

# NEURODIVERSITY

## AWARENESS RAISING STRATEGY



# Project Information

<b>Project acronym</b>	<b>NEW</b>
<b>Project title</b>	<b>Neurodiversity at Work</b>
<b>Project number</b>	<b>2021-1-IT01-KA220-VET-000033362</b>
<b>Sub programme or KA</b>	<b>KA220-VET - Cooperation partnerships in vocational education and training</b>
<b>Project website</b>	<b><a href="https://www.neurodiverseworkplaces.eu/">https://www.neurodiverseworkplaces.eu/</a></b>

This Awareness Raising Strategy is the first answer shaped as a comprehensive document that can support SMEs and microenterprises in starting to inform and making employees, and all the other relevant stakeholders, aware about the importance of introducing the concept of Neurodiversity in the workplace. Through detailed actions per target groups, Neurodiversity should be not only better known but also promoted as an asset for business.

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The Strategy is needed considering that COVID 19 increased the inequality among employees, by putting those less equipped with both digital skills and/or whom leaders were not investing enough on, at risk of marginalisation or de-qualification. Among them, those who are the most unknown in companies, almost invisible, are people affected by Specific Learning Differences, such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia ADHD and other neurodiverse conditions. This also led to management and professional and career development practices, as well as workspaces, being designed only with neurotypicals in mind, not considering the Neurodiversity of the workforce.

Given this picture, the Awareness Raising Strategy intends to be the means to build a shared transnational model for “raising the issue” in SMEs and microenterprises with reference to the inclusion and wellbeing of people with Specific Learning Differences at workplaces and to the effective management of Neurodiversity as a key asset in contemporary business, intended as a richness which has the potential to drive business towards a more ethical and prosperous future.



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# Glossary

# 1#

## The NEW project in a nutshell

**NEW is a 36-months project that brings together 6 partners based in Italy, Austria, Bulgaria and Ireland, aimed at supporting SMEs and microenterprises to create work environments that are more inclusive and able to enhance the talents of all the people, including the neurodivergent ones.**

The main innovative element is thus the focus on Neurodiversity and neurodivergent persons, especially those adults working in companies who have not had the opportunity to be diagnosed as such, to be fully enhanced and included in the organisation, avoiding any stigmatisation and possible discrimination.

The rationale behind the project is to start thinking that Neurodiversity in enterprises' staff represents a source of talents who are usually not considered under this light, because of:



**1.**

Lack of knowledge about Neurodiversity and what it means in practice when referred to adult workers;



**2.**

Reduced availability and low awareness of HR managers and employers, in general of assessment processes and procedures adequate to neurodivergent persons;



**3.**

Lack of structured systems and methods to support possible neurodivergent workers in companies to make value out of their skills, instead of simply place them in less-qualified positions which are taken for granted as the only ones adapt to their not investigated capacities.

**To appropriately address this needs, the NEW partnership sets as its own objectives:**

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## **AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE**

Raising awareness and increasing knowledge, especially among SMEs and micro companies' entrepreneurs, HR managers, companies' leaders, and reference stakeholders, about Neurodiversity as key asset in contemporary business.

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## **DATA COLLECTION**

Championing specific and regular data collection on Neurodiversity at the workplace, especially in SMEs.

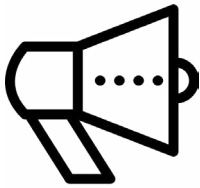
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## **SET OF COMPETENCES**

Equipping business leaders and staff with an appropriate set of competences, strategies and tools to introduce and practice Neurodiversity in the workplaces, with the aim to prevent discrimination, and to guarantee the wellbeing of their employees as well as benefits to their organizations.

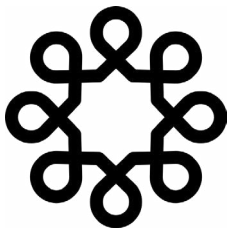
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According to these objectives, the project intends to impact on the system of VET, mainly C-VET and on SMEs and microenterprises at different levels in Europe, by developing the following results:



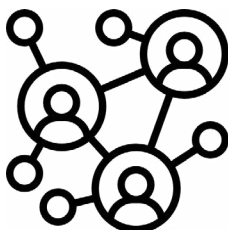
### **AWARENESS RAISING STRATEGY**

An Awareness Raising Strategy to increase knowledge among entrepreneurs, HR managers, SMEs and micro companies' leaders, Trade Unions and Employers;



### **(R)EVOLUTIONARY INCLUSION MODEL**

A (r)evolutionary inclusion model, that will be piloted in SMEs in the 4 involved countries, with the final aim to equip business leaders and staff with an appropriate set of strategies and tools to introduce and practice Neurodiversity in the workplaces;



### **A EUROPEAN NETWORK**

A European Network, to build a multi-stakeholder long-lasting framework for sustaining and further elaborating on NEW outcomes.



The Neurodiversity at Work Erasmus+ project therefore aims to pursue an inclusive workplace, by defining and putting into practice strategies and tools to:

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## **O1**

**Make employers/business leaders enablers of inclusivity in the workplace, by practicing “My employer helped me find out what I’m good at”;**

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## **O2**

**Transform the negative perception of Specific Learning Differences (SLD) to a more balanced approach - supporting challenges and recognising strengths, by adopting the Neurodiversity perspective;**

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## **O3**

**Co-create concrete help and solutions with employees with SLD;**

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## **O4**

**Spread the solutions’ impact within the whole companies’ organisation, by demonstrating the benefits for all employees.**

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The NEW project involves a collaboration between six organisations partner. The lead partner is FORMA.Azione. Here follows the full list of project partners:



**AIDP (IT)**

Italian Association for HR management



**FORMA.Azione (IT)**

VET and Adult Education provider, working at national and EU level



**EDA (BE)**

European Dyslexia Association



**DIE BERATER (AT)**

Consulting company for training and development, with a comprehensive know-how with regard to HR management, learning at the workplace, diversity and inclusion



**CATRO (BG)**

Company experiences in the field of organisational consulting and human resources management and development, bringing also a specific know-how on Neuro-agility



**Specialisterne Ireland (IE)**

Specialist consultancy that recruits and supports talented people on the autism spectrum and those with similar neurodiverse challenges in gaining employment.

