

A Feedback Report on the
**Malta National
Autism Strategy**
2021 - 2030





THE MALTA CHAMBER

**A Feedback Report on the Malta National Autism
Strategy 2021-2030**

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Industry**

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Introduction

It is interesting to note that there are currently two concurrent national strategies put forward for consultation regarding persons with disability both covering the employment aspect, namely with regard to:

I. National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disability 2021-2030 (09 Work & Employment)

- ✓ From: Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing (Office for Disability Issues (ODI))
- ✓ Published: 9 June 2021
- ✓ Running till: 7 July 2021

II. National Autism Strategy 2021-2030 (04 Employment)

- ✓ From: Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing (Autism Advisory Council)
- ✓ Published: 30 March 2021
- ✓ Running till: 20 April 2021

On a national level there is also a current Bill (No.213 of 04.05.2021) being discussed in parliament that was presented by the Minister of Finance in January 2020. The scope of this Bill is to strengthen Chapter 210 with various measures that were announced during the Budget of 2015. These measures will now be embedded in the law.

On account of the above, The Malta Chamber would like to present the below recommendations to support persons with disability, who are on the Autism Spectrum into paid employment.

Recommendations

1. Framework

The Malta Chamber acknowledges the need to establish an updated and holistic framework for persons with disability to enter the labour market and retain their work. The Malta Chamber acknowledges the fact that this framework should tackle all types of impairments, including but not limited to those on the autism spectrum as this goes in line with the National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disability 2021-2030 and also 'Persons within the Autism Spectrum (Empowerment) Act, Chapter 557.

The framework should focus on various aspects on a holistic level. The Malta Chamber welcomes the initiative to continue strengthening the national system of job coaching and mentoring. However, The Malta Chamber suggest that **a new role within the employment section of persons with disability is created and supports holistically the individual to smoothen the transition into employment.** The role is that of an Employment Support Worker. The role should be at par with that of a Learning Support Educator, within the Education Sector in Malta. Within the role of an Employment Support Worker one can also find the job coaching and mentoring element to support young people in employment or others to retain their employment. The Malta Chamber supports the idea of creating partnerships with foreign entities to address the shortage of job coaches or mentors in Malta. However, it is important to start looking at offering accredited courses for such Employment Support Workers.

Currently the Autism Parents Association in collaboration with the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) and PRISIMS Malta are piloting a project on Autism Friendly Spaces in various locations around the island. This project should also be considered in the employment sector and step up the opportunity to include Autism Friendly Spaces within the working environment. This project will also include the training of staff including first liners and management.

2. Pre-employment programmes

The Malta Chamber recognises the fact that employers are being supported through the Lino Spiteri Foundation to support jobseekers into employment with various services including Job Coaching and Mentoring and also through the Job Bridge Training Centre in Pembroke which is offering various Awards in Pre-employment Skills. During the funding period of 2014-2020, a programme titled VASTE aimed at supporting vulnerable job seekers (including persons with disability) to the open labour Market. The work carried out as part of this programme need to be continued and built upon.

Currently, Jobsplus is supporting employers through the Bridging the Gap Scheme, a national fund incentive, that supports the employers even during the transitional period from unemployment to employment. The Malta Chamber is suggesting that such national scheme continues with the local authorities and make employers more aware that there is also fiscal support in the transition period of getting a person with disability employed.

Notwithstanding all this, The Malta Chamber still recognising the fact that there are currently various other pre-employment programmes offered by other government institutions (such as INK Project from Agenzija Support) and other various per-employment programmes from various educational institutions such as Level 1 Awards by MCAST and Youth.Inc by Agenzija Zghazagh. Such pre-employment programmes all offer a form of 'work experience', 'on the job training' etc. However, the Malta Chamber is aware that this fragmentation is leading employers to find it difficult which programmes to support and which students will they invest in to be able to engage them with their company at the end of these programmes.

3. Transition from Education to Employment

Whilst the Malta Chamber appreciates that there has been a collective improvement from various stakeholders and from the national authorities to have an inclusive education system. As young people with disability still face challenges to enter the labour market once they finish compulsory education. The Malta

Chamber recommends that young people need to be guided to a job readiness programme as from Year 9 within compulsory education. This is to ensure that such young people will not end up in the vicious circle of 'training' once over the age 16 and either never make it to employment or enter the labour market at a later stage. The Malta Chamber acknowledges the fact that a number of young people would still need to be trained even after finishing secondary education.

4. Fiscal Incentives

To ensure that the current financial incentives remain available and create other fiscal incentives.

Current fiscal incentives:

- Currently the employer benefits from exemption from paying the employer's share of social security contributions for such employees. The Malta Chamber believes that this incentive should be retained.
- Employers are also eligible to claim a fiscal incentive equivalent to 25% of the disabled person's basic wage up to a maximum of €4,500 for each person with disability. However, The Malta Chamber is proposing that this amount is capped at €5,000 taking into consideration the current salaries.
- During the past years, employers also had the option to benefit from the Access to Employment Scheme (A2E), however this scheme was set up with European Funds covering period 2014-2020. The Malta Chamber recommends that such scheme will also be available for the next Funding Period.

New proposed fiscal incentives:

- Job Retention Schemes:
 - ✓ Creating a one-time fiscal retention incentive for employers who manage to support persons with disability remaining on their records. This incentive is eligible after the two years of engagement with the employer.
- Self-employed:
 - ✓ The Malta Chamber welcomes incentives for persons with disability to venture into entrepreneurship and become self-employed. This

also in view of the new proposed legislation for the Social Enterprise Act.

5. Discrimination & Reasonable Accommodation

The Malta Chamber recognise the effort of the work being done by the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability in regard to the Equal Opportunity Act (2000) Chapter 413 which is made up of several pillars including education and employment. The work being done is evident in the report that the same Commission publish on an annual basis. Most of the Employment cases are closed through a mediation process between the employee and the employer and in reasonable time. However, The Malta Chamber is recommending more awareness to employers in view of the 'Reasonable Accommodation' apart from the physical adaptation of the workplace (buildings etc) but also the nature of the work itself (with an emphasis on autism job seekers).

There should be more open dialogue with stakeholders including Trade Unions and Social Partners. The Malta Chamber recommends **a more active role in the Malta Business Disability Forum** that was set up in 2019. However, this is a great opportunity to bring together various stakeholders for the benefit of such job seekers. The success of this Forum depends on the level of involvement invested in by all stakeholders.

6. YOU SAID

Finally, it is worth noting that the first part of the National Autism Strategy section 04 Employment (page 29) reads:

YOU SAID:

	Individual (Jobseeker)	Parent
We are worried that our children will not be able to find a job anywhere		x

The employment services are not autism-friendly, so there is no way that I can get a job, if I cannot even get through the process that will help me to get one	X	
Employers do not know what autism is, or else do not want to employ persons on the autism spectrum	X	X
I am afraid of disclosing that I am on the autism spectrum at work, because they will fire me on the spot	X	
There is no way I will get a serious job if I am on the autism spectrum, I was only ever offered simple tasks because of the way I am, but I know I am capable of doing much more	X	
We just wish some people could help us with on-the-job coaching	X	
There are job training programmes, but it is impossible to continue in full-time employment with a company after a period of training	X	
My employer is refusing to make necessary adjustments I am entitled to due to being on the autism spectrum, or else is threatening to fire me for being difficult	X	
We don't know where or who to turn to for assessment, training or support concerning employment	X	
Trade unions should be there to defend the rights of all workers and jobseekers, including those on the autism spectrum	X	X

'YOU SAID'; from the above statements it is very clear that the parties involved to voice out their concerns in the first part of this section of this national strategy

were either the Individuals (jobseekers) themselves or their Parents. However, it would have also be appropriate that such opportunity was also given to the Employers. This would have been the opportunity to voice out their opinion and come up with statements from their perspective under 'YOU SAID'. Unfortunately, sometimes employers are not given the opportunity to voice out their concerns, experience and also best practices.