

## Module 2: Nature of autism spectrum disorder

**08:30 – 12:15 (Estimated time: 3 ¾ hours)**

**Rationality:** Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or just autism, today summarizing several previous different diagnoses (infantile autism, Asperger syndrome, atypical autism, pervasive developmental disorders not otherwise classified [PDD-NOS]) is heterogenous in causes and individual presentation. Genetic factors are strong in its etiology but even environmental factors play in (Vorstman et al., 2017; Bölte et al., 2019a). ASD is today diagnosed in about 1% of the general population across many low- and middle-income countries and frequently accompanied by psychiatric disorders (e.g. anxiety, depression) other physical complications (e.g. neurological or gastrointestinal issues) (Simonoff et al., 2008; Pan et al., 2021). Many functional impairments in different areas of life (e.g. school, work) might be present, with a risk of low well-being, quality of life and premature mortality (Bölte et al., 2019b, Hirvikoski et al., 2016, Jonsson et al., 2017). ASD is of neurodevelopmental origin, a result of altered neurological architecture, function or maturation of the brain and central nervous system. Although ASD is not a disease, but an expression of neurodiversity, it comes with increased risk for mental and somatic disorders and social exclusion (Bölte et al., 2021). In the dominating diagnostic systems of the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-5) and the World Health Organization (ICD-11), ASD is defined by qualitative difficulties in social communication and interaction along repetitive, restricted behaviors and sensory processing alterations. However, this definition is limited in terms of conveying the comprehensiveness and multifaceted nature of autism, particularly how autistic people themselves experience the phenomenon.

Thus, this module aims to provide a better insight into the complexity and many faces of autism. The modules contain information on autistic experiences, thinking, perceptions, as well as co-occurring issues, the formal view of autism in biomedicine, a list of misconceptions of autism, an overview of the causes of autism and its occurrence with other conditions.

# SESSION PLAN

## MATERIALS

- Computer with MS office, PowerPoint (access to videocalls in case of digital education)
- Notebook and pencil for each participant
- Whiteboard or blackboard
- Projector/beamer and external sound speakers
- PowerPoint slides M2\_contents Module 2 AuTrain
- One copy for each participant of the Worksheet 2.1 *Diagnostic criteria*
- - Video/internet 2.1: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism>
- - Video/internet 2.2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4G0HTIUBII>
- One copy for each participant of the Publication 2.1 by *Fombonne 2021\_JADD*
- One copy for each participant of the Worksheet 2.2 *Increasing prevalence reasons*
- - Video/internet 2.3: <https://www.spectrumnews.org/news/autism-genetics-explained>
- - Video/internet 2.4: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/autism-s-causes-how-close-are-we-to-solving-the-puzzle>
- - Video/internet 2.5: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKlMcLTqRLs>
- One copy for each participant of the Worksheet 2.3 *A case description*
- One copy for each participant of the Worksheet 2.4 *Other behaviors*
- One copy for each participant of the Worksheet 2.5 *Autistic Experiences*
- - Video/internet 2.6: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPknwW8mPAM&feature=emb\\_rel\\_pause](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPknwW8mPAM&feature=emb_rel_pause)
- One copy for each participant of the Worksheet 2.5 *Common misconceptions*

## OVERVIEW

### Begin 08:30 – 10:00

- Aim
- Contents
- Learning outcomes
- Organization
- The formal view of autism in biomedicine, the frequency and causes of autism
- Activities: *Watch & Read 2.1, Discuss 2.1*
- Materials: Worksheet 2.1, Video/internet 2.1, Video/internet 2.2, Publication 2.1, Worksheet 2.2, Video/internet 2.3, Video/internet 2.4, Video/internet 2.5

**Break 10:00 – 10:30**

**Develop 10:30 – 11:30**

- Co-occurring mental and physical conditions
- Autistic experiences, thinking, and perceptions
- Activities: *Watch 2.2, Discuss 2.2, Think & Reflect 2.1*
- Material: *Worksheet 2.3, Worksheet 2.4, Worksheet 2.5, Video/internet 2.6*

**Break 11:30 – 11:45**

**End 11:45 – 12:15**

- Common misconceptions of autism
  - Activity: *Read & Watch 2.3, Think & Reflect 2.2*
  - Material: *Worksheet 2.5*
  - Wrap up
  - References & Resources
- Goodbye 😊