In addition, there are a number of Associate Partners collaborating on the project:



**AIDP INTERNATIONAL (IT)**



**UNGCNI**

UN Global Compact Italy (IT)

Network Italia



**EDA (BE)**

European Dyslexia Association



**UIL**

UNIONE ITALIANA DEL LAVORO  
trade union (IT)

PLATTFORM FÜR  
BERUFSBEZOGENE  
ERWACHSENENBILDUNG

**Plattform für Berufsbezogene  
Erwachsenenbildung (AT)**



**BPMA**

Bulgarian Association for People  
Management (BG)

BULGARIAN ASSOCIATION  
FOR PEOPLE MANAGEMENT



**DAI - Dyslexia Association of Ireland (IE)**



**Dyspraxia/DCD Ireland (IE)**

## 2#

# What is Neurodiversity?

**The term Neurodiversity was coined in 1998, in an article published by Harvey Blume on the New York Times and elaborated by Judy Singer, an Australian social scientist. (Blume, 1998).**

**Neurodiversity is the idea that atypical neurodevelopment (neurodivergent from the norm) is a normal and continuously situated difference in the spectrum of natural human variance, which must be recognized and respected like any other biological variations. Differences can appear in how information is acquired, and processed, in language, sounds, images, lights, texture, taste, movement and emotions. (Hermon, 2004).**

Indeed, the term “neurodivergent” is not merely synonymous with disability. The concept of “neurodivergence” intends to shift attention to atypical ways of thinking, learning and processing information, which, being different from the norm, are not necessarily disadvantageous.’ Being neurodivergent doesn’t not mean being individuals who need to be protected, but above all being talents to be valued, at work as in studies and educational actions, with positive repercussions on a personal level and social life.

Neurodiversity, therefore, refers to the infinity variability of neuro-cognition within the human population on Earth. It indicates that every human has a unique combination of skills and needs. Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one “right” way of thinking, learning, and behaving. Differences are not to be viewed as deficits.

Neurodiversity is also a subset of Biodiversity, a term used primarily for the purpose of supporting species conservation. Biodiversity presupposes that it is in the interest of the human being to desire the conservation of all species regardless of their perceived usefulness to humans.

This is based on the principle that:

- **the greater the biodiversity within an ecosystem, the more stable, adaptable and sustainable that system is**
- **ecosystems are interconnected in complex ways that affects forms of life, including human life;**

It follows that the more Neurodiversity is respected and encouraged within culture, the more stable, adaptable the culture is.

## 2.1#

# What Neurodiversity is not

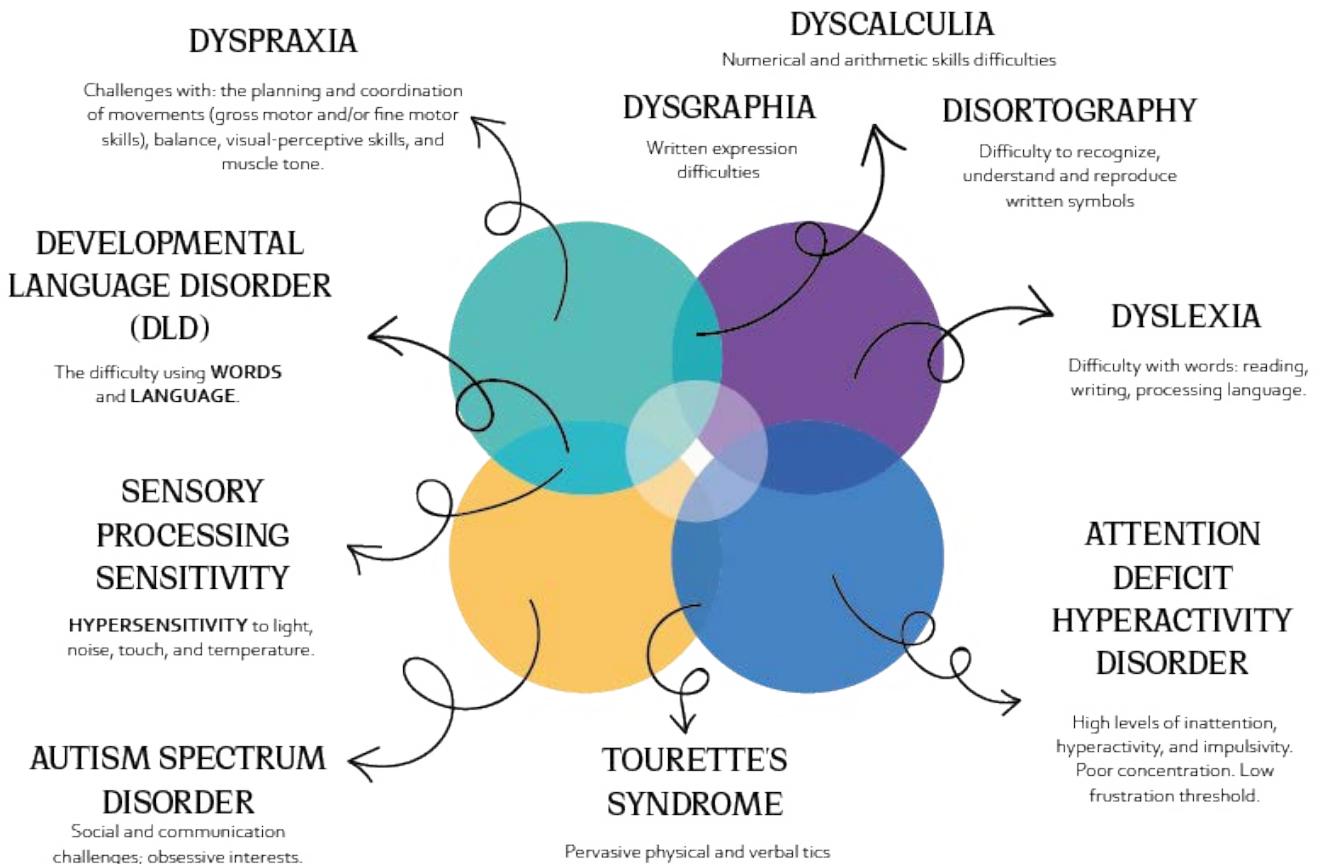
**Neurodiversity is not a psycho-medical diagnosis. Nor it is a tool to divide “us” “normal” from “them” “neurodivergent”. We are all neurodiverse because no two humans on the planet are exactly alike.**

## 2.2#

# Neurodiversity in the context of the NEW project

Although the map below is very clear and understandable, it is worth underlining that, in the context of the NEW project, the Tourette Syndrome will not be taken into account, while a specific focus of both the Awareness Raising Strategy and the other set of activities and results will be kept on all the other dimensions.

