

## Welcome to our first AutismFIT newsletter

The AutismFIT project aims to improve the physical and mental health of young people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) with the use of innovative Virtual Reality tools and game-based learning environments. By incorporating everyday objects and custom-made games, the project encourages healthy eating and active living engagingly and effectively.

Spanning from May 2024 to March 2026, the project consists of 6 partners coming from Germany, Belgium, Cyprus, Portugal, and Italy.



## Why AutismFIT?

Autism Spectrum Disorder affects 1% of the global population. As with all young people, maintaining a balanced diet and regular exercise is crucial for their well-being, yet these areas are often under-addressed for individuals with autism. The AutismFIT partnership, comprised of six partners from across Europe, will address this need by creating resources and support for a healthier lifestyle for teens on the spectrum.

Research shows that serious games (games designed for a purpose more than pure entertainment) and gamified learning environments are some of the most common ways of learning and enhancing a learner's engagement and performance. These methods can provide a structured and motivating environment that many people with autism may enjoy.

Visit the AutismFit Webpage for the latest project news: [www.tinyurl.com/AutismFit](http://www.tinyurl.com/AutismFit)

## Kicking off AutismFIT project

AutismFit officially started with an online meeting on 17 May 2024. Partners focused on the implementation of the Needs Assessment. These activities have identified a number of common challenges to delivering accessible lifestyle education. These challenges include:

- A lack of training resources
- Poor understanding of the use of technology
- A lack of inclusive environment and activities
- Lack of proper training among youth workers.

Following the meeting, a collection of practices of active lifestyle for people with ASD was also launched. To date, partners have gathered over 61 practices (Digital tools, research articles, offline games, educational courses, and learning mobility initiatives) which will be made available via the AutismFit online repository in 2025.



## The Partnership

- Internationaler Bund (Coordinator, Germany)
- EASPD (Belgium)
- Emphasys Centre (Cyprus)
- AIAS Bologna (Italy)
- Special School Nicosia (Cyprus)
- Associação Portuguesa para as Perturbações do Desenvolvimento e Autismo de Coimbra Portugal (Portugal)

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## Setting the scene: AutismFIT's national Innovation Forums



The project recently hosted 4 Innovation Forums. These interactive workshops involved youth workers, parents, young people with autism and experts such as dieticians and physical instructors to co-design solutions to challenges in delivering accessible lifestyle education. Bringing together more than 60 participants, the events highlighted a number of common challenges in promoting the physical and mental well-being of ASD youth. In particular:

- In Italy, AIAS Bologna conducted 5 online forums to inform the development of the AutismFIT project. These interactive sessions brought together professionals and families of individuals with autism from Bologna and Modena provinces. Participants discussed key aspects of autism, including individual needs, available resources, and personal experiences.
- In Portugal, APPDA Coimbra's forum gathered professionals, caregivers, and youth with autism to discuss mental health and emotional self-regulation. Key takeaways included the need for personalised interventions, improved professional training, and inclusive school environments. Participants emphasised the importance of collaboration and innovative approaches to support autistic youth's well-being and social participation.
- In Cyprus the Forum hosted by Emphasys Centre and Special School Nicosia provided a great opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences regarding the physical and mental well-being of ASD youth and the different practices and methodologies participants use in their practices.
- In Germany, Internationaler Bund hosted the innovation form with participants including professionals and family members of people with autism who expressed the lack of proper resources and guidance to do activities to ensure physical well-being for people with ASD.

## What's Next

- An in-person project meeting in Dresden, Germany.
- Development of a competence framework outlining the personal, social, and learning skills required to be physically active and acquire a balanced diet.
- Info sessions in four participating countries.

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