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# GERMANY NATIONAL REPORT

**I01: INCLUSION CHAMPION PROFILE  
DESK AND FIELD RESEARCH**

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## **Work-Aut**

Leveraging WBL to foster professional inclusion of  
people affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder

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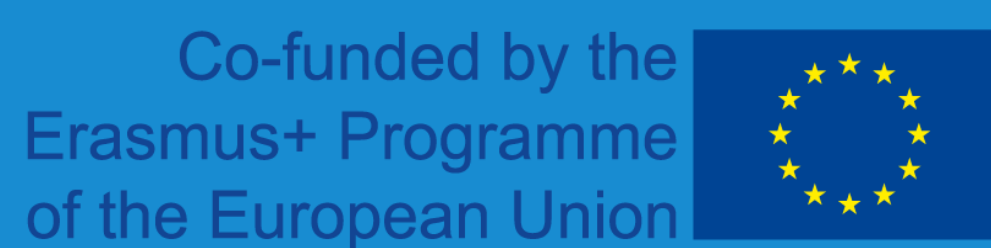


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# 1.Summary

The following report gives insights into the inclusion of people from the Autism Spectrum Disorder into the German labour market. It is based on a desk research and a field research to collect valuable theoretical information, and benefits from the knowledge and experience of people dealing with this topic in their daily working life

## **2. Aim and scope of the National Report**

This report focuses on current gaps and needs in the professional inclusion of people from disadvantaged categories. A specific focus is on people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Therefore, it is, first of all, necessary to deliver a more detailed understanding of this complex term which can involve many distinct aspects. It needs to be mentioned that ASD can have different characteristics, as it is a very individual rather than general disease. The common understanding on which the following report is based upon, is also in line with the WHO World Report on Disability and the UN convention on Rights of Disabled People: it involves a combination of a person suffering from a health impairment which has (negative) social consequences for the person regarding recruitment and selection criteria or environmental aspects (Böhm, 2014) (World Health Organization (WHO), 2011).

Having a job and being part of the working world has positive effects on life quality. It supports a self-determined life, improves self-consciousness and lays the basis for being able to cope with financial issues and social participation. In turn, being excluded from the labour market could have severe consequences.

The report is supposed to provide an overview of the situation in Germany and displays what is currently done to involve people affected by AD in the labour market. To deliver a better framework, German policies and strategies are presented and the legislative background is explained. To benefit the further activities in the frame of the Erasmus+ project Work-AUT project (No. 2020-1-NO01-KA204-076508), current problems regarding the professional inclusion of disadvantaged people, like barriers and prejudices, are identified. Additionally, the report also examines the implications for employers and young adults with ASD and relevant studies on the inclusion for people affected by ASD in the labour market are included as well.

To learn from other successful approaches and collect inspiration, three examples of best practices used and applied in Germany are also presented.

### **3. National situation of the inclusion of people affected by ASD in the labour market**

#### ***3.1 Policies and strategies***

The number of people with disabilities suffering from unemployment is twice as high as those among people without disabilities (Böhm, 2014) whereas the differences between those two groups even increase with a higher age according to data of the German Employment Agency (Riedel, 2018). There are only estimations on how much people with ASD are included in the labour market. In 2013, probably only 5% of people with autism are included in the general labour market in Germany, around 40% to 65% are employed in specific places for disabled persons ("Werkstätten"), whereas the rest of them is not in employment (Riedel, 2018). A study from 2017 gives similar indications, claiming that around 5% to 12% of people with ASD in the in working age between 15 and 64 years have a permanent, insured employment. The majority of this group is probably suffering from atypical autism and Asperger. This study also indicates similar figures for people with ASD being employed in "Werkstätten" (45%) (Knaak & Traub, 2019) (Dalferth, 2017). Further investigations of Riedel (2018) and others also came to the conclusion that people with ASD are often highly educated and conduct jobs that are below their competence level. As the consequence, it is necessary to develop certain strategies to ensure their inclusion in fields of work they have an interest in.

One German strategic document is the "Diversity Charta" (Charta der Vielfalt), which is a public manifest developed by economic representatives. It promotes diversity in the workplace and states that Germany can only be economically successful, when it recognises diversity in the workforce and among the customers and business partners. Moreover, it involves that a diverse workforce with its variety of skills and competencies is the one that provides chances to find innovative and creative solutions.

Additionally, the document also provides some advice on how this diversity could be implemented. It says it is necessary to adapt job profiles to people and not look for people fitting the job, develop the position of a diversity manager as a specific contact person in the company, which increases trust and appreciation and also invest in the talents of people affected by disabilities (Charta der Vielfalt e.V., 2021).

Another strategy followed in Germany is the one of “workplaces for people with disabilities” (Werkstätten für behinderte Menschen). These are workplaces that were specifically developed for people with disabilities who would otherwise not be able to participate in vocational training and apprenticeship. Currently around 320.000 adults are working in these facilities, among them 30.000 are involved in the vocational education area, whereas the 270.000 are participating in the field of work. The remaining people receive a special care and support due to their severity of the disability. The workplaces enable an individual in-company training, an orientation phase as well as the support with the help of a job-coach (Riedel, 2018) (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Werkstätten für behinderte Menschen e.V., 2021).