## NEURODIVERSITY MAP



# 3#

## Why an awareness raising strategy about Neurodiversity addressing SMEs and microenterprises

**This Awareness Raising Strategy is the first answer shaped as a comprehensive document that can support SMEs and microenterprises in starting to inform and making employees, and all the other relevant stakeholders, aware about the importance of introducing the concept of Neurodiversity in the workplace. Through detailed actions per target groups, Neurodiversity should be not only better known but also promoted as an asset for the business and for managing human resources in the 21st century.**

The COVID 19 pandemic forced SMEs and micro enterprises to reshape their usual organisation and working methods, in line with restrictions, and also for adjusting to the different situations and personal obligations that employees have experienced during the pandemic.

In this process of (r)evolution, on one hand, few of these organisations were adequately prepared to face this challenge and to immediately define a new and effective approach to leadership and organisation. On the other hand, not all employees have the appropriate knowledge and skills to take advantage of a more digitalised working environment as well as of working remotely in an effective way. Among them, those who are the most unknown in companies, almost invisible, are people affected by Specific Learning Differences, such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia ADHD and other neurodiverse conditions.

Due to this lack of competences, awareness and understanding, COVID 19 has increased the inequality among employees, by putting those ones less equipped with both digital skills and/or whom leaders were not investing enough on, at risk of marginalisation or de-qualification. This has also led to management and professional and career development practices, as well as workspaces, being designed only with neurotypicals in mind, not considering the Neurodiversity of the workforce

A great cultural work still remains to be done to overcome these problems, and to update SMEs, human resource management and the work environment to become more inclusive and better able to enhance the talents of the available personnel.

Given this picture, the NEW project awareness raising strategy intends to be the means to build a shared transnational model for “raising the issue” in SMEs and microenterprises, with reference to the inclusion and wellbeing of people with Specific Learning Differences at workplaces and to the effective management of Neurodiversity as a key asset in contemporary business, intended as a richness which has the potential to drive business towards a more ethical and prosperous future.

As already mentioned, there is the need to promote a cultural change leading to a positive attitude toward SLD, enhancing the unique talents that Neurodiversity brings in workplaces, even in order to create the necessary conditions for making people with SLD willing to disclose their condition (Italian Dyslexia Association - <https://dsaelavoro.aiditalia.org>). SMEs which are the backbone of the European economy, after being equipped with specific competences and understanding about Neurodiversity approach and practices at organisational level, they could become the engine and the boost to the evolution of work environment. These companies can be a strong sounding board for breaking down those invisible walls that make organizations non-inclusive and respectful of the uniqueness of people. The contributions that SMEs and microenterprise will bring to this project will provide useful information and will allow the dissemination and creation of a model in order to systematise the actions and ensure their transferability and sustainability.



By developing and implementing this Strategy, the NEW partnership expects to:

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**O1**

**Increase the understanding and responsiveness of Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, SMEs and relevant stakeholder to Neurodiversity;**

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**O2**

**Contribute in creating inclusive environments that foster equity and equality, by preventing discrimination and stigma;**

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**O3**

**Empower neurodivergent people to have a say in shaping inclusive environments in VET and workplaces;**

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**O4**

**Collect data and information about a phenomenon which is largely unknown, useful for key actors and stakeholders in the labour market and the wider community;**

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**O5**

**Promote and develop the commitment of SMEs about Neurodiversity and the participation in project activities.**

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# 4#

## Key principles

The awareness Raising Strategy is inspired by the following principles:

**Neurodiversity in the workplace is an asset** that should be further explored by employers, entrepreneurs and HR managers so as to better benefit from it as companies and at the societal level;

**Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies** in all the organisations are **key drivers** in designing and implementing modern Human Resource policies and practices that have proven to be effective and highly required by the employees to promote retention and engagement in the workplace;

**A person-centred approach** should be guaranteed to all the employees targeted by the strategy, by referring to an Employee Experience (EX) to be meant not only as a mean for increasing Diversity and Inclusion at organisation level, but also to benefit from the increased presence of neurodivergent persons in the workplace, who can contribute to enterprise innovation and competitiveness;

21st century companies need to be even more focused on **sustainability** of their working practices in order to promote and practice inclusion of all the diverse talents and resources available, which is the key towards a durable success;

SMEs are the **main players in the production sector of European countries** but they are unfamiliar with Diversity Equity & Inclusion dynamics and consequently also with everything related to neurodiversity and are less familiar with how to play a relevant role at societal level through inclusion and in Social Responsibility.

These principles come from the Neurodiversity concept itself: people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways. so there is not only one “right” way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits.

<sup>1</sup> <https://hbr.org/2017/05/neurodiversity-as-a-competitive-advantage>

This makes us reflect on how Neurodiversity, like any other type of diversity (ethnic, religious, age, gender or sexual orientation), can represent an added value for the company, a real resource, rather than a limit or a problem. Introducing diversity, of any kind, into work organizations allows you to make use of an inexhaustible source of “lateral thinking”, useful for reviewing one’s work and organizational processes in an even new, innovative and never conventional light. Basically anyone with any form of Neurodiversity, if on the one hand it might seem in deficit (typically in interpersonal relationship or in the ability to use conventional methods), on the other hand it instinctively develops talents above the norm. People with ADHD, for example, can have great ease in managing stressful situations even in the presence of numerous great creativity. Autistic people, on the other hand, can have an obsessive attention to detail, an iron memory and visuospatial abilities above the norm. Finally, for some people with dyslexia or in general SLD, having a very visual learning style, exploit this specific feature to perceive visual information more quickly and efficiently than other people (Geiger et al.,2008); this ability seems to be advantageous that require three-dimensional thinking, such as in the fields of astrophysics, genetics and engineering.

