applicable tools that enable guidelines to be translated into concrete actions. These tools help companies to assess their inclusiveness, structure clear processes, and train staff effectively.

For example, an **operational checklist** could prove to be a useful self-assessment tool, allowing you to answer key questions such as: “Is my workplace truly inclusive?” or “Am I providing sufficient support for neurodiverse people?” Typical items to check include: clarity of selection processes, accessibility of interviews, reasonable accommodations in the workplace, internal communication, and support among colleagues. Checklists help HR and managers identify strengths and areas for improvement in a quick and structured way.

Other useful tools could be **templates**, which allow you to standardize and simplify certain key practices, such as:

- **Inclusive job descriptions**, which specify tasks and required skills in a clear and concrete manner, avoiding ambiguity and vague terms;
- **Onboarding plans**, with a gradual sequence of activities, clear objectives, assigned mentors, and monitoring tools;
- **Individual accommodation plans**, which document the agreed adjustments and specific support methods for each employee.

The use of templates reduces process uncertainty and ensures consistency and transparency in the management of neurodiverse individuals.

Furthermore, **practical guides, training videos, and online platforms** are valuable tools for raising awareness and training HR staff and teams, improving their understanding of autistic characteristics and inclusive management strategies. These materials may include:

- **Operational guidelines on interviews** and skills assessment;
- **Educational videos** for onboarding simulations;
- **E-learning courses on neurodiversity**, clear communication, and wellness management.

It is important for SMEs and HR managers to make use of European bodies, associations, and resources, as this can make a big difference in implementing inclusive practices. Organizations such as **Autism-Europe** offer guides, case studies, and practical tools that support the selection, onboarding, and day-to-day management of employees with autism.

At the same time, many local foundations and associations provide direct support to young people with autism, helping them prepare for the world of work and accompanying them in their first professional experiences.

There are also European platforms and projects dedicated to training managers and HR professionals, offering online courses, webinars, and teaching materials on topics such as clear communication, neurodiversity, and reasonable accommodations in the workplace. Accessing these resources not only enriches the skills of HR staff, but also builds a network of contacts and best practices at the European level, promoting the adoption of effective and replicable strategies in SMEs.

In summary, integrating these external sources and collaborating with specialized agencies allows companies to face the challenges of workplace inclusion with greater confidence and competence, transforming it into a structured and sustainable process.

REFERENCE:

Autismeurope. (2023). INFUSE Compendium of best practices: Bridging the autism employment gap in Europe [PDF]. Retrieved from https://www.autismeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ENG_INFUSE-Compendium-of-best-practices.pdf

Monitoring & Evaluating hr actions

Monitoring and evaluating inclusive **HR practices** are essential tools for ensuring that the strategies adopted produce concrete results and improve the work experience of young people with autism. Effective management is not limited to implementing adjustments or procedures, but requires **systematic analysis of processes, results, and employee well-being** in order to constantly refine the actions taken.

To evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive practices, it is useful to define specific and measurable key performance indicators (KPIs). Among the most relevant are:

Level of employee satisfaction, collected through questionnaires or periodic interviews;

Participation in training and mentoring programs;

Number of accommodations implemented and their perceived effectiveness by beneficiaries;

Results of competency assessments, comparing expected and actual performance.

HR Tool 4– Inclusive HR Action Tracker

HR ACTION	STATUS	RESPONSIBLE PERSON	DEADLINE	NEXT REVIEW
Review job advertisements	☐ Planned ☐ Ongoing ☐ Completed			
Adapt recruitment process	☐ Planned ☐ Ongoing ☐ Completed			
Prepare onboarding plan	☐ Planned ☐ Ongoing ☐ Completed			
Assign workplace mentor	☐ Planned ☐ Ongoing ☐ Completed			
Implement workplace accommodations	☐ Planned ☐ Ongoing ☐ Completed			
Schedule wellbeing check-ins	☐ Planned ☐ Ongoing ☐ Completed			
Deliver staff awareness training	☐ Planned ☐ Ongoing ☐ Completed			

HR Tool 4– Inclusive HR Action Tracker

Key achievements:

Challenges encountered:

Actions planned for the next review period:

PURPOSE OF THIS TOOL

Creating an inclusive workplace is an ongoing process rather than a one-time initiative. This tracker is designed to help HR professionals and managers monitor the implementation of inclusive HR practices and evaluate their effectiveness over time.