**BEGIN**

**08:30 – 10:00**

Aims, Contents, Learning Outcomes

Organization

Activities & Materials: *Worksheet 2.1, 2.2; Publication 2.1,*

*Video/internet 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5*

**#1. Welcome participants, introduce the aim, contents and the learning outcomes of this module (allow 5-10 min. for this)**

*Note:* Present slides number 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5



1



2

3

**Aim**

**Module 2: Nature of autism spectrum disorder (ASD)**

- The pure formal definition of autism is limited in terms of conveying the comprehensiveness and multifaceted nature of autism.
- Thus, this module aims to provide a better insight into the complexity and many faces of autism, particularly how autistic people themselves experience the phenomenon.

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**Contents**

**Module 2: Nature of autism spectrum disorder**

- The formal view of autism in biomedicine
- The frequency and causes of autism
- Co-occurring mental and physical conditions
- Autistic experiences, thinking, and perceptions
- Common misconceptions of autism

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**Learning outcomes**

**Module 2: Nature of autism spectrum disorder**

- Learn about autism diagnosis, defining features, and understand autism from the inside.
- Learn about the causes of autism, how frequent autism is and how the frequency of autism diagnoses has changed.
- Detect, learn about, and understand autistic behaviors and thinking.
- Learn about what is not typical of autism.

**Aim:**

The pure formal definition of autism is limited in terms of conveying the comprehensive and multifaceted nature of autism. Thus, this module aims to provide a better insight into the complexity and many faces of autism, particularly how autistic people themselves experience the phenomenon.

**Contents:**

- The formal view of autism in biomedicine
- The frequency and causes of autism
- Co-occurring mental and physical conditions
- Autistic experiences, thinking, and perceptions
- Common misconceptions of autism

**Learning outcomes:**

- Learn about autism diagnosis, defining features, and understand autism from the inside.
- Learn about how frequent autism is and how the frequency of autism diagnoses has changed
- Detect, learn about, and understand autistic behaviors and thinking.
- Learn about autism diagnosis, defining features and understand autism from the inside.
- Learn about what is not typical of autism.

**#2. Present to the participants the program for the day including the planned breaks. The program is quite dense (allow 5 min. for this)**

*Note:* Present slides number 6 and 7.

**Organization:**

Present the overview schedule of the session and suggest a longer 30 minutes break and another 15 minutes break.