This “new” vision of diversity and inclusion is establishing itself globally as a fundamental value within the workplace. According to what one of the NEW partners, Specialisterne Ireland, states in its policy of Neurodiversity Hiring, it is clear that there are numerous benefits of hiring Neurodiverse Employees for the business, individual, and society as a whole, and that this can be achieved at a minimal cost to employers. Indeed, also through the magazine of The Business Harvard Review of May–June 2017, “Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage” Robert D. Austin and Gary P. Pisano affirm that many people with neurological conditions such as autism and dyslexia have extraordinary skills, including in pattern recognition, memory, and mathematics. Yet they often struggle to fit the profiles sought by employers. A growing number of companies, in the US, including SAP, Hewlett-Packard Enterprise, and Microsoft, have reformed their HR processes in order to access neurodiverse talent—and are seeing productivity gains, quality improvement, boosts in innovative capabilities, and increased employee engagement as a result.

Having said that, companies have a representation of Neurodiversity that is not very focused on the resources and skills of the individual. In the definition of some Neurodiversity conditions, negative terms prevail, outlining a person who is lacking on various levels and which enhance in terms of deficit and not of enrichment. Terms such as aggression, loss of contact with reality, self-harm, “being in a parallel world” become real labels that are immutable and difficult to unhook.

It is thus of undoubted importance using a person-centred approach in implementing the Awareness raising Strategy, so as to effectively ensure that all the workers (being not always recognisable those neurodivergent) perceive both the efforts made by companies in making workplaces more friendly and inclusive towards diversity in general, and the colleagues’ increased knowledge and awareness made visible through improved attitudes and positive behaviours towards Neurodiversity and diversity at large.

Recognizing and exploiting DEI is crucial for all the organizations seeking to increase innovation and improve their resilience, sustainability and reputation. SDGs are currently asking companies at global level to be fully committed in pursuing how to effectively practice sustainability, by not only going greening and digital, but also making efforts to ensure equity and prevent discrimination at the workplace. Adopting the Neurodiversity approach can concretely ensure this capacity to working organisations as well as inspire employees in acting themselves as sustainable workers.

The importance to address SMEs relies mainly on data which clearly show, according to Eurostat data of 2019, that SMEs in Europe represent the 99,8% of the total number of enterprises, employing around the 64,5% of the workforce and producing the 52,4% of gross value added. Their workforce thus represents a significant pool of persons whose organisational culture directly contribute in shaping enterprises’ values, rights and performances, also with reference to DEI policies. That’s why it is even more important to invest on SMEs’ organisation culture and workforce capacities so as to develop appropriate skills to act according to human rights policies and diversity enhancement, following what is already consolidated in the big companies and multinationals.

## 5#

# Main criteria for defining and evaluating the awareness raising strategy

With the aim to implement the Awareness Raising Strategy, it is necessary to define the appropriate pathway to effectively translate the key principles into actions that introduce and progressively change SMEs workplace towards a more neurodiverse attitude.

A common set of criteria on which the Awareness Raising Strategy is based upon, has been thus defined to make the actions implemented in each Country comparable and to measure their effectiveness.

The criteria to be followed in designing and implementing the Strategy are:

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### 01

**Impact on competence and knowledge level of the different target groups in relation to both Neurodiversity and other related contents and abilities (i.e. empathy among colleagues, openness towards diversity, etc.)**

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### 02

**Replicability and transferability of the actions and tools implemented among SMEs and micro enterprises, among different economic sectors (if relevant), among different cultural contexts**

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**03**

**Level of Integration with practices and methods already  
present in the company**

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**04**

**Level of combination and efficacy of internal and external  
communication**

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**05**

**Involvement of other relevant key stakeholders**

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**06**

**Sustainability of the resources and materials in terms of  
reduced environmental impact, by preferring digital ones**

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Below the criteria are described in terms of expected impact produced by the actions and tools developed with the Awareness Raising Strategy:

# 01

**Impact on competence and knowledge level of the different target groups in relation to both Neurodiversity and other related contents and abilities (i.e. empathy among colleagues, openness towards diversity, etc.)**

- **The actions designed and implemented have the capacity to affect the level of knowledge about Neurodiversity first, but also other related contents, such as Diversity Equity & Inclusion policies, collaboration between colleagues/stakeholders, etc., so as to lead the change of their usual set of skills etc. (i.e. graphic designers are more sensitive towards the topic and how to better communicate to neuro divergent people)**

- **The increased knowledge leads to the review of the common language and communication materials used inside the enterprises, trying to shift to an inclusive written and spoken language for instance avoiding to replicate negative terms as “specific learning disorders”, “lacking of...something (in Italian, for instance deficit which is related to the offensive word “deficient”)**
  
- **The actions designed and implemented have the capacity to impact on employees’ skills and behaviours towards neuro divergent people, in terms of increased empathy in the workplace, increased capacity to remove stereotypes and bias related to neuro divergent persons, increased capacity to promote a more inclusive workplace, etc.**
  
- **The actions designed and implemented have the capacity to positively impact on all the target groups general perception and understanding the talents of each category of Neurodiversity in the workforce (i.e. people with Autism are usually highly performing in ICT and maths)**



## 02

### **Replicability and transferability of the actions and tools implemented, beyond the target groups already involved as SMEs and micro enterprises, within different economic sectors (if relevant) and cultural contexts**

- **The actions and tools implemented are well accepted, if not requested by other SMEs and micro enterprises not included as NEW project target groups;**
- **The actions and tools are promoted also by the employers' associations of SMEs and microenterprises;**
- **Other Regions and/or countries in Europe are interested in using the Awareness Raising Strategy, by asking through the project website and/or the direct target groups involved.**