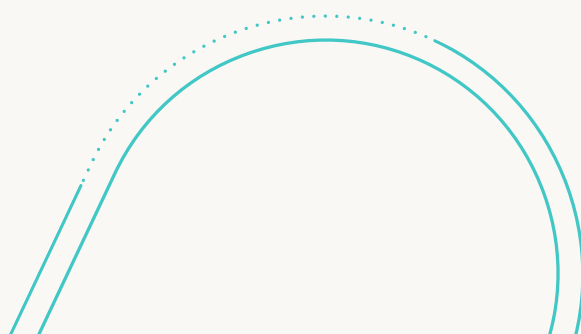
It is recommended that this tool be completed **every six months** as part of the organisation's HR review process. By regularly reviewing completed actions, identifying challenges and planning future improvements.

These indicators allow you to identify strengths and areas for improvement, providing concrete data for more informed HR decisions. Recent studies highlight the importance of combining quantitative and qualitative indicators, such as measuring perceived well-being and job satisfaction, with objective retention and performance data (Sánchez-Arizcuren et al., 2025; INFUSE Compendium, 2023).

Data collection can be done through **anonymous questionnaires, structured interviews, or digital feedback tools**, and it is important that the methods are simple, clear, and respectful of employee privacy. The data collected may include information on the onboarding experience, comfort with environmental adjustments, clarity of procedures, and the quality of support received from colleagues and mentors.

Continuous improvement of inclusive practices:

The data collected should be used to guide the continuous improvement of HR practices. For example, if feedback highlights that a certain type of interview is stressful or unclear, the company can review the format and provide more detailed instructions. Similarly, regular monitoring of workplace accommodations allows for the optimization of tools, spaces, and support methods, making the environment increasingly inclusive and functional.



According to recent studies conducted in European and international companies, a collaborative monitoring approach that involves employees with autism themselves promotes engagement and trust, as well as making the improvement of inclusive practices more effective (van der Linden et al., 2024; INFUSE Compendium, 2023).

In summary, **monitoring and evaluation should not be perceived as formal control, but as a participatory process aimed at strengthening the culture of inclusion** and ensuring that HR processes are truly effective and sustainable.

REFERENCE:

van der Linden, M., Schuurmans, J.A., Wright, E.P., Bunders-Aelen, J.G.F., & Regeer, B. (2024). Exploring autistic employment and retention realities: A qualitative study among 12 Dutch organizations. SAGE Journals. Autismeurope. (2023). INFUSE Compendium of best practices: Bridging the autism employment gap in Europe [PDF]. Retrieved from https://www.autismeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ENG_INFUSE-Compendium-of-best-practices.pdf

Conclusions & Recommendations

The inclusion of young people with autism in the workplace represents a strategic opportunity for SMEs and a fundamental step towards building more equitable and innovative work environments.

Inclusion requires awareness and preparation: employees with autism bring unique skills and strengths, but companies must be ready to structure selection, onboarding, and management processes adapted to their needs.

A few small adjustments can make a big difference, from modifying workspaces and tools to clear and predictable communication, seemingly simple changes can significantly increase productivity and well-being.

Finally, **monitoring** and ongoing training are essential. Effective inclusive practices require constant evaluation, data collection, feedback, and updating the skills of HR and teams.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HR AND SMES

Draft clear and inclusive job descriptions, specifying tasks and required skills in concrete terms.

Organize accessible interviews and practical tests, assessing actual skills without bias.

Implement structured onboarding, dedicated mentors, and reasonable accommodations in the workplace.

Train HR staff and teams on unconscious bias and neurodiversity management.

Use checklists, templates, and training materials to standardize inclusive practices.

