

## AUTISM AND EMPLOYMENT: DIGITAL JOB PLATFORMS AND SUPPORT

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### Abstract

Employment opportunities for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) continue to be limited, creating a significant barrier to economic independence and inclusion. In response, digital job platforms and support services have emerged as crucial tools for connecting neurodivergent job seekers with potential employers. This study focuses on both global and Türkiye-specific platforms that offer tailored services to individuals with ASD, examining how these tools facilitate meaningful employment. Global initiatives such as Specialisterne, WIN (Workplace Inclusion Now), Neurodiversity Hub, Mentra, Microsoft Autism Hiring Program, and Inclusively provide a range of support, from job matching to workplace accommodations. In Türkiye, local organizations like Tohum Autism Foundation, İŞKUR, OBİDEP (Otizmlı Bireyler İçin Destek ve Eğitim Programı), Engelsiz Kariyer, and AYDER (Alternatif Yaşam Derneği) offer similar services, adapting them to the country's specific employment landscape. These platforms offer vocational training, interview preparation, ongoing workplace support, and accommodations, addressing the unique challenges faced by individuals with autism. Through an analysis of their features, accessibility, and user feedback, this research evaluates the effectiveness of both global and local platforms in improving employment outcomes for individuals with ASD. The findings reveal that while these tools significantly enhance employment opportunities, challenges such as stigma and accessibility still remain. The study provides insights into the evolving landscape of digital job support for individuals with autism in Türkiye and globally, emphasizing the need for continued development and advocacy for inclusive hiring practices.

**Keywords:** autism employment, digital job platforms, inclusive employment, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), global autism employment initiatives, autism employment in Türkiye.

### Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that significantly influences an individual's communication, social interactions, and behavioral patterns. While individuals with autism often possess unique strengths such as attention to detail, high levels of concentration, and exceptional problem-solving abilities, they also face significant challenges in securing and maintaining employment. These challenges are not solely due to their condition but also stem from societal biases, inadequate workplace accommodations, and the lack of structured support systems tailored to their needs (Hirota & King, 2023). The employment gap for individuals with autism is stark; studies indicate that this population experiences one of the highest unemployment rates compared to individuals with other types of disabilities. Yet, inclusive employment opportunities can foster financial independence, personal growth, and social integration, demonstrating the critical need for addressing this issue. In recent years, digital job platforms have emerged as a potential solution, offering accessible and flexible opportunities for individuals with autism (Solomon, 2020).

Digital platforms such as freelancing websites, job-matching portals, and online training modules not only provide employment opportunities but also create avenues for skills development and networking (Goger et al., 2022). Moreover, these platforms allow employers

to better understand the specific needs of individuals with autism through tools such as detailed job descriptions, task customization options, and training materials. However, their effectiveness depends on whether these platforms integrate autism-friendly features, such as accessibility adaptations, task breakdowns, and communication support (Estival et al, 2024).

This research aims to explore the intersection of autism and employment, focusing on the role of digital job platforms in enhancing employment opportunities for individuals with autism. It examines how these platforms cater to the unique needs of this population, the challenges they address, and their limitations. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of digital tools in fostering an inclusive labor market, offering recommendations for improving support mechanisms and fostering greater collaboration between employers, digital platform developers, and autism advocacy groups. Bridging the gap between technology and inclusivity, this research contributes to the growing discourse on leveraging digital solutions to empower individuals with autism in the workplace, ultimately fostering a more equitable and diverse workforce.

## Methodology

The goal of this qualitative study is to analyze global and Türkiye-specific digital job platforms in terms of their features, accessibility, and effectiveness in supporting employment for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This research employs analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of digital job platforms in improving employment outcomes for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The study focuses on both global platforms and Türkiye-specific platforms, particularly those offering tailored services to individuals with autism. Examining features, accessibility, and user feedback, the research aims to identify best practices and areas for improvement in supporting meaningful employment for individuals with ASD. The study is designed as a qualitative analysis to systematically evaluate the selected platforms. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of the platforms' design, functionality, and impact on employment outcomes for individuals with autism.

The platforms included in this study have been selected based on four criteria:

1. **Relevance:** The platform must explicitly target or provide services to individuals with ASD.
2. **Scope:** Both global platforms (e.g., Specialisterne, Ultronauts) and Türkiye-specific platforms (e.g., local employment agencies, disability-focused job portals) are included.
3. **Features:** Platforms must offer unique features aimed at improving accessibility, such as task breakdowns, autism-friendly user interfaces, or training resources.
4. **User Base:** Platforms with active engagement from individuals with ASD or their employers have been prioritized.

Platform documentation, promotional materials, and website content have been reviewed to understand the core features and target audience.

Due to the scope of this study, primary data collection was not conducted. However, future research should incorporate interviews with individuals with ASD, employers, and platform developers to gain deeper, firsthand insights into platform usability, accessibility, and impact.

## Findings

Several online platforms and initiatives have been designed to help individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) find employment. These platforms focus on providing job opportunities, training, and support tailored to the specific needs of neurodivergent individuals.

## 1. Specialisterne

Specialisterne is a global organization that works to help individuals with autism find employment, particularly in fields like technology, administration, and data processing. They offer training and placement services, working closely with companies to create autism-friendly job environments. Specialisterne is a global social enterprise dedicated to creating meaningful employment opportunities for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other neurodivergent conditions. Founded in Denmark in 2004 by Thorkil Sonne, Specialisterne—which translates to "The Specialists"—is built on the recognition of the unique skills and abilities that neurodivergent individuals bring to the workplace, particularly in roles that require high attention to detail, precision, and structured thinking. The organization operates in collaboration with companies, governments, and educational institutions worldwide to foster inclusive employment practices. Specialisterne's efforts focus on integrating neurodivergent individuals into industries such as IT, data analysis, quality assurance, and administrative support, where their strengths align with job requirements.



Figure 1. Specialisterne website

Specialisterne offers a range of services aimed at promoting inclusive employment for individuals with ASD, including: Assessment and Training, Job Placement and Support, Employer Training, Global Reach. Specialisterne operates in multiple countries, adapting its model to regional labor markets and cultural contexts (Figure 1). Specialisterne's initiatives have resulted in thousands of neurodivergent individuals gaining meaningful employment globally, increased awareness and acceptance of neurodiversity in the workplace, and growing number of companies integrating inclusive hiring practices into their core operations. Specialisterne serves as a benchmark for how tailored services and advocacy can bridge the employment gap for individuals with ASD, making it a critical case study for understanding the role of digital platforms and support systems in fostering inclusive employment.

## 2. Autism Speaks: Workplace Inclusion Now (WIN)

WIN is an employment portal by Autism Speaks that connects individuals with autism to job opportunities while providing tools for both employees and employers to create an inclusive workplace. The platform offers job listings, resources for interview preparation, workplace accommodations, and employer training programs.

WIN is designed to improve employment outcomes for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by promoting workplace inclusion and providing tools, training, and resources for both employees and employers. WIN aims to address the significant employment gap faced by individuals with autism, enabling them to access meaningful, sustained careers while helping businesses recognize and leverage the value of a neurodiverse workforce.

WIN includes a lot of key components such as: resources for job seekers like employment toolkit, skill development programs, and career pathways; employer support and training like neurodiversity training, inclusive hiring practices, and workplace accommodations; partnerships and advocacy, and digital tools such as online training modules for both job seekers and employers and digital job boards that connect employers with candidates on the autism spectrum.

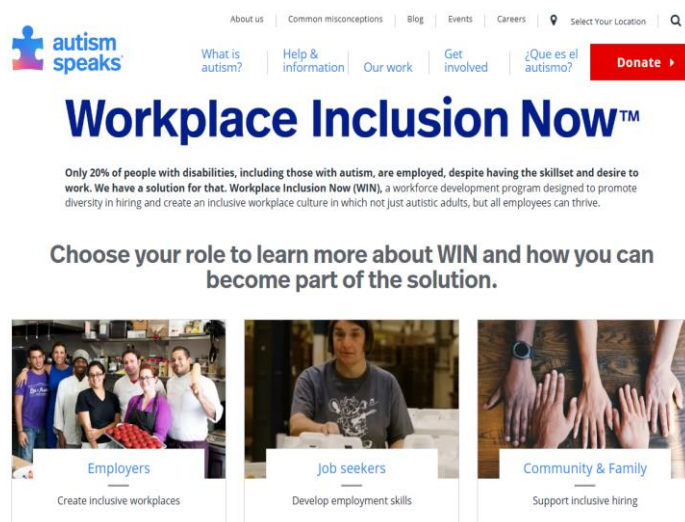


Figure 2. Workplace Inclusion Now website

The WIN initiative aims to increase access to competitive, integrated employment for individuals with autism and raise awareness about the strengths of neurodiverse employees and the benefits of hiring them by helping organizations build cultures that embrace neurodiversity as a valuable asset.

Since its inception, WIN has partnered with numerous companies, including organizations, to create neurodiversity-focused hiring programs. Also, they have facilitated the placement of individuals with autism in roles ranging from entry-level positions to highly specialized technical jobs and provided training to thousands of employers and managers, fostering inclusive practices across diverse industries.

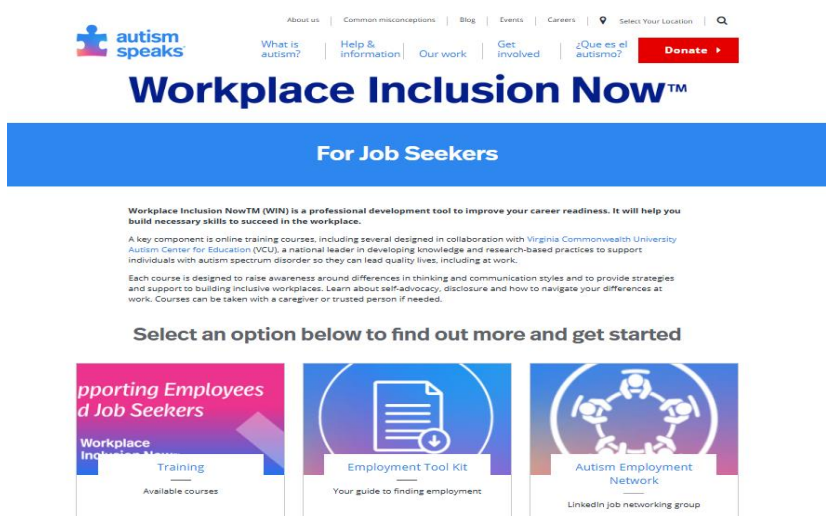


Figure 3. WIN, opportunities for job seekers

### 3. Neurodiversity Hub

This platform provides a collaboration space for students and graduates with autism to enhance their employability skills. It includes job listings, networking opportunities, and educational resources aimed at building a bridge between neurodiverse individuals and employers.

The Neurodiversity Hub is an international initiative that aims to enhance employment opportunities for neurodivergent individuals, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It provides a collaborative platform that connects universities, employers, service providers, and advocacy organizations to create inclusive pathways for education and career development. By leveraging the strengths of neurodiverse individuals, the Neurodiversity Hub seeks to address the challenges of unemployment and underemployment faced by this population.

The mission of the Neurodiversity Hub is to build a global ecosystem that supports neurodivergent individuals in their transition from education to meaningful employment by promoting the benefits of neurodiversity in workplaces and educational institutions and offering tools, guidelines, and support for both neurodivergent individuals and organizations seeking to foster inclusivity. This platform is also encouraging partnerships between universities, employers, and service providers to create accessible pathways for neurodiverse individuals.

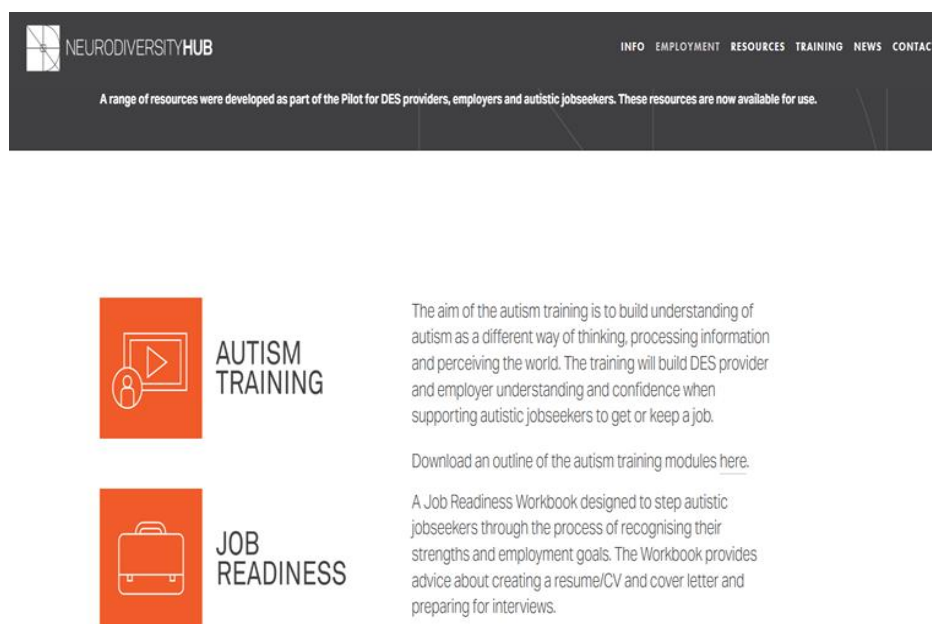


Figure 4. Neurodiversity Hub website

The key features of the Neurodiversity Hub platform include resources for universities and educators, support for employers, and tools for neurodivergent individuals. The Neurodiversity Hub has supported universities globally in establishing neurodiversity programs and transitioning students into employment and created partnerships with leading companies to promote neurodiversity hiring initiatives. Additionally, it has developed accessible, user-friendly resources that enable organizations to build inclusive environments.

## 4. Mentra

Mentra is a job-matching platform specifically designed for neurodiverse job seekers. The platform uses AI to match individuals with jobs that align with their strengths and provides support through the application and interview process. Mentra is an innovative, neurodiversity-focused employment platform designed to connect neurodivergent individuals, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), with inclusive employers. Established to address the systemic barriers faced by neurodiverse individuals in traditional job markets, Mentra leverages artificial intelligence and personalized matching algorithms to facilitate meaningful employment opportunities. The platform emphasizes a strength-based approach, highlighting the unique talents of neurodiverse individuals and aligning them with roles where they can thrive. The mission of Mentra is to revolutionize the job search process for neurodivergent individuals by creating an inclusive and accessible hiring ecosystem and to build a world where neurodiverse talent is celebrated, and employment opportunities are equitable, empowering individuals to reach their full potential.

The key features of mentra include AI-powered job matching using a sophisticated algorithm to match neurodivergent job seekers with roles that align with their skills, preferences, and work styles. Neurodiversity-Centric Profile Design that enables users to create personalized profiles that showcase their talents, preferred work environments, and communication styles which encourages self-expression and authenticity, helping employers better understand each candidate's unique value. This accessible platform is designed with input from neurodiverse users to ensure ease of navigation and usability offering employer training and support that provides resources and training for companies to build inclusive hiring practices and supportive workplace environments. Community and mentorship opportunities are also offering job seekers access to a supportive community and mentorship programs to enhance career readiness and confidence.

Mentra has successfully connected neurodivergent individuals with roles in diverse industries, including technology, healthcare, and creative fields. The platform has raised awareness among employers about the value of neurodiverse talent and the importance of fostering inclusive work environments. By addressing common barriers in traditional recruitment, Mentra has helped increase employment rates among its users.

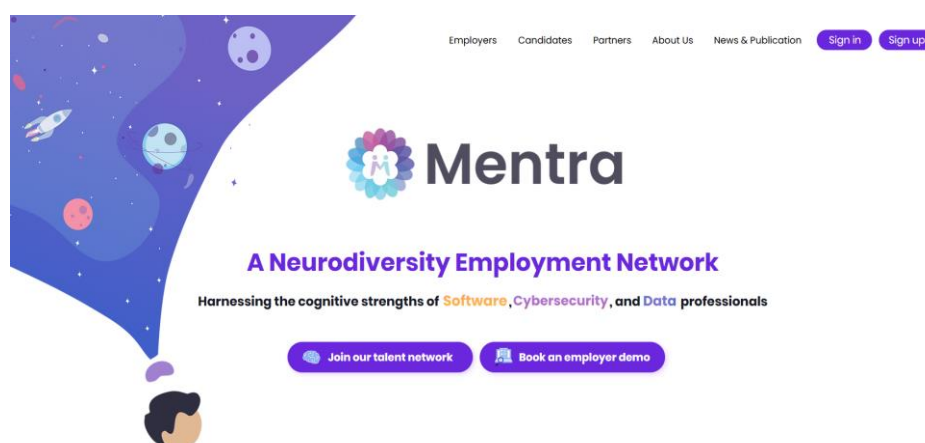


Figure 5. Mentra website



## 5. Microsoft Autism Hiring Program

Although not a standalone platform, Microsoft's initiative is a dedicated program aimed at hiring and supporting individuals with autism in tech roles. Microsoft provides tailored interview processes, career support, and accommodations to ensure that neurodivergent employees can thrive. The Microsoft Autism Hiring Program is a pioneering initiative aimed at creating an inclusive hiring and workplace environment for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Established in 2015, this program reflects Microsoft's commitment to promoting diversity and harnessing the unique strengths of neurodivergent talent, particularly in areas like technology, innovation, and problem-solving. The program offers tailored recruitment processes, workplace accommodations, and ongoing support, ensuring that individuals on the autism spectrum can thrive in their careers.

The objectives of the microsoft autism hiring program is to integrate neurodiverse talent into Microsoft's workforce and foster a culture of inclusion, to leverage the unique skills of individuals with ASD, particularly in areas like pattern recognition, logical reasoning, and attention to detail, and to serve as a model for other organizations to embrace neurodiversity in their hiring practices.



Figure 6. Microsoft Autism Hiring Program website

The key features of the Microsoft Autism Hiring Program includes alternative hiring process such as traditional interviews, which can be challenging for individuals with autism, being replaced with an alternative process focused on skills and abilities. Also this platform matches job roles with the strengths and interests of the candidates, such as software engineering, data analytics, cybersecurity, and quality assurance. They also provide sensory-friendly work environments, flexible schedules, and clear communication tools and comprehensive training programs for managers and team members to understand autism and foster a supportive and inclusive workplace environment.

Since its inception, the Microsoft Autism Hiring Program has successfully hired and retained numerous employees on the autism spectrum, inspired other major corporations, such as SAP and JPMorgan Chase, to launch similar initiatives, and raised awareness about the value of neurodiverse talent in the tech industry and beyond.

## **6. Inclusively**

Inclusively is an innovative, disability-inclusive employment platform designed to connect job seekers with diverse abilities, including individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), to inclusive employers. Founded in 2019, Inclusively operates on the principle of "accommodation transparency," empowering job seekers to openly communicate their support needs while enabling employers to create accessible and inclusive work environments. The platform fosters meaningful employment by aligning the unique talents of neurodivergent individuals with roles tailored to their strengths.

The mission of this platform is to redefine traditional hiring practices by creating a transparent and inclusive job marketplace where neurodivergent individuals and other underrepresented groups can thrive, and to build a workforce where diversity, equity, and inclusion are embedded in every stage of the hiring and employment process.

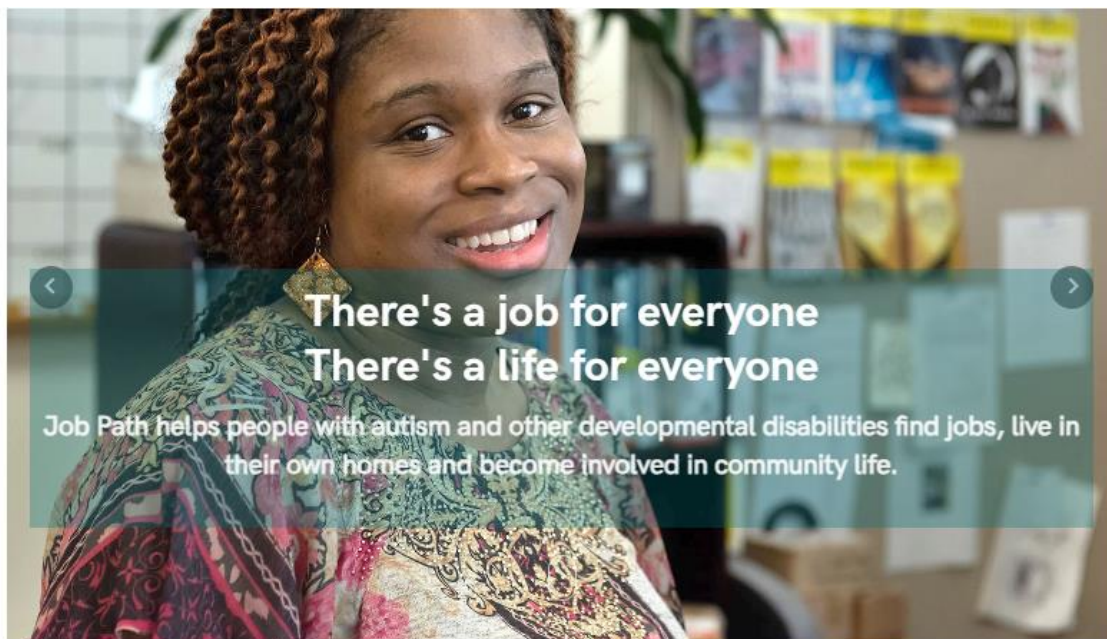
The Key Features of the Inclusively platform is to allow job seekers to indicate their preferred workplace accommodations during the job application and to provide employers with insights into candidates' needs, promoting a proactive and inclusive onboarding process. This platform uses advanced algorithms to match job seekers with roles that align with their skills, preferences, and accommodation needs and goes beyond conventional qualifications to focus on strengths, work styles, and potential contributions. Also they partner with companies committed to fostering diversity and inclusion, ensuring that job seekers are matched with supportive workplaces by offering employers tools and resources to implement inclusive hiring practices. With 'Inclusively' platform job seekers are provided with resources such as resume-building tools, interview tips, and career development guides. Sometimes, they also offer training programs for employers on creating inclusive work environments and accommodating neurodivergent employees.


Inclusively has achieved significant milestones since its launch, including partnering with major organizations across industries to support disability-inclusive hiring, facilitating successful employment placements for individuals with ASD and other disabilities and raising awareness about the importance of workplace accommodations and diversity.

## **7. Job Path**

Job Path helps individuals with developmental disabilities, including autism, find employment in various sectors. It provides job coaching, placement services, and ongoing support to help individuals transition into the workforce. Job Path is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping individuals with disabilities, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), find and sustain meaningful employment. Based in New York City, Job Path focuses on creating customized career opportunities by partnering with individuals to identify their strengths, interests, and goals. The organization collaborates with employers and communities to foster inclusive workplaces and ensure the long-term success of neurodivergent employees. The aim of this platform is to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve independence and career fulfillment by providing the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to thrive and to create a society where individuals with disabilities are recognized for their abilities and have equal access to career opportunities (Figure 7).









**Employment**

Everyone who wants to work deserves the chance. Through Job Path's Customized Employment strategies, we take an individualized approach to job placement - helping our partner businesses fill unmet needs while tailoring positions to the unique skills and abilities of job seekers.




**Supported Living**

Through our comprehensive Supported Living program, Job Path enables people to establish a home of their own. Ranging from a few hours of support each week to 24/7 care, our support offers an alternative to the group home model where individuals can thrive and belong.




**Community Connections**

Life extends beyond the home and workplace. With Job Path staff, individuals in our Community Connections program develop a schedule that reflects their interests. Whether it's volunteering, taking an art class, going to the gym, or getting a college degree, people are leading full and vibrant lives.



**Self-Direction**

Our fastest growing program, Self-Direction, helps participants and their families navigate state and federal benefits so they can make the most of their budgets to do things like hire staff, take classes, offset rent, and other routine expenses.



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Figure 7. JobPath website

Job Path works closely with individuals to identify their strengths, preferences, and employment goals developing tailored job opportunities that align with each individual's unique capabilities and aspirations. They provide one-on-one job coaching to help individuals adapt to their roles and build workplace skills and offer ongoing training to enhance professional development and ensure career growth. They also collaborate with employers to create inclusive work environments and match them with candidates whose skills align with organizational needs and provide resources and training to employers on supporting neurodiverse employees. Since its establishment, Job Path has successfully placed hundreds of individuals with ASD and other disabilities in meaningful, long-term employment and has partnered with businesses across various industries to expand workplace diversity and inclusion. They have also played a pivotal role in shifting societal perceptions of disability, focusing on abilities rather than limitations.

## 8. AbilityJobs

This is one of the largest job boards dedicated to connecting people with disabilities, including those with autism, to employers. AbilityJobs offers a platform for job seekers to post resumes and browse job opportunities while promoting inclusion and diversity in the workplace. Founded with the goal of promoting equal access to employment for people with disabilities, AbilityJobs focuses on providing an accessible, non-discriminatory platform for job seekers and employers. The platform offers a wide variety of job listings across various industries, along with resources and tools to help individuals navigate the job search process and thrive in the workplace. The aim of AbilityJobs is to provide individuals with disabilities the resources and support they need to secure meaningful, long-term employment while helping employers build more inclusive and diverse work forces and to create a world where people with disabilities, including those with ASD, have equal opportunities in the job market and are valued for their skills and abilities.

The Key Features of this platform is to offer a comprehensive job board with job listings specifically for individuals with disabilities and to provide an easy-to-use search tool that allows users to filter jobs by location, type, industry, and accommodation needs. Partners with inclusive employers can also post job openings and showcase their commitment to disability inclusion and provide employers with resources to develop accessible hiring practices and create supportive work environments. This platform offers resume-building tools, interview preparation tips, and career counseling to help individuals with disabilities prepare for and succeed in the job market as well as providing job seekers with personalized advice on navigating job searches and accommodations. This platform offers guidance and information about workplace accommodations that can support neurodivergent individuals, including sensory needs, flexible hours, and other workplace adjustments. They also connect individuals with disabilities to a supportive community of job seekers and employers through virtual job fairs, webinars, and networking events (Figure 8).

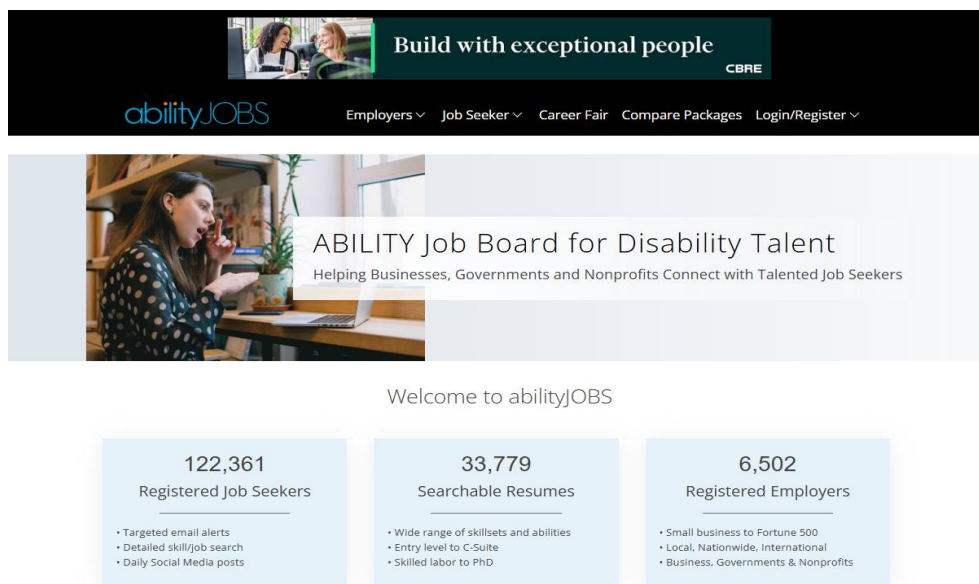


Figure 8. AbilityJobs website

AbilityJobs has made a significant impact by connecting thousands of individuals with disabilities to job opportunities in a range of industries, from technology and healthcare to retail and manufacturing. They are also collaborating with major corporations and government agencies to increase awareness about disability inclusion and improve hiring practices.

These platforms cater to the specific needs of individuals with autism by providing job matching, interview coaching, and work environment accommodations (Table. 1). Many of them also collaborate with employers to ensure a smooth transition for neurodivergent employees.

**Table 1.** Comparison of Global Digital Job Platforms Supporting Employment for Individuals With Autism

<i>Platform Name</i>	<i>Accessibility Features</i>	<i>Autism-Specific Tools</i>	<i>Employer Engagement</i>	<i>Reported Impact</i>
<i>Specialisterne</i>	Structured environments, detailed task design	Training, job coaching, diagnostic tools	High collaboration model	Thousands of individuals placed in tech-related jobs
<i>WIN (Autism Speaks)</i>	Toolkit, job board, interview preparation	Dedicated autism resources	Moderate	Established hiring pipelines with major employers
<i>Neurodiversity Hub</i>	Career pathways, e-learning content	Yes – university work transition tools	Varies (university-driven)	International partnerships and institutional support
<i>Mentra</i>	AI-based platform, user-centered design	Strength-based profiles	High – includes employer training	Improved candidate-job matching, increased awareness
<i>Microsoft Autism Hiring Program</i>	Sensory-friendly environments, alternative interviews	Tailored hiring process	High – internal implementation	Inspired similar initiatives at SAP, JPMorgan, etc.
<i>Inclusively</i>	Accommodation transparency, custom profiles	Yes – job matching by need and preference	High – training and resources	Broad employer network, increased visibility
<i>Job Path</i>	Personalized coaching and ongoing training	Yes – community-based approach	Moderate	Long-term placement success in NYC
<i>AbilityJobs</i>	Accessible search and resume features	General disability inclusion	Moderate	Thousands connected with inclusive employers

### Digital platforms in Türkiye

Turkey, platforms specifically dedicated to supporting individuals with autism in finding employment are still emerging. However, there are several organizations and initiatives that work towards providing employment opportunities and support for people with autism and other disabilities.

## 1. Tohum Autism Foundation (Tohum Otizm Vakfı)

Tohum Autism Foundation is one of Turkey's leading organizations focusing on education and services for individuals with autism. While their primary focus is on early intervention and education, they also work on increasing awareness and creating opportunities for individuals with autism, including employment. The foundation organizes programs to raise awareness among companies about employing individuals with autism and helps create inclusive work environments. Tohum Autism Foundation actively supports the employment of individuals with autism by fostering independence and societal participation through various initiatives. The foundation collaborates with companies to raise awareness about autism and the benefits of inclusive workplaces, emphasizing the unique strengths individuals with autism bring to the workforce, such as attention to detail, consistency, and reliability. To ensure success, they assist companies in developing autism-friendly practices, including modifying job roles to match abilities, providing training for supervisors and coworkers, and offering on-the-job support. Additionally, the foundation organizes vocational training workshops that focus on developing technical and soft skills, building routines, and enhancing adaptability to different work environments. By establishing partnerships with businesses across sectors, the foundation connects employers with talented individuals, bridging the gap between opportunity and capability while advocating for meaningful employment and inclusivity (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Tohum Otizm Vakfı website

## 2. İŞKUR (Turkish Employment Agency)

İŞKUR offers general employment support for individuals with disabilities, including autism. It provides job placement services and training programs aimed at increasing employability for people with various disabilities. While İŞKUR is not specific to autism, it can be a resource for individuals with autism seeking employment, as it offers vocational courses and support for workplace integration. İŞKUR, the Turkish Employment Agency, supports individuals with autism in accessing meaningful employment through various initiatives tailored to their needs. The agency offers vocational training programs that focus on developing practical, job-specific skills while accommodating the unique learning styles of individuals with autism. It provides job placement services by matching their abilities and preferences with suitable roles, often emphasizing positions that benefit from their strengths, such as attention to detail or routine-oriented tasks. İŞKUR also facilitates workplace integration by guiding employers on creating autism-friendly environments and fostering better communication and understanding among coworkers. Additionally, the agency organizes awareness programs to educate employers about



the value of hiring individuals with autism and implementing inclusive practices, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and equitable labor market (Figure 10).

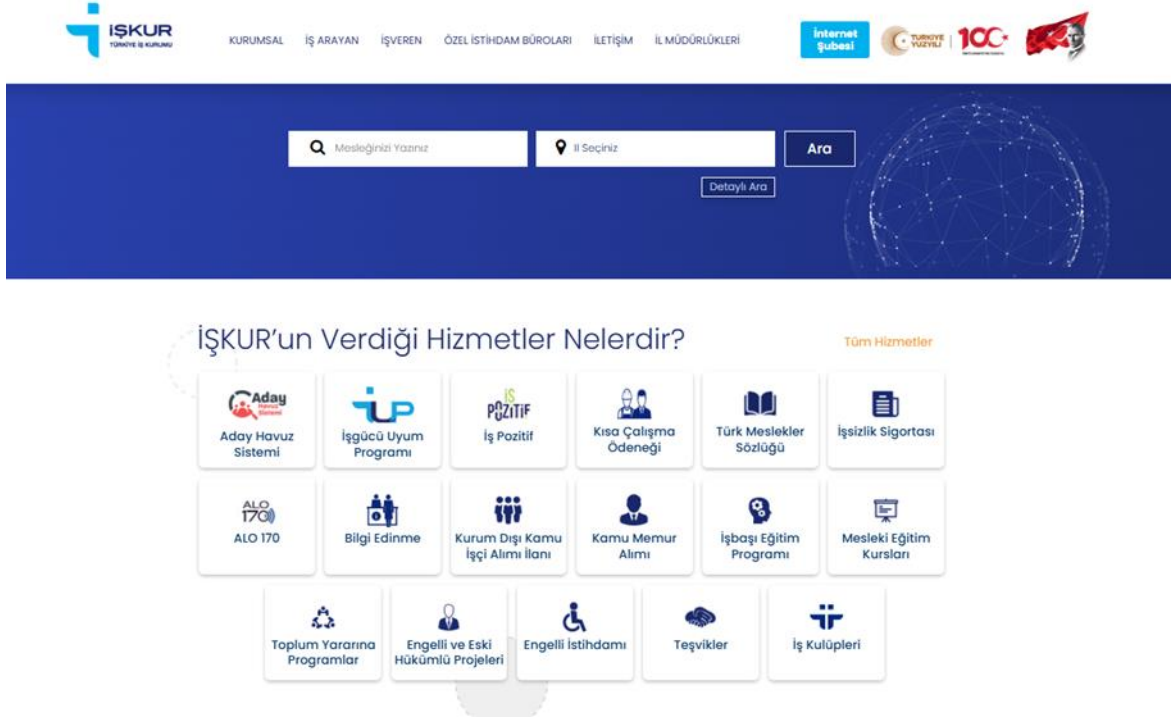


Figure 10. İŞKUR website

### 3. Otizmli Bireyleri Destekleme Vakfı (OBİDEP)

OBİDEP is an education and support program designed to improve the skills and job opportunities of individuals with autism. They focus on vocational training, aiming to increase the employability of participants through workshops and hands-on training. OBİDEP works to connect individuals with autism to potential employers by offering job coaching and training to prepare them for the workforce. This education and support program is designed to enhance the skills and employment prospects of individuals with autism through targeted vocational training. By offering workshops and hands-on training, the program aims to increase participants' employability and readiness for the workforce. OBİDEP also bridges the gap between individuals with autism and potential employers by providing job coaching and preparatory training to ensure a successful transition into the workplace. These efforts focus on equipping participants with the necessary skills and confidence to thrive in professional environments while promoting inclusive hiring practices (Figure 11).



Figure 11. OBİDEV web site

#### 4. Alternatif Yaşam Derneği (AYDER)

AYDER works to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities, including autism, by offering a range of programs including social integration, education, and employment. They have developed employment programs that aim to support individuals with disabilities in finding and sustaining jobs, although their focus is broader than just autism. AYDER is dedicated to improving the quality of life for individuals with disabilities, including autism, through programs that promote social integration, education, and employment. While their focus extends to various disabilities, AYDER has implemented employment programs that assist individuals with autism in finding and maintaining jobs. These programs aim to enhance employability through training, support, and collaboration with employers, fostering sustainable employment opportunities and inclusive work environments (Figure 12).



Figure 12. AYDER web site

#### 5. Engelsiz Kariyer

Engelsiz Kariyer is a Turkish job portal specifically designed for individuals with disabilities, including those with autism. It connects employers who are seeking to hire individuals with disabilities with potential candidates. The platform provides job listings, career counseling, and resources to help individuals with disabilities navigate the job market. It aims to promote inclusive employment practices in Turkey. The platform connects employers seeking to hire



individuals with disabilities with suitable candidates, fostering inclusive hiring practices. It offers a range of features, including job listings, career counseling, and resources designed to help individuals with autism navigate the job market and build fulfilling careers. By bridging the gap between talent and opportunity, Engelsiz Kariyer aims to promote inclusivity and equal opportunities in the Turkish workforce (Figure 13).

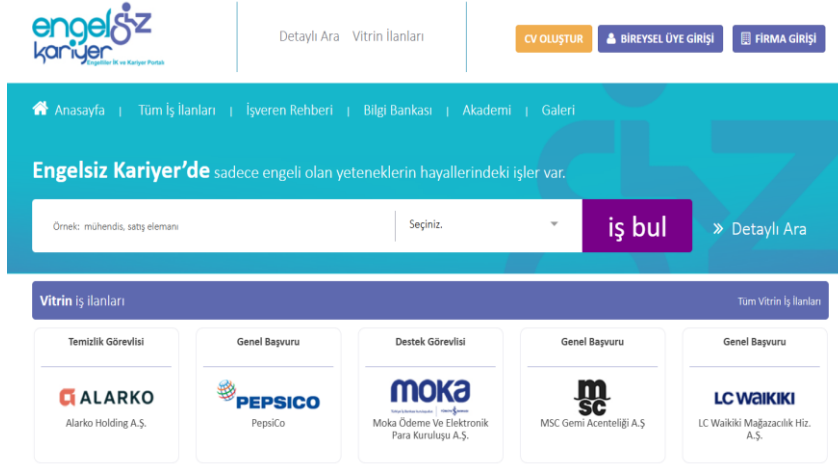


Figure 13. Engelsiz Kariyer website

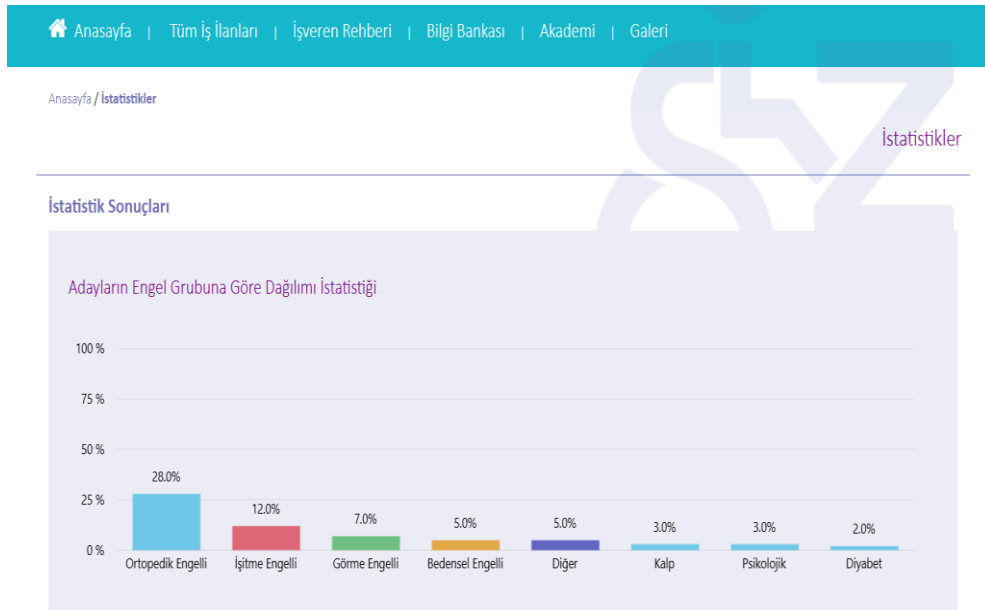


Figure 14. Distribution statistics of users according to disability group

This chart from Engelsiz Kariyer's website (Figure 14) illustrates the distribution of job applicants by disability type, highlighting a diverse and inclusive platform. The largest group consists of individuals with orthopedic disabilities (28%), followed by those with hearing disabilities (12%), and visual disabilities (7%). Applicants with physical disabilities and those categorized under "Other" each make up 5%. Smaller groups include individuals with cardiac, psychological (likely including autism), and diabetes-related disabilities, each accounting for 3% or 2%. Autism is likely included in the "Psychological" (Psikolojik) category, which accounts for 3% of the applicants. Autism is often grouped under psychological or neurodevelopmental conditions in similar classifications, even though it is distinct from mental health disorders. This categorization suggests that individuals with autism may have a smaller

representation on the platform, highlighting the need for increased outreach and tailored support to ensure their inclusion and participation in employment opportunities.

As shown in Table 2, Türkiye-specific digital platforms and initiatives supporting employment for individuals with autism vary in terms of accessibility, autism-specific features, and levels of employer engagement. Among them, the Tohum Autism Foundation stands out as the only organization offering structured autism-focused vocational programs and proactive employer collaboration. In contrast, public platforms such as İŞKUR and Engelsiz Kariyer operate under a broader disability framework, with limited emphasis on autism-specific needs. OBİDEP provides targeted training programs designed for individuals with autism, though its reach remains localized. AYDER and Engelsiz Kariyer demonstrate moderate levels of inclusivity but currently lack specialized tools or accommodations tailored to neurodivergent job seekers. These observations indicate that while inclusive employment efforts are growing in Türkiye, there is a need for more specialized and scalable models that reflect the distinct challenges and strengths of individuals with autism.

**Table 2.** Comparison of Türkiye-Specific Digital Job Platforms and Initiatives for Individuals With Autism

<i>Platform/Initiative</i>	<i>Accessibility Features</i>	<i>Autism-Specific Tools</i>	<i>Employer Engagement</i>	<i>Reported Impact</i>
<b>Tohum Autism Foundation</b>	Vocational workshops, support materials	Yes – customize d training	High – awareness & partnership building	Raised autism awareness in businesses; growing employer collaborations
<b>İŞKUR</b>	General disability services, job matching	Limited – not autism-specific	Moderate – public sector focus	Broad national reach; limited autism targeting
<b>OBİDEP</b>	Hands-on vocational training, coaching	Yes – focused on autism	Moderate	Improved readiness for employment in pilot programs
<b>AYDER</b>	Employment programs, social integration focus	No – broader disability coverage	Moderate	Supports inclusion but lacks autism-specific tools
<b>Engelsiz Kariyer</b>	Accessible job listings, employer filters	Not autism-specific	Moderate	Platform-wide inclusion effort; autism underrepresented (3% classified as psychological)

### The employment gap and structural challenges

Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder face disproportionately high unemployment rates compared to the general population and individuals with other disabilities (Doyle et al., 2022). Studies indicate that only 14-38% of adults with autism are employed, with many in part-time or low-wage positions (Roux et al., 2015; Baldwin et al, 2014). Despite possessing valuable cognitive strengths—such as attention to detail, pattern recognition, and problem-solving—

individuals with autism often struggle to secure and maintain employment due to structural, social, and communication barriers (Moraine, 2015). One of the key issues is the lack of transition support from education to employment (Wehman et al., 2014). Many individuals with autism leave school without adequate vocational training, career guidance, or access to workplace readiness programs, contributing to long-term underemployment (Berman, 2022). Workplace environments are largely designed around neurotypical communication norms, which can disadvantage individuals with autism (Lorenz & Heinitz, 2014). Many job interviews rely heavily on social interaction, non-verbal communication, and abstract reasoning, which may not align with the cognitive and communication styles of individuals with autism (Finn et al., 2023). Moreover, a study by Romualdez, et al. (2021) found that workplace culture and lack of autism awareness among employers contribute significantly to employment difficulties. Misinterpretations of autistic behaviors—such as avoiding eye contact or struggling with small talk—can lead to biased hiring decisions or workplace exclusion. Research shows that many employers lack knowledge about autism and reasonable workplace accommodations (Waisman-Nitzan et al., 2019). While accommodations such as flexible schedules, structured work tasks, and sensory-friendly environments significantly improve employment retention for individuals with autism, they are not widely implemented (Harmuth et al., 2018). Furthermore, employer perspectives on hiring employees with autism vary. Some studies highlight positive attitudes, emphasizing the productivity, reliability, and specialized skills of employees with autism (Albright et al., 2020). Others reveal hesitancy and misconceptions, with employers fearing increased management complexity or concerns about social integration (Rebholz., 2020). The emergence of digital job platforms has provided alternative pathways to employment, particularly through remote work, gig economy roles, and autism-friendly job matching services (Austin & Pisano, 2017). Platforms such as Specialisterne, Mentra, and Neurodiversity Hub have demonstrated success in placing individuals with autism in sustainable employment by focusing on skills-based hiring rather than traditional interviews (Dreaver et al., 2020). However, digital employment solutions also face challenges. A review by Zolyomi, (2021) found that many online platforms are not fully accessible to users with autism due to complex navigation, lack of sensory-friendly interfaces, and insufficient employer engagement. Furthermore, online job platforms must address algorithmic bias in AI-driven job matching, ensuring that neurodivergent candidates are equitably matched to roles that suit their strengths. Despite growing awareness of neurodiversity hiring, many countries lack strong legislative frameworks to support job seekers with autism (Shattuck et al., 2012). Studies suggest that government incentives, employer training programs, and autism-focused recruitment policies can significantly improve employment outcomes (Lindsay et al., 2019). Encouraging businesses to partner with digital employment platforms and autism advocacy groups can also drive systemic change.

### **Employment challenges for individuals with Autism**

A study by Efeoğlu and Kılınçarslan (2024) in Türkiye explored the employment experiences of workers with autism and intellectual disabilities. Interviews with co-workers, managers, and parents has revealed initial concerns about employing individuals with autism. However, targeted training activities increased awareness and positively shifted attitudes, enhancing social interactions between employees with autism and their colleagues. This underscores the importance of organizational context and proactive training in facilitating inclusive employment. Similarly, Bury et al. (2021) have examined workplace social challenges experienced by employees on the autism spectrum. Both employees and supervisors have identified social difficulties, often attributed to internal factors, leading to adverse outcomes for employees with autism. Resolutions have tended to focus on individual adjustments rather than

systemic changes, highlighting a need for broader organizational interventions to support equitable work participation. While specific empirical studies on digital platforms for individuals with autism are limited, research suggests that digital employment solutions offer alternative pathways to employment (Dreaver et al., 2020). Platforms focusing on skills-based hiring rather than traditional interviews have shown promise in placing individuals with autism in sustainable employment. However, challenges such as platform accessibility and employer engagement remain, indicating a need for further research and development in this area (Dillahun et al., 2018). Employer attitudes play a crucial role in the employment outcomes of individuals with autism. Studies have shown that employers often lack knowledge about autism and reasonable workplace accommodations, leading to hesitancy in hiring employees with autism (Patton, 2019). Conversely, some employers recognize the unique strengths of individuals with autism, such as attention to detail and problem-solving skills, and view neurodiverse hiring as a competitive advantage (Austin & Pisano, 2017). These mixed perspectives suggest that increasing employer awareness and providing targeted training could enhance neurodiverse employment practices.

## **Discussion**

This research highlights the transformative role of digital job platforms in bridging the employment gap for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), focusing on global and Türkiye-specific initiatives. These platforms offer tailored solutions such as job-matching algorithms, vocational training, interview coaching, and workplace accommodations, fostering a supportive employment ecosystem. However, the study also underscores persistent challenges such as societal stigma, limited employer awareness, and accessibility barriers.

This analysis reveals that global platforms like Specialisterne and Mentra have set benchmarks in leveraging advanced technologies and personalized services to address the unique needs of neurodivergent individuals. Their success demonstrates the potential of scalable and inclusive employment solutions. Conversely, Türkiye-specific platforms, including İŞKUR and Engelsiz Kariyer, reflect an emerging yet growing commitment to inclusive employment practices. These platforms are adapting global best practices to local contexts, albeit with limited resources and outreach. In Türkiye, the legal framework for employing individuals with disabilities is shaped by the Turkish Disability Act (5378) and regulations mandating a quota for hiring individuals with disabilities in both public and private sectors. However, autism-specific employment incentives are limited. İŞKUR provides general support, but there is a need for targeted initiatives such as subsidies for autism-friendly workplace modifications or mandatory employer training on neurodiversity. Including autism explicitly in policy discussions and incentivizing partnerships with digital platforms could foster systemic change.

The findings also underscore the critical role of collaboration among stakeholders—employers, policymakers, advocacy groups, and digital platform developers. While digital platforms enhance visibility and accessibility for neurodivergent job seekers, their impact is maximized when integrated into broader frameworks promoting inclusivity in workplace cultures and labor markets. Additionally, this study highlights the necessity of ongoing research to monitor user experiences and refine platform functionalities. While many platforms include tools and training for employers, there is limited evidence on how actively employers use these features. Future studies should explore employer perceptions of digital platforms, their barriers to engagement, and the impact of these tools on hiring decisions.

While this study is based on secondary data, including platform documentation and published feedback, future research could benefit from direct input from users and employers to further validate the findings and enrich the analysis.

## **Recommendations**

To enhance the effectiveness of digital job platforms for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), efforts should focus on improving accessibility, raising employer awareness, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. Platforms must adopt universal design principles, ensuring user-friendly interfaces and culturally relevant resources for diverse populations. AI-driven job-matching tools and interactive training modules can further refine support for job seekers, while mentorship programs and partnerships with educational institutions can facilitate smoother transitions into the workforce.

Employers play a vital role in fostering inclusive hiring practices. Awareness campaigns, training sessions, and showcasing success stories can highlight the value of neurodivergent talent. Policymakers and advocacy groups should work together to provide incentives, such as tax benefits, for companies employing individuals with ASD. Integrating these platforms into national employment strategies and creating opportunities for community engagement will drive a more inclusive and equitable labor market, enabling individuals with autism to thrive.

Türkiye, in particular, needs more platforms specifically tailored to the unique needs of individuals with autism. While initiatives like İŞKUR and Engelsiz Kariyer demonstrate progress, these efforts must expand to address gaps in accessibility and outreach. Policymakers and advocacy groups should collaborate to establish dedicated autism-focused platforms and provide incentives, such as tax benefits, for companies employing individuals with ASD. Integrating these platforms into national employment strategies and fostering community engagement will create a more inclusive labor market, empowering individuals with autism to thrive both socially and economically.

## **Conclusion**

The integration of digital job platforms into employment strategies for individuals with autism represents a significant step towards inclusive labor markets. While global platforms exemplify innovation and scalability, Türkiye-specific initiatives highlight the importance of contextual adaptability. The study concludes that leveraging technology to address barriers faced by neurodivergent job seekers requires a multi-faceted approach, blending technological advancements with stakeholder collaboration and policy support. By prioritizing inclusivity, digital platforms can play a pivotal role in fostering equitable and diverse work environments, ultimately contributing to the economic independence and social inclusion of individuals with ASD.

The literature indicates that employment barriers for individuals with autism are multifaceted, ranging from structural and social challenges to employer biases and policy gaps. While digital job platforms offer innovative solutions, they must be complemented by inclusive workplace policies, employer education, and stronger transition support programs. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach, including organizational training, systemic accommodations, and a shift in employer perspectives towards valuing neurodiversity.

The findings of this study are particularly relevant for educators designing employment preparation programs, employers seeking to build inclusive hiring practices, and policymakers developing digital accessibility strategies.

## Ethical Considerations

Since this study relies on publicly available sources, it does not involve direct engagement with individuals with ASD or employers. However, care was taken to ensure that platform evaluations were based on objective criteria and aligned with best practices in inclusive employment. This research was presented at the 5th International Scientific Conference of the Faculty of Pedagogy (ISCFPE24), held from November 6-8, 2024, in Tetovo, North Macedonia.

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