# 03

## **Level of integration with practices and methods already present in the company**

- **Through a mapping of the internal/external communication plan the Awareness Raising Strategy (or part of it) is appropriately integrated;**
- **The actions and tools experimented within the Awareness Raising Strategy are designed by communication and graphic designers usually hired by the SMEs/micro enterprises**
- **The actions and tools experimented within the Awareness Raising Strategy have led to improvement and better qualification of the usual communication campaign conducted by the target groups involved in the NEW project;**
- **The actions and tools experimented within the Awareness Raising Strategy have led to a change of attitude in communication and graphic design companies/experts, by making their provision more neuro diverse sensitive**

# O4

## **Level of combination and efficacy of internal and external communication**

- **The actions and tools experimented within the Awareness Raising Strategy are effective both internally and externally;**
- **The actions and tools experimented within the Awareness Raising Strategy have led to an increased cooperation of the SMEs and micro enterprises with the community around them, also by activating new stakeholders, such as associations of Autism, Dyslexia, etc.**
- **The coherence between the internal and external communication has the potential to increase the Employee Experience**

# 05

## **Involvement of other relevant key stakeholders**

- **A mapping of the relevant territorial networks and stakeholders (including consultants, trade unions) with whom the SMEs and micro enterprises are in contact, has been carried out or is available**
- **The actions and tools experimented within the Awareness Raising Strategy involve all the relevant stakeholders on the topic at both local and national level;**
- **Through the implementation of the first activities (both online and offline) of the Awareness Raising Strategy, other relevant stakeholders have asked to collaborate**

# 06

## **Sustainability of the resources and materials in terms of reduced environmental impact, by preferring digital ones**

- **The actions, initiatives and tools are available both in online and offline format and graphics are accessible for all the neuro diverse target groups;**
- **The actions, initiatives and tools are accessible and spread through the main corporate social media and aligned with sustainability policies;**
- **Specific paper less and recycling materials policies are adopted for materials and tools used.**

# 6#

## Key messages

**Key messages are the main points of information that the Strategy intends to focus on in order to achieve the defined objective of activating a cultural change from a “SLD approach” towards a Neurodiversity perspective: a “paradigm shift” able to concretely contribute to the staff with SLD inclusion and wellbeing of, but also to make understandable and clear that Inclusion & diversity, and specifically Neurodiversity and inclusive practices, can bring an actual added value to business in terms of competitiveness and leadership. This will also allow the empowerment of workers with SLD who will feel more comfortable in disclosing their differences, fearing less stigma.**

In the NEW Awareness Raising Strategy, the key messages will arise from specific questions:



**HOW CAN YOU PROMOTE  
NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE?**



**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF  
NEURODIVERSITY FOR EMPLOYERS?**



**HOW DOES THE CONCEPT OF  
NEURODIVERSITY APPLY TO ETHICS?**



**WHAT IS INCLUDED IN NEURODIVERSITY?**

These questions will be answered by focusing the Awareness Raising Strategy on specific key messages as follows:

**“A Neurodiversity friendly workplace is beneficial for everyone”**

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**“Valuing neurodiverse employees”**

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**“The benefits of Neurodiversity at work”**

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**“A Neurodiversity friendly workplace enables employees to achieve their full potential”**

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**“People with neurodiverse profiles can bring great strengths to the workplace”**

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**“Workplaces can support employees with Neurodiversity by being flexible and accommodating”**

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**“Celebrating the value of Neurodiversity in the workplace”**

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**“Simple, no cost or low cost accommodations can make a workplace accessible”**

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**“Employers and employees together can create Neurodiversity friendly workplaces”**

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**“My employer helped me find out what I’m good at”**

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**“Employees with Neurodiversity are an asset in the workplace”**

# 7#

## Target groups

The strategy addresses the following target groups:

- 
- A** **SMEs staff** including **potential neurodivergent employees** – promoting the culture of Neurodiversity across the whole organisation can help develop a general awareness, and a greater understanding and responsiveness to the diversity brought by colleagues. This can then make employees willing to disclose their SLD, fearing less the stigma, as they are seen as individuals bearing unique strengths, whose companies can greatly benefit. This is why the involvement of staff is crucial from the project beginning. They are addressed by the awareness raising campaign also in order to promote the C call for action towards their companies' management.
- 
- B** **Entrepreneurs, HR and D&I managers, companies' leaders in SMEs/microenterprises** – potentiating their awareness about Neurodiversity, intended not only as means for enhancing Diversity and Inclusion at company level, but also to the benefit of neurodiverse talents contributing to business innovation and competitiveness, is essential. This is why they are targeted by the awareness raising strategy and, together with the staff, will be the main users of the campaign.
- 
- C** **Policy makers, trade unions, employers' and VET organisations and other stakeholders (advisors, partners, suppliers)** – their involvement in the awareness raising activities allow the partnership to constantly relate the project implementation to the Neurodiversity-related needs emerging from SMEs, the labour market and VET key stakeholders. This allows also the activation of community members that can act as influencers due to their previous knowledge and awareness about Neurodiversity (i.e. because of their personal experience as parents, or thanks to their professional/academic background).



The target groups are addressed by taking into account the brand awareness pyramid of David Allen Aaker: it's a brand blueprint which emphasizes the importance of brand identity and offers unique solutions to building a strong brand, as the NEW partnership intends to do with the "Neurodiversity" brand.



The Aaker tool also allows us to measure the effect of the actions taken according to 4 main axes, which can be transferred to the context the issue of Neurodiversity:

## **01 Lack of knowledge**

at the base of the pyramid we find those who do not have any idea/knowledge of Neurodiversity. They are those who must be involved from an emotional point of view and with respect to the rationality of information. The issue should be explained in detail. For example, the use of storytelling can certainly be effective.

## **02 Minimum knowledge**

going up the pyramid, those who know the topic of Neurodiversity; are those who, involved with questions and stimuli, can gain greater awareness and act as “word of mouth” in their social and working contexts.

## **03 Strong knowledge**

even more so there are those who know Neurodiversity and can immediately establish a connection with the reference areas; they are those who, if stimulated by the online and offline means of communication, facilitate the correct passage of information in contexts, social, friends and work, also supporting the Top of Mind.