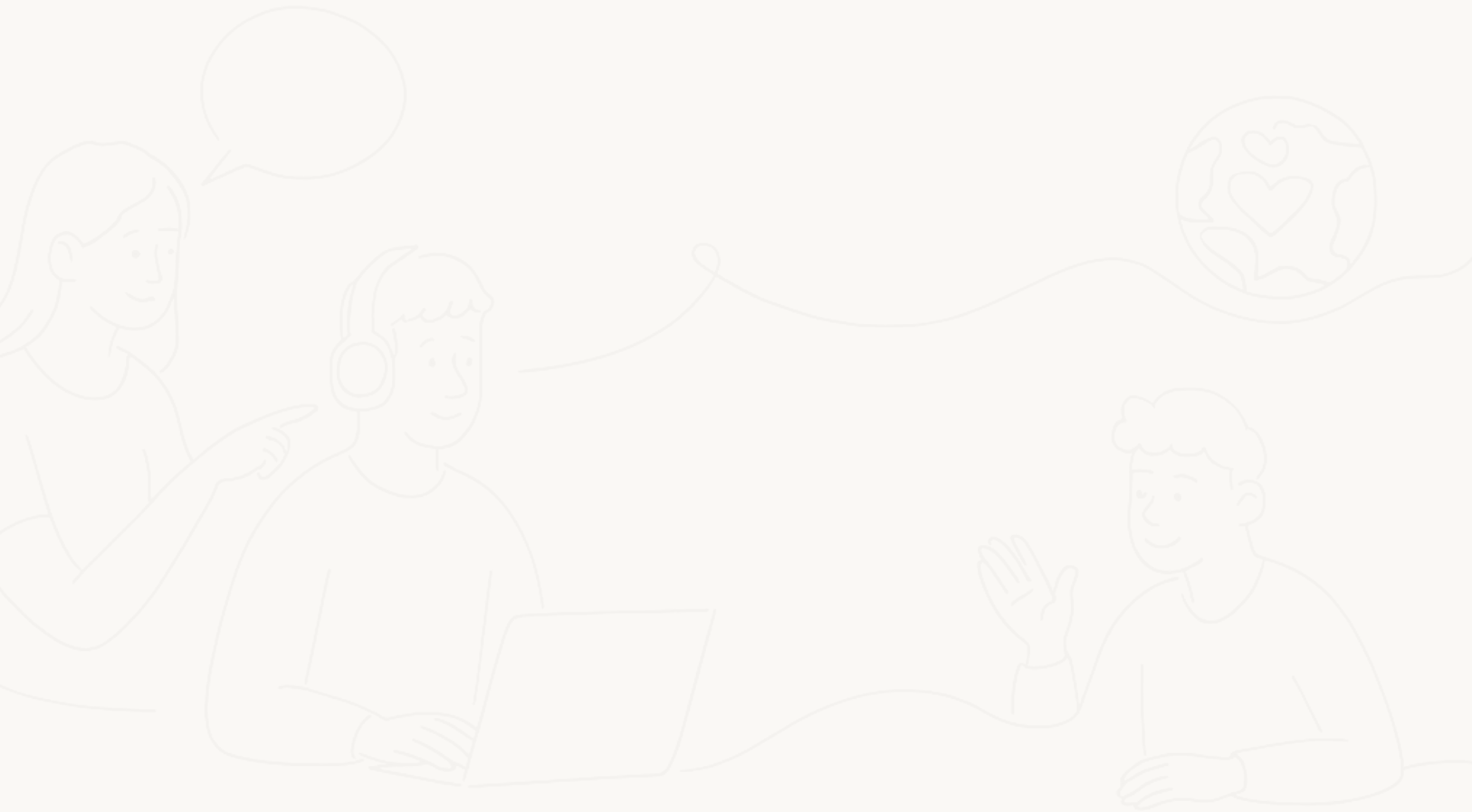
Regularly monitor well-being, performance, and retention, using concrete data to improve strategies.

The HR Leaders Compendium (PR5) is designed as a practical guide for SMEs, providing tools, guidelines, and best practices to foster truly inclusive work environments for young people with autism. For HR professionals, this compendium represents a key resource to enhance recruitment processes, optimize human resources management, and adapt workplaces to the specific needs of autistic employees.

By following the recommendations and using the practical tools included—such as inclusive job descriptions, structured onboarding plans, accessible interview practices, and monitoring checklists—HR can:

- **Identify** and leverage the unique strengths of autistic employees, ensuring their skills and talents are fully utilized;
- **Create** predictable, supportive, and accessible work environments, reducing barriers and promoting engagement;
- **Implement** structured HR practices that improve recruitment outcomes, retention, and overall employee satisfaction;
- **Foster** a culture of inclusion, not only benefiting autistic employees but enhancing the overall workplace climate and team performance.

Ultimately, the compendium empowers HR professionals to **translate knowledge into action**, moving from awareness to practical implementation. It positions HR as a strategic actor in shaping inclusive workplaces, ensuring that young people with autism can thrive professionally while contributing meaningfully to the organization.



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