**Organization**

**Module 2: Nature of autism spectrum disorder**

Estimated time to complete the module: 3 ¼ hours

Breaks: 1 x 30, 1 x 15 minutes

**Organization**

**OVERVIEW**

Module 00: 00 - 00:00

- 01: Introduction
- 02: Learning objectives
- 03: Overview of the module: the structure and content of modules
- 04: Module 01: About 01: 00:00 - 01: 00:00
- 05: Module 02: About 02: 00:00 - 02: 00:00
- 06: Module 03: About 03: 00:00 - 03: 00:00
- 07: Module 04: About 04: 00:00 - 04: 00:00
- 08: Module 05: About 05: 00:00 - 05: 00:00
- 09: Module 06: About 06: 00:00 - 06: 00:00
- 10: Module 07: About 07: 00:00 - 07: 00:00
- 11: Module 08: About 08: 00:00 - 08: 00:00
- 12: Module 09: About 09: 00:00 - 09: 00:00
- 13: Module 10: About 10: 00:00 - 10: 00:00
- 14: Module 11: About 11: 00:00 - 11: 00:00
- 15: Module 12: About 12: 00:00 - 12: 00:00
- 16: Module 13: About 13: 00:00 - 13: 00:00
- 17: Module 14: About 14: 00:00 - 14: 00:00
- 18: Module 15: About 15: 00:00 - 15: 00:00
- 19: Module 16: About 16: 00:00 - 16: 00:00
- 20: Module 17: About 17: 00:00 - 17: 00:00
- 21: Module 18: About 18: 00:00 - 18: 00:00
- 22: Module 19: About 19: 00:00 - 19: 00:00
- 23: Module 20: About 20: 00:00 - 20: 00:00
- 24: Module 21: About 21: 00:00 - 21: 00:00
- 25: Module 22: About 22: 00:00 - 22: 00:00
- 26: Module 23: About 23: 00:00 - 23: 00:00
- 27: Module 24: About 24: 00:00 - 24: 00:00
- 28: Module 25: About 25: 00:00 - 25: 00:00
- 29: Module 26: About 26: 00:00 - 26: 00:00
- 30: Module 27: About 27: 00:00 - 27: 00:00
- 31: Module 28: About 28: 00:00 - 28: 00:00
- 32: Module 29: About 29: 00:00 - 29: 00:00
- 33: Module 30: About 30: 00:00 - 30: 00:00
- 34: Module 31: About 31: 00:00 - 31: 00:00
- 35: Module 32: About 32: 00:00 - 32: 00:00
- 36: Module 33: About 33: 00:00 - 33: 00:00
- 37: Module 34: About 34: 00:00 - 34: 00:00
- 38: Module 35: About 35: 00:00 - 35: 00:00
- 39: Module 36: About 36: 00:00 - 36: 00:00
- 40: Module 37: About 37: 00:00 - 37: 00:00
- 41: Module 38: About 38: 00:00 - 38: 00:00
- 42: Module 39: About 39: 00:00 - 39: 00:00
- 43: Module 40: About 40: 00:00 - 40: 00:00
- 44: Module 41: About 41: 00:00 - 41: 00:00
- 45: Module 42: About 42: 00:00 - 42: 00:00
- 46: Module 43: About 43: 00:00 - 43: 00:00
- 47: Module 44: About 44: 00:00 - 44: 00:00
- 48: Module 45: About 45: 00:00 - 45: 00:00
- 49: Module 46: About 46: 00:00 - 46: 00:00
- 50: Module 47: About 47: 00:00 - 47: 00:00
- 51: Module 48: About 48: 00:00 - 48: 00:00
- 52: Module 49: About 49: 00:00 - 49: 00:00
- 53: Module 50: About 50: 00:00 - 50: 00:00
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- 71: Module 68: About 68: 00:00 - 68: 00:00
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- 80: Module 77: About 77: 00:00 - 77: 00:00
- 81: Module 78: About 78: 00:00 - 78: 00:00
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- 84: Module 81: About 81: 00:00 - 81: 00:00
- 85: Module 82: About 82: 00:00 - 82: 00:00
- 86: Module 83: About 83: 00:00 - 83: 00:00
- 87: Module 84: About 84: 00:00 - 84: 00:00
- 88: Module 85: About 85: 00:00 - 85: 00:00
- 89: Module 86: About 86: 00:00 - 86: 00:00
- 90: Module 87: About 87: 00:00 - 87: 00:00
- 91: Module 88: About 88: 00:00 - 88: 00:00
- 92: Module 89: About 89: 00:00 - 89: 00:00
- 93: Module 90: About 90: 00:00 - 90: 00:00
- 94: Module 91: About 91: 00:00 - 91: 00:00
- 95: Module 92: About 92: 00:00 - 92: 00:00
- 96: Module 93: About 93: 00:00 - 93: 00:00
- 97: Module 94: About 94: 00:00 - 94: 00:00
- 98: Module 95: About 95: 00:00 - 95: 00:00
- 99: Module 96: About 96: 00:00 - 96: 00:00
- 100: Module 97: About 97: 00:00 - 97: 00:00
- 101: Module 98: About 98: 00:00 - 98: 00:00
- 102: Module 99: About 99: 00:00 - 99: 00:00
- 103: Module 100: About 100: 00:00 - 100: 00:00

### #3. Introduce and develop the Activity *Read & Watch 1.1*

*Note:* Present slides number 8 to 11, provide worksheets and publication to participants

**Activity: Read & Watch 2.1**

**Materials**

Worksheet 2.1, Video/Internet 2.1, Video/Internet 2.2, Publication 2.1, Worksheet 2.2, Video/Internet 2.3, Video/Internet 2.4, Video/Internet 2.5

- Read worksheets
- Read publication
- Watch videos (video 2.5 optional, only if time allows)
- Make notes of your thoughts and of important points for later discussion

**Activity: Read & Watch 2.1**

**What is ASD?**

Watch these two short videos (2:42 min. & 4:13 min.)  
Then, have a quick read of the Worksheet 2.1 Diagnostic criteria (5 min.)

**Activity: Read & Watch 2.1 cont.**

**What are the causes of ASD?**

Watch these two movies (2:35 min., 14:47 min.)