## O4 Top of mind

**the last level of the pyramid, the highest and least numerous, is the one that includes those who have direct knowledge of the topic. They are those who, due to their personal or family experience, can exercise the role of Ambassador of the issue in the different contexts and or systems they attend.**

Aaker's scheme is useful for us to understand that no reference target is excluded when we wish to spread a truly inclusive culture with respect to the theme of Neurodiversity and neurodivergent people. It is clear that, in addition to the involvement of SMEs staff, corporate customers and suppliers will also need to be sensitized, and since SMEs experience the context, the territory, and can here act as a sounding board to reach even all those who are unfamiliar with the issue or simply know it superficially.

# 8#

## National Campaigns implementation: actions, methods and supporting materials

**NEW project partners have decided that the best means to launch the Awareness Raising Strategy is through National Campaigns to be designed and implemented in each project country, according to the criteria set and taking into account the specificities of the context. The National campaigns are thus based on a variety of actions, initiatives, tools designed, developed and implemented according to both online and offline channels, SMEs needs/profiles, cultural context, employees level of awareness and knowledge, neuro divergent people's capacities, so as to respond also to the criteria detailed above.**

The National Campaigns are made of the following actions which can be planned and delivered according to the different target groups' needs and level of awareness and knowledge, thus with different timing and respecting eventual priorities, if relevant. For instance, we suggest to start with informative actions and/or Investigation and diagnosis ones and then, once people are acknowledged and ready to activate themselves, proceed with motivational and engagement actions.

Together with the actions identified the NEW project partnership has chosen to adopt the following methods and materials, trying to achieve a consistent set of actions, methods and materials according to partners' experience and capacities and always taking into account the principles and criteria set in the present Awareness Raising Strategy.

## TARGET GROUP:

Entrepreneurs, HR and DEI managers, companies' leaders in SMEs/microenterprises

<b>GOALS</b>	<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>METHODS</b>	<b>MATERIALS (see ann. 2/3)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the understanding and responsiveness of Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, SMEs and relevant stakeholder to Neurodiversity;</li> <li>• promote and develop the commitment of SMEs about Neurodiversity and the participation in project activities.</li> </ul>	<p>Informative actions about Neurodiversity DEI and Unconscious Bias (including also legal obligations and frameworks) to start distributing first-hand information to both stimulating interest and at the same time providing relevant data to lower disinformation and stigmatisation and increase critical thinking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email or publication on social media of informative materials</li> <li>• Informative sessions, through webinars or seminars, about Inclusive language, Neurodiversity, DEI and Unconscious Bias</li> <li>• Sessions on Neurodivergent thinking</li> <li>• Organisation of a Neurodiversity Awareness Raising Day where experts on the topic are invited to the companies to explain what Neurodiversity is, what is NEW project about, what kind of resources/actions/tools can be used to make the companies more inclusive, etc..</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital version of leaflets, postcards, cards</li> <li>• Video Spots</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collect data and information about a phenomenon which is largely unknown, useful for key actors and stakeholders in the labour market and the wider community;</li> <li>• promote and develop the commitment of SMEs about Neurodiversity and the participation in project activities</li> </ul>	<p>Investigation and diagnosis actions, which while collecting data and assessing the level of awareness and knowledge of SMEs' employers and employees, raise the awareness of the respondents on the topic of Neurodiversity at the workplace, making them even more curious about it and/or conscious of their lack of knowledge, thus probably asking for more contents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online survey investigating the level of awareness and knowledge about Neurodiversity and then reporting and sharing the findings – ex ante (before training and piloting activities) and ex post (after training and piloting activities)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey template</li> </ul>

**TARGET GROUP:**

Entrepreneurs, HR and DEI managers, companies' leaders in SMEs/microenterprises

<b>GOALS</b>	<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>METHODS</b>	<b>MATERIALS (see ann. 2/3)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contribute in creating inclusive environments that foster equity and equality, by preventing discrimination and stigma</li> </ul>	<p>Engagement actions aimed at collective perspectives and opinions on how to enhance Neurodiversity through inclusive DEI policies and measures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interactive sessions on specific issues related to Neurodiversity to favour individual awareness-raising, exchange among peers and actual engagement of SMEs staff by elaborating specific proposals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivational graphic images</li> <li>Video spots</li> <li>Informative leaflets</li> </ul>

**TARGET GROUP:**

SMEs staff including potential Neurodiverse Employee

<b>GOALS</b>	<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>METHODS</b>	<b>MATERIALS (see ann. 2/3)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the understanding and responsiveness of Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, SMEs and relevant stakeholder to Neurodiversity;</li> <li>promote and develop the commitment of SMEs about Neurodiversity and the participation in project activities.</li> </ul>	<p>Informative actions about Neurodiversity DEI and Unconscious Bias (including also legal obligations and frameworks) to start distributing first-hand information to both stimulating interest and at the same time providing relevant data to lower disinformation and stigmatisation and increase critical thinking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Email or publication on social media of informative materials</li> <li>Informative sessions, through webinars or seminars, about inclusive language. Neurodiversity, DEI and Unconscious Bias</li> <li>Sessions on Neurodivergent thinking</li> <li>Organisation of a Neurodiversity Awareness Raising Day where experts on the topic are invited to the companies to explain what Neurodiversity is, what is NEW project about, what kind of resources/actions/tools can be used to make the companies more inclusive, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital version of leaflets, postcards, cards</li> <li>Video Spots</li> </ul>

