Autism Awareness Day: The right to work

Written by Alicia Homs Ginel on 2 April 2020 in Opinion

People with Autism Spectrum Disorder have the right to work to gain their economic independence, but greater investment and resources are needed, argues Alicia Homs Ginel.

In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2 April World Autism Awareness Day. The European Parliament was a few years ahead of schedule and had already adopted a charter in 1996 focusing on the recognition of the rights of this group, which represents one percent of the world’s population.

According to data from Autism Europe, there are some seven million people in Europe with autism. Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises the right of persons with disabilities to work “on an equal basis with others” and to have the opportunity to “earn a living by a freely-chosen job”.

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However, these rights are not always achieved. Either because of the lack of awareness of the business community to provide employment and preemployment opportunities, or because of the lack of resources and support in career guidance, people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face numerous obstacles before they can be incorporated into the labour market.

Furthermore, when they do overcome these barriers, they are often found in temporary or part-time jobs, with lower qualifications than would be appropriate based on their education and training and with few possibilities for professional development.

This is demonstrated by employment rates. Data from the European Labour Force Survey, published by Eurostat last year, show that only 48.1 percent of people with disabilities are employed - compared to 73.9 percent of the population without.

This figure falls to alarming levels in the specific case of those with ASD: only around 10 percent of people with autism are in work, which leads this group to suffer higher rates of poverty and social exclusion.

We must not forget that having a quality job is a key element of social inclusion. It is an essential aspect of facing adult life with autonomy and independence and is essential for the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

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This is why we must all work together to raise awareness and ensure that everyone achieves the positive social inclusion to help them take the path they want in life. In addition to these concerns, the barriers to access the job market begin much earlier, during the education process.

People with ASD are one of the groups with the highest failure and dropout rates. In this context, developing an educational model that combines theoretical and practical teaching and that offers training itineraries to bring people with autism closer to real working environments is fundamental, as organisations such as the Confederación Autismo España are doing.

Only in this way can they benefit from training while acquiring the social and adaptive skills necessary for work performance. We must strive for the full social and labour integration of those men and women with ASD.

Capable people, who have great potential in various sectors, but whose working conditions are far from the minimum needed to give them independence and stability.
In short, we need to offer them greater resources, invest more in research and approve a new, strengthened policy framework for action to facilitate the inclusion of people with disabilities, including people with ASD, in employment, education and training.

About the author

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