**Activity: Read & Watch 2.1 cont.**

**How frequent is ASD?**

Read publication 2.1 (10 min.) and worksheet 2.2 (5 min.)  
If there is time left you may also want to watch this video (15:43 min), *optional*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BkzTqLs> (if participants want to watch later)

**Introduce the Aim of the activity:** This activity aims to give an introduction to autism, its causes and frequency. The activity is divided into three parts, one slide each in the presentation (9, 10, 11). Introduce the activity with the overview slide 8. This activity is a mixture of reading shorter texts and watching mostly shorter movies. Participants will need to take notes for later discussion (next activity) of important points or thoughts. All images in the slides indicative of the video are linked to the actual videos.

**Introduce the material:** Provide the *Worksheet 2.1 Diagnostic criteria, Publication 2.1 Fombonne 2021\_JADD*, and *Worksheet 2.2 Increasing prevalence reasons* to the participants, and tell them, when they will need to read them in a certain order, and that you will guide them, when to read which of them.

**Procedures:** After the introduction (slide 8), show slide 9 “What is ASD”, tell that you are going to show the two videos first (videos 2.1 & 2.2) and then the participants have 5 min. to look at the worksheet diagnostic criteria of ASD, according to DSM-5.

Then move to slide 10, “What are the causes of ASD”. Show both movies (2.3 & 2.4) to the participants and remind of making notes if needed.

Move to slide 11. Ask the participants to read Publication 2.1 Fombonne 2021\_JADD, and Worksheet 2.2 Increasing prevalence reasons. Allow max 15 min. for this. If people think this is too short, they can focus on the abstract and discussion in the publication. Remind of making notes. Video 2.5 is *optional*, there is probably not time for it. The default is to not show it.


Move to the next activity.

**Adaptation for online session:** no need.

#### #4. Introduce and develop the Activity *Discuss 2.1*

*Note:* Present slide number 12

12



**Introduce the Aim of the activity:** The objective of this activity is that the participants think about what they have read and watched and share and discuss their impressions and personal experiences of the contents with the rest of the participants. The participants can use their notes or introduce more spontaneous ideas or respond to what others say. The main idea is to connect the contents provided with the individual experiences and concepts of the participants. Is there something that surprises them? To they get an idea of ASD if they did not know about it so much before? What are their personal experiences with ASD from work and elsewhere?

**Introduce the material:** The discussion is based and the material provided in the activity before. Just remind of it and show slide 12 during the whole activity.

**Procedures:** Show the slide with the questions to the participants and give them a moment to read them. Then ask if someone would like to make a start to any of the questions. If there is no reaction, explain again what the activity wants to achieve. If there is still not reaction, start by answering the questions yourself, and then pass the word to anyone among the participants to start a discussion. Try to get a discussion going, rather than only people one after the other answering the questions. You might want to introduce provocative questions (e.g. “Anyone believing that autism is a fashion diagnosis”?, “Do you think there is an inflation

of ASD diagnoses”). 25 min. for this activity. You may want to use the whiteboard or the blackboard to write-down bullet points of what is said.

Then say: “Now you deserve a break of 30 min.” (show slide 13)

**Adaptation for online session:** no need.

## BREAK TIME

10:00 – 10:30

## DEVELOP

10:30 – 11:30

Co-occurring mental and physical conditions

Autistic experiences, thinking, and perceptions

Activities & Materials: *Watch & Read 2.2, Discuss 2.2, Think & Reflect 2.1*

Material: *Worksheet 2.3, Worksheet 2.4, Worksheet 2.5, Video/internet 2.6*

**#5. Introduce the content of this section, the two areas (co-occurring conditions and autistic experiences, thinking and perception and the material and activities)**

*Note:* Present slide number 14

Slide 14 content: A slide titled "DEVELOP" with a sub-header "Co-occurring mental and physical conditions" and "Autistic experiences, thinking, and perceptions". Below this, it lists "Activities & Materials" and "Material".

14

**#6. Introduce and develop the Activity *Read and Watch 2.2***

*Note:* Present slide number 15, and then 16 and 17

Slide 15 content: A slide titled "Activity: Read & Watch 2.2" with a sub-header "Materials" and a list of materials: "Worksheet 2.3, Worksheet 2.4, Worksheet 2.5, Video/Internet 2.6". It also includes a list of activities: "Read worksheets", "Watch video", and "Make notes of your thoughts and impressions for later activities".

15

Slide 16 content: A slide titled "Activity: Read & Watch 2.2 cont." with a sub-header "Worksheet 2.3, Worksheet 2.4, Worksheet 2.5, Video/Internet 2.6". It includes a list of activities: "Read worksheet 2.3 case of autism: Alexis' story (10 min.)", "Read worksheet 2.4 cooccurring behaviors (10 min.)", "Watch video 2.6 autism simulator (1:29 min.)", "Read worksheet 2.5 autistic experiencing (10 min.)", and "Make notes of your thoughts and impressions for later activities".

16



17

**Introduce the Aim of the activity:** The objective of this activity is to provide the participants with information about how autism can present in individual cases and how autistic people perceive the world and their style of thinking. The main idea is to deepen and extend what they read and saw before and generate a broader and more flexible picture of autism, and that they get an idea of how it may feel like to be autistic. Motivate that they take notes and prepare for the later activities? The images on the slide 17, indicative of the video, is linked to the actual video.

**Introduce the material:** Provide each of the participants with the worksheets 2.3. *A case description*, 2.4 *Other behaviors*, and 2.5 *Autistic Experiences*. Mention the video 2.6. *autism simulator* that you show later.

**Procedures:** Let the participants read the worksheets 2.3. *A case description*, 2.4 *Other behaviors* (allow 20 min. for it). Then show the video 2.6 *autism simulator*. Thereafter let the participants read the worksheet 2.5 *Autistic Experiences* (allow 10 min. for it). Motivate them to take notes of their thoughts and ideas, while reading and watching.

Then lead over to the next activity.

**Adaptation for online session:** no need.

## #7. Introduce and develop the Activity: *Discuss 2.2*

*Note:* Present slide number 18.



18

**Introduce the aim of the activity:** The aim of this activity is to discuss two questions regarding the material that the participants have worked with in the Read and Watch activity before, especially the case description and the co-occurring issues. The objective is that the participants discuss the case of Alexis in relation to the diagnostic criteria and their general idea of ASD. How well does the case match their idea of ASD and the diagnostic criteria? The other questions



pertain to what often co-occurs with autism. It is to make participants aware of that these can mask autism and make the real burden for the autistic person. What do participants know about these other conditions?

**Introduce the material:** The material from Read and Watch 2.2.


**Procedures:** Show the slide with the questions to the participants and give them a moment to read them. Then ask if someone would like to make a start to any of the questions. If there is no reaction, explain again what the activity wants to achieve. If there is still not reaction, start by answering the questions yourself, and then pass the word to anyone among the participants to start a discussion. Try to get a discussion going, rather than only people one after the other answering the questions. Allow 10 min. for this activity. You may want to use the whiteboard or the blackboard to write-down bullet points of what is said.

When it is time, wrap up, stressing the complexity and heterogeneity of autism, such as with “if you know someone with autism, you know one person with autism”, and then, lead over to the next activity.

**Adaptation for online session:** no need.

## #8. Introduce and develop the Activity: *Think & Reflect 2.1*

*Note:* Present slide number 19.



19

**Introduce the aim of the activity:** The aim of this activity is that the participants reflect and think about how it might be and feel to be autistic based on the Read and Watch activity material that they have worked with before, especially the autism simulator and autistic experiencing , thinking and perception video and worksheet. Can they imagine what it could be like, how it could impact daily life, how others react (negatively) to it? What do the participants think, how one should behave towards autistic people to make life easier for them?

**Introduce the material:** The material from Read and Watch 2.2.

**Procedures:** Show the slide with the points to the participants and give them a moment to read them and reflect. Then ask if someone would like to make a start. If there is no reaction,

explain again what the activity wants to achieve. If there is still not reaction, start by reflecting yourself, and then pass the word to anyone among the participants. Allow 15 min. for this activity. You may want to use the whiteboard or the blackboard to write-down bullet points of what is said.

When it is time, wrap up, stressing again that autism can be challenging especially in an environment that does not understand autism, and people behave in ways that are hard for autistic people to grasp and navigate in.

**Adaptation for online session:** no need.

Then say, it is time for another break (15 min.) and show slide 20.

Then say, it is time for another break (15 min.) and show slide 20.