## TARGET GROUP:

### SMEs staff including potential Neurodiverse Employee

GOALS	ACTIONS	METHODS	MATERIALS (see ann. 2/3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>collect data and information about a phenomenon which is largely unknown, useful for key actors and stakeholders in the labour market and the wider community;</li> <li>promote and develop the commitment of SMEs about Neurodiversity and the participation in project activities</li> </ul>	<p>Investigation and diagnosis actions, which while collecting data and assessing the level of awareness and knowledge of SMEs' employers and employees, raise the awareness of the respondents on the topic of Neurodiversity at the workplace, making them even more curious about it and/or conscious of their lack of knowledge, thus probably asking for more contents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interactive sessions on specific issues related to Neurodiversity to investigate about individual awareness-raising and needs of SMEs staff with reference to Neurodiversity-related topics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Video spots</li> <li>Informative leaflets</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contribute in creating inclusive environments that foster equity and equality, by preventing discrimination and stigma;</li> <li>empower neurodivergent people to have a say in shaping inclusive environments in VET and workplaces;</li> <li>promote and develop the commitment of SMEs about Neurodiversity and the participation in project activities</li> </ul>	<p>Motivational actions aimed at arousing the interest not only on the specific topic and the related concepts but also in term of mobilising employers and employees as possible activists against discrimination in the workplace and towards a more inclusive environment, especially towards neurodivergent persons.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social media campaign / offline campaign to support SMEs staff in behaving differently in facing Neurodiversity at Workplace</li> <li>Seminars/webinars presenting role models on Neurodiversity, inviting neurodivergent people who are succeeding in their career/professional development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivational graphic images</li> <li>Video spots</li> <li>Informative leaflets</li> </ul>

## TARGET GROUP:

### SMEs staff including potential Neurodiverse Employee

GOALS	ACTIONS	METHODS	MATERIALS (see ann. 2/3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contribute in creating inclusive environments that foster equity and equality, by preventing discrimination and stigma;</li> <li>empower neurodivergent people to have a say in shaping inclusive environments in VET and workplaces;</li> <li>promote and develop the commitment of SMEs about Neurodiversity and the participation in project activities.</li> </ul>	<p>Advising actions in the form of guidelines and/or specific instructions to start planning a road map towards a more diverse and inclusive workplace, through the adoption of concrete practices and measures at organisational level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online/in presence sessions for presenting Guidelines for meeting/conferences taking into account Neurodivergent staff's needs and collecting feedback from SMEs</li> <li>Online/in presence sessions for presenting guidelines about inclusive languages with specific reference to Neurodiversity and collecting feedback from SMEs</li> <li>Promotion of the guidelines through the project website and social media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guidelines for meeting/conferences</li> <li>Guidelines about inclusive languages</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contribute in creating inclusive environments that foster equity and equality, by preventing discrimination and stigma;</li> <li>empower neurodivergent people to have a say in shaping inclusive environments in VET and workplaces;</li> </ul>	<p>Engagement actions aimed at collective perspectives and opinions on how to enhance Neurodiversity through inclusive DEI policies and measures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interactive sessions on specific issues related to Neurodiversity to favour individual awareness-raising, exchange among peers and actual engagement of SMEs staff by elaborating specific proposals</li> <li>Suggestion box to collect proposal on how to enhance Neurodiversity through inclusive DEI policies and measures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivational graphic images</li> <li>Video spots</li> <li>Informative leaflets</li> <li>Corporate open Padlet as "digital suggestion box"</li> </ul>



## TARGET GROUP:

Stakeholders (including partners, advisors, suppliers)

GOALS	ACTIONS	METHODS	MATERIALS (see ann. 2/3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the understanding and responsiveness of Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, SMEs and relevant stakeholder to Neurodiversity;</li> <li>promote and develop the commitment of SMEs about Neurodiversity and the participation in project activities.</li> </ul>	<p>Informative actions about Neurodiversity DEI and Unconscious Bias (including also legal obligations and frameworks) to start distributing first-hand information to both stimulating interest and at the same time providing relevant data to lower disinformation and stigmatisation and increase critical thinking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Email or publication on social media of informative materials</li> <li>Informative sessions, through webinars or seminars, about Inclusive language, Neurodiversity, DEI and Unconscious Bias</li> <li>Organisation of a Neurodiversity Awareness Raising Day where experts on the topic are invited to the companies to explain what Neurodiversity is, what is NEW project about, what kind of resources/actions/tools can be used to make the companies more inclusive, etc..</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital version of leaflets, postcards, cards</li> <li>Video Spots</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contribute in creating inclusive environments that foster equity and equality, by preventing discrimination and stigma;</li> <li>empower neurodivergent people to have a say in shaping inclusive environments in VET and workplaces;</li> <li>promote and develop the commitment of SMEs about Neurodiversity and the participation in project activities</li> </ul>	<p>Motivational actions aimed at arousing the interest not only on the specific topic and the related concepts but also in term of mobilising stakeholders as possible activists against discrimination in the workplace and towards a more inclusive environment, especially towards neurodivergent persons.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social media campaign / offline campaign to support stakeholders in behaving differently in facing Neurodiversity at Workplace</li> <li>Seminars/webinars presenting champions/ role models on Neurodiversity, inviting neurodivergent people who are succeeding in their career/professional development or representatives of enterprises who already successfully practice Neurodiversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivational graphic images</li> <li>Video spots</li> <li>Informative leaflets</li> </ul>

# Annex 1

## Key steps for partners to implement the strategy at national level

**A**

Adaptation of the awareness raising strategy and reference materials at national level, having already shared a clear picture of the fundamentals of the strategy in terms of principles, contents, methodologies and materials, including the structure of the survey and of the Call for action and the methodologies to analyse collected data.

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**B**

Translation of the strategy in reference partners' languages and revision with the National Committees on Neurodiversity at the workplace, by presenting the Strategy to collect their feedback and revise it accordingly.

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**C**

Mapping of SMEs, microenterprises and stakeholders to reach out to for implementing the Strategy at national level.

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**D**

Launch of the awareness raising campaign at national and European level, according to the objectives, actions and materials included in the Awareness Raising Strategy. All partners will use their formal/information networks of SMEs to reach SMEs, as well as national and European networks of VET providers, trade unions, and dyslexia associations members of EDA to act as multipliers of the campaign

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**E**

Promotion at national, European and international level, through online channels of a Preliminary survey for SMEs, then collection and analysis of the answers taking care of get meaningful data about the knowledge, awareness, emerging needs and practice related to Neurodiversity in SMEs, so as to have specific indications for structuring the project training activities.

## F

Launch of a Call to action for the recruitment of SMEs willing to participate in next project activities, (training and piloting ones). The partners will promote the Call among the SMEs who has already participated in the survey and collect the applications, taking care of explaining that the participation in subsequent project activities from the same SME is strongly recommended in order to assure the effective impact of the project action.

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## G

Sharing with SMEs and other relevant stakeholders of the preliminary data from the survey together with fresh-hand feedback from the implementation of the first awareness raising activities so as to start developing a continuous improvement approach in carrying out the strategy;

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## H

Further revision & update of the Strategy during the whole project duration, on the basis of the data and feedback collected and the results of the subsequent activities.

**N.B. To obtain an effective implementation, it is essential to set up a Coordination Committee that decides and governs the most suitable actions to be put into practice. The Committee will have to be constituted by each partner to implement the strategy in each single country, with the specific companies and targets that each partner considers useful and is able to involve.**

**In Italy, for example, the Coordination Committee could be constituted as follows: AIDP, FORMA.Azione, AID, Global Compact + the Italian stakeholders already mapped.**

**Furthermore, for a possible activation as needed, according to specific actions and tools to be used, by the individual partners, it is possible to include in the Coordination Committee also the reference target groups as indicated in the point.7 of this document. Specifically, a representative for each target audience can be involved to allow a concrete and consistent implementation.**

# Annex 2

## List of awareness raising materials

### INFORMATIVE LEAFLETS

2 leaflets, one addressed to SMEs management and the other to SMEs staff, to explain Neurodiversity, how it relates to workplace and benefits the company with reference to innovation, organisation and performance. The infographic layout is privileged and the graphic elaboration is assigned to a subcontractor.

**LINK - Management**

**LINK - Staff**

### DIGITAL CARDS/POSTCARD

short publication including motivational graphic images, based on specific messages aimed at making SMEs management and staff to behave differently in facing Neurodiversity at workplace, whose graphic elaboration will be assigned to a subcontractor.

**LINK**

### VIDEO SPOTS

3 different video spots 30 seconds lasting and produced by subcontracted experienced video makers, based on scripts and forms developed by partners and based on role models or infographics. The main aims of the videos are informing about Neurodiversity, enhancing strengths of LD people, giving suggestions for introducing small changes in work environment. The themes of the video will be: a) benefits of Neurodiversity at workplace, creating a supportive environment for everyone (universal design), 2) individual needs and differences of neurodivergent people; 3) helping individual needs.

**LINK**

## **GUIDELINES FOR MEETING/CONFERENCE**

advising document meant to show companies how organising and delivering Neurodiversity friendly environments, especially conferences, meetings, by briefing detailing what they do in this direction.

**LINK**

## **GUIDELINES ABOUT INCLUSIVE LANGUAGES**

advising document meant at facilitating companies in using of inclusive terms and phrases when referring to neurodivergent people in ways that are respectful, accurate, and supportive

**LINK**

## **CORPORATE OPEN PADLET AS “DIGITAL SUGGESTION BOX”**

online Padlet open to SMEs staff to collect perspectives and opinions on how to enhance Neurodiversity through inclusive DEI policies and measures, or questions/reflections/individual and collective needs related to Neurodiversity topics.

**LINK**

## **Annex 3**

# **Template of the preliminary survey aimed at anonymously collect data about SMEs awareness and knowledge of Neurodiversity, as well as about related existing practices and emerging needs**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/12pJ13AwF2YtLLixFxHGwqv8p6Gs3Kg3B/edit>

# Annex 4

## Template of the Call to Action

### CALL TO ACTION

#### PREMISE

**The Call to action represents the final step of the Neurodiversity at Work awareness raising strategy, carried out at national and European level campaign and leading to the active involvement of both NEW project partners and SMEs and micro enterprises as target groups, according to the Guidelines contained in our reference strategy.**

**The Call to Action is aimed at giving an immediate feedback to the request of SMEs and microenterprises leaders and staff to commit to Neurodiversity promotion at the workplaces, by recruiting and selecting them for the participation in the following training and piloting activities.**

**The partners will promote the Call among the SMEs who have already participated in a preliminary survey sent out by (name each partner according to the country). All Partners will use their formal / informal networks to reach SMEs, but also national and European networks of HR Managers, trade unions, employers/employees' associations to which to present our theme "Neurodiversity at work", with the aim of acting as multipliers.**

To keep up with the Call to Action, here are some simple useful tips:

- be concise - the brevity and immediacy of the call draws the user's attention to what is important to do;
- generate curiosity - the more creative the text, the more it attracts attention;
- Keep the focus on the goal, facilitate the user to take action, use terms such as "visit, discover, download" etc.
- highlight the benefits and generate urgency - this means highlighting the benefits that the action entails. As if to say: "Consider it as a real training opportunity, put your managerial reality into play, because you will be among the first SMEs companies to make a difference, culturally, on the issue of Neurodiversity at work. You can communicate your intentions to us by ... "

# STANDARD TEXT OF THE CALL TO ACTION

Dear ...

as part of the ERASMUS + Neurodiversity at Work project, we aim to support your company in creating work environments that are inclusive and able to enhance the talents of neurodiverse staff, by offering the following opportunities and resources.

Opportunity	Target	Timeline
<b>Study circles at the workplace for exchanging experiences, needs and competences related to the enhancement of Neurodiversity at Work</b>	SMEs and microenterprises leaders, HR managers and staff	From March to June 2023
<b>Training “Discover Neurodiversity as a key asset in contemporary business”</b>	SMEs and microenterprises leaders	From September to November 2023
<b>Training “Promoting Neurodiversity at work to enhance talents and people wellbeing”</b>	SMEs and microenterprises staff, HR managers, OHS leaders	From September to November 2023
<b>Mentoring path with neurodiversity experts to pilot strategies, methodologies, practices and tools for management, career management and professional development, adaptation of work environment</b>	SMEs and microenterprises leaders, HR managers and staff	From January to May 2024



**If you are interested in participating to these activities, please fill the following form.**

By filling out the form, the company pre-registers to the project activities. The registration can then be confirmed once the contents, methods of implementation and calendars of the activities have been defined in detail.

Moreover, if you haven't yet participated in, you can fill out our survey to support the ongoing research and data collection about neurodiversity at the workplace, and the emerging needs identified.

**If you want to know more visit our website**

**To be informed about our next steps follow us**

**LinkedIn page**

**Twitter account**

**Facebook**

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