

Introduction



- Hello, I'm David Preece, the Project Coordinator of ASD-EAST
- Thanks for coming to our virtual conference! We hope that you find it interesting
- In this short presentation I will give an outline of:
 - why we undertook this project
 - what we are seeking to achieve
 - who is involved in the project



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Hello, I'm David Preece, from the University of Northampton. I am the Project Coordinator of the ASD-EAST project. I know that things are difficult in these strange times, and on behalf of all my colleagues, I thank you very much for visiting our virtual conference. I hope that you will find it interesting and useful. In this short presentation I introduce the ASD-EAST project. I will explain the background and rationale for undertaking the project, discuss what we are seeking to achieve by our work, and introduce the project partners.

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 autism, no single educational intervention is effective or appropriate for all: therefore teachers need a range of appropriate skills and strategies
- A particular need for support has been identified within Eastern Europe and the Balkans, where there are significant training and developmental needs
- Therefore this 2-year EU-funded project (Sept 2018-Aug 2020) has been developed



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Autism Spectrum Disorder is a lifelong condition affecting about one person in a hundred.

It impacts upon all aspects of the individual's experience, including how they learn.

Children and young people with autism are entitled to effective education, and indeed education has been identified as a key intervention for those with autism.

However, such children have special needs arising from the characteristic difficulties of autism regarding communication, social understanding, restricted interests, the need for predictability and sensory processing.

Due to the diverse nature of the autism spectrum, no one single intervention or approach is effective for everyone.

Therefore, educators need to have a range of skills and strategies.

Providing effective education for learners on the autism spectrum is challenging, and a particular need for support and training has been identified within Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

Project partners in ASD-East had, in previous projects, identified areas of good practice, but also significant training and developmental needs.

And so, we came together in this project, focusing on developing training for teachers, to support them to effectively include children on the autism spectrum in education and learning.

The project is funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme.

It is a two-year project, which began in September 2018 and concludes in August 2020.

ASD-EAST project - objectives

- Undertake initial mapping activity to identify
 - country-specific and Europe-wide good practice
 - developmental needs 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, the Republic of North Macedonia and Poland
 - evaluate the impact of this training on teachers' skills and practice
- Share the materials with stakeholders and professionals



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ASD-EAST stands for Autism Spectrum Disorder – Supporting and Empowering Teachers. It is an innovative project and has been the first trans-European partnership specifically focusing on improving the skills of specialist educators in this region.

The project has united a partnership of schools, academics and governmental and non-governmental organisation to carry out its aims and objectives.

These were as follows.

Firstly, to map out and identify country-specific good practice in autism in Croatia, the Republic of North Macedonia and Poland, as well as more widely across Europe and beyond; and to identify areas needing development and support.

Secondly, to use the information obtained during the mapping phase to develop a locally appropriate training programme and training materials.

As it would be extremely challenging to attempt to address the needs of all teachers and age-groups in a two-year project, we focused in this project on the training needs of specialist teachers, who will be expected to work with children with autism.

With regard to age groups, we focused on children attending primary education, in both special education settings as well as mainstream and inclusive settings.

Thirdly, after developing the programme and materials, we used them to carry out pilot training workshops with specialist educators from Croatia, the Republic of North Macedonia and Poland.

Using a rigorous programme evaluation methodology, we identified teachers' satisfaction with the training, the appropriateness of the materials and the impact of

attending training on teachers' practice and confidence.

Finally, we are sharing the programme and our findings with stakeholders throughout Europe and making recommendations to policy makers, through conferences such as this one, and through materials such as our policy recommendations.

You can find the Policy Recommendations, and the accompanying video, elsewhere on this site.

ASD-EAST partnership

- 9 partners:
- 3 x schools
 - Centre for Autism, Zagreb, Croatia
 - Special School Zlatan Sremec, Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia
 - School No 12, Krakow, Poland
- 2 x NGOs
 - Autism Macedonia Blue Firefly, Republic of North Macedonia
 - Autism Europe, Belgium
- 1 x small business
 - Target Autism, UK
- 3 x academic partners:
 - University of Zagreb, Croatia
 - Pedagogical University of Krakow, Poland
 - University of Northampton, UK



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This project was designed to bring together partners with expertise in autism from across Europe, but with a specific focus on Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In it we have explicitly taken account of local, cultural and systemic differences across Europe; and we have sought to maximise skill development and impact within participating organisations, so that partners will be empowered to continue their work in this field after the end of the project.

I will now introduce the partnership.

There are three schools in the partnership.

The Centre for Autism in Zagreb, Croatia, is a specialist education facility funded by the government. It has provided a range of educational, vocational and social services to individuals with autism and their families since its creation in 1981, including a pre-school programme, educational programme, adult day care and a residential service. In addition, the Centre for Autism provides support and consultation services to teachers across Croatia.

Special School Zlatan Sremec, from Skopje in the Republic of North Macedonia, is one of only four special schools for children with intellectual disabilities in that country. Its students, a third of whom are on the autism spectrum, are taught in 14 classes on site, as well as in 9 satellite units in mainstream schools. The school cooperates with schools, kindergartens and other associations across North Macedonia and beyond.

School Number 12 is a large primary and junior high school in Krakow, Poland, with 550 pupils. It has 29 classes, 20 of which are inclusive. Classes generally consist of

approximately 20 students, typically with 3-5 students with special educational needs. The school has experience of working in partnerships to support educational and social inclusion.

There are two non-governmental organisations in the project.

Autism Macedonia Blue Firefly is a quite recently established association of professionals, academics and parents, based in Skopje. The association's purpose is to provide education and support regarding autism to individuals on the spectrum, their families and those who work with them.

Autism Europe, based in Brussels, is a pan-European organisation which plays a key role in raising public awareness and influencing European decision makers. It has member associations from across Europe and close links with European and international institutions. Autism Europe holds regular International Congresses which attract about 2000 participants from across the world. Autism Europe has had a key role in dissemination within this project.

Target Autism, a small business based in Northamptonshire UK, is an education consultancy that provides training and advice to a wide range of education, care and social settings, as well as delivering training to parents and professionals and clinical and diagnostic services.

Finally, there are three academic partners.

The Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Zagreb, Croatia, is the only higher education institution within that country providing education for professionals who will work with learners with special needs. As well as educating undergraduate and postgraduate students, the faculty has a centre for rehabilitation, providing both training and clinical services. The photo shows partners on the steps of the Faculty.

The Pedagogical University Krakow is the largest pedagogical university in Poland. It has a strong track record and reputation within the fields of inclusive education, social inclusion and the training of teachers and allied professionals.

The University of Northampton in the United Kingdom is coordinating this project. The University's Centre for Education and Research has a strong and well-established track record of undertaking and leading funded research in the areas of inclusive education, social inclusion and disability.

That is the partnership delivering the ASD-EAST project.

In the next video, I will discuss the Mapping Activity that took place to inform the development of the materials.

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