## BREAK TIME

11:30 – 11:45

## END

11:45– 12:15

Common misconceptions of autism

Wrap up

References & Resources

Goodbye ☺

Activities & Materials: *Read & Watch 2.3, Think & Reflect 2.2, Worksheet 2.6*

**#9. Introduce the last part of the training, consisting of final activities around common misconceptions of autism (20 min.), wrap-up of the whole training, references, resources, and goodbye (in total 30 min).**

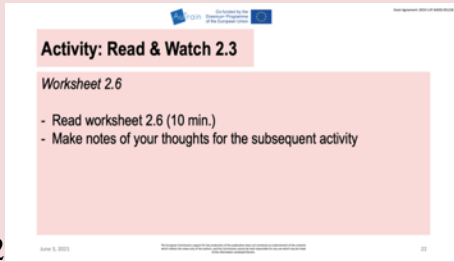
*Note:* Present slide number 21



21

**#10. Activity: Read & Watch 2.3**

*Note:* Present slide number 22



22

**Introduce the aim of the activity:** The aim of this activity is to provide information about some common misconceptions of autism to the participants, both overly positive and negative ones and false ones. It is important that people have a realistic picture of autism, do not overgeneralize, or believe in myths put forward but autistic and non-autistic people. This completes all the other information that they received before on the individual nature of autism phenotypes and to follow a scientifically based approach.

**Introduce the material:** The worksheet 2.6 on common misconceptions.

**Procedures:** Show the slide 22 to the participants, day that they now should read the worksheet and perhaps make notes about their thoughts. Allow 10 min. for this activity.

Then lead over to the next activity.

## #11. Activity: *Think and Reflect 2.2*

*Note:* Present slide number 23



23

**Introduce the aim of the activity:** The aim of this activity is to make the participants to think and reflect about their own possible misconceptions of autism: do they have misconceptions of autism? Perhaps some of those mentioned in the worksheets? Have they encountered these misconceptions somewhere? What do they think one can do about them? The objective is to achieve that the participants question their ideas and knowledge of autism and inspire to do so even in the future and to convey this critical thinking to others.

**Introduce the material:** The material from Read and Watch just before.

**Procedures:** Show the slide with the points to the participants and give them a moment to read them and reflect. Then ask if someone would like to make a start. If there is no reaction, explain again what the activity wants to achieve. If there is still not reaction, start by reflecting

yourself, and then pass the word to anyone among the participants. Allow 10 min. for this activity. You may want to use the whiteboard or the blackboard to write-down bullet points of what is said.

When it is time, wrap up, stressing that it is vital that people jeopardize their stereotypes about autism and autistic people and are open to what individuals autistic people say and do.

**Adaptation for online session: no need**

Then, lead over to the References and Resources.

**#13. Wrap up the session by summarizing the main points of it and monitoring participants learning**

Note: Present slide number 24

24



a. Explain to the participants that it is time to come to an end and summarize the module. You have generated some bullet points for them as take-home message. It is not comprehensive but a way to condense the materials and activities.

b. Read out loud the text on the slide, and make sure that the group is consistent with your summary.

c. Ask the participants if they wish to add something important you might have missed.

**#13. Introduce References & Resources, and indicate where participants can find it in the AuTrain platform**

Note: Present slides number 25 to 27

25



26





27

- a. The references can be used to further and deepen the contents of the module using scientific reports
- b. The resources do partly correspond with the contents presented in the module (e.g. WHO and APA = diagnostic criteria); spectrum news is a newsletter service about autism research provided by the Simons Foundation; The Autism Self Advocacy Network is an empowerment organization for autistic people and their relatives; The Center for Disease Control is a national authority in the USA monitoring autism prevalence.

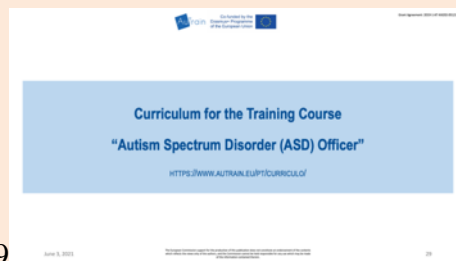
## #12. Questions? Goodbye & Thanks for coming 😊

Ask for any question participants may have. As you intentionally say goodbye, give participants a sense of purpose through making meaning of their hard work and success within the module. Remind them of how important they are to make a change for autistic people.

*Note:* Present slides number 28 and 29



28



29

## End of the module

### Reflection

In the end of the module write a reflection on what occurred during the process. Concerning the participants' learning, the activities, the organization, etc.