In the Bavaria region, in the south of Germany, the initiative “Inclusion in Bavaria” (Inklusion in Bayern) was established as a specific strategy to make the working world more inclusive. The initiative presents several best practice examples as an inspiration for other companies, but also gives advice and useful contact addresses that could be consulted. Moreover, it also has a section on its website that is dedicated to people with disabilities and it contains important information regarding support in the working world (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Familie, Arbeit und Soziales, 2021).

### **3.2 Legislative framework**

Since the issue of the vocational inclusion of people affected by disabilities is a major priority in many countries, there are several legal documents regarding that topic. One of the most known ones, is the UN convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities which was adopted in 2008 among 152 countries and the EU. The most important points of this document involves a change of perspective from seeing people with disabilities as being ill, towards perceiving them as persons with rights. Part of these rights is also to open the working environment and the labour market for them, so that they are able to freely choose their jobs (Riedel, 2018) (United Nations, n.d.).

The German social law also defines disability similar, describing a disabled person as somebody having a physical, psychological impairment or a sensory impairment that makes it difficult to interact with environmental barriers and lasts for more than six months in which it is not able to equally participate in society (§2, SGB IX). Additionally the degree of impairment describes how severe the implications for the participation are. It is important to have this degree of impairment defined as many legal claims can result from that regarding the severity. However, often people with autism do not apply for their degree of impairment, although autism often highly affects social life. Often they are afraid of being discriminated against and do not want to be seen as disabled (Knaak & Traub, 2019).

The above-mentioned special workplaces for people with disabilities are also enshrined in the German law, more detailed in the social security statute book (Sozialgesetzbuch SGB IX, § 219 SGB IX Begriff und Aufgaben der Werkstatt für behinderte Menschen) (Sozialgesetzbuch, n.d.). This paragraph explains the right for the participation in working life, with an appropriate remuneration, enabling the target group to thrive and use their potential to develop their personality. These workplaces are supposed to support the transition into the general working world, as their vocational apprenticeships are often closely connected to workplace actors.



Besides these special workplaces for people with disabilities, there is also a law that ensures their support during a vocational training in the general working world. In § 75 of the social security statute book (SGB III, § 75 Begleitende Phase der Assistierten Ausbildung) it is stated that people who are able to receive support can apply for the following: social-pedagogic support, measures for a initial qualification and stabilising the working relationship, support for reducing barriers in language and education, learning related offers for technical competences. This support should be provided by the employment agency in support with the employers. The law also states that the individual support needs to be adapted to individual needs (Sozialgesetzbuch, n.d.).

In the social security statute book (SGB IX) includes also a law that specifies certain measures ensuring the participation of people with disabilities in the working life (SGB IX, Leistungen zur Teilhabe am Arbeitsleben). It states that employers and companies can receive support for preventative and adaptation measures, when they decide to restructure their workplaces to better fit for the target group's needs. Additional services that they can apply for are consulting with external experts, technical consultant services and integration offices. To receive a funding support for these aspects, some legal requirements must be fulfilled: Employers need to check whether they can offer their vacant workplaces to people with severe disabilities and they are obliged to design the workplace according to the needs of people with disabilities (§164, SGB IX). They also need to ensure that operational inclusion measures are appropriately implemented (§ 167 SGB IX). (Knaak & Traub, 2019) In case a company does not offer workplaces for at least 5% of its workforce for severely disabled persons, it has to pay a countervailing charge (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Familie, Arbeit und Soziales, 2021).

### ***3.3 Identification of the problems (prejudices and barriers)***

Although public interest in the topic of autism has risen over the past years, a high deficit on information regarding the disease and its implications is still omnipresent – especially regarding the social and communication behaviour of the target group. What's more, is that people affected by ASD are not part of a homogenous group, as the implications of their disease can be very different. This makes it even more difficult to speak about general problems, prejudices and barriers when entering and remaining in the labour market.

However, what could be said is that often an inflexible working environment can lead to problems. As people suffer from health-related problems have different needs, it is necessary to apply solution-oriented thinking and the flexibility to adapt the working environment to their needs. If an employer is able to implement the necessary adaptations it is proven that the people suffering from disabilities are even happier with their workplace than people without disabilities (Böhm, 2014). Therefore, a good idea would be to have several feedback talks with the pre-requisite of an open communication climate, with e.g. the HR department of a company to make sure the employer understands the specific needs and adapts to them. Böhm (2014) also points out that the adaptations can have distinct forms, like physical adaptations in the working environment, but also time-wise (e.g. flexible working time) or organisational.

Another difficulty is the one referring to prejudices. People affected by ASD are often seen as “different” from other people, which might lead to giving them the impression of being an outsider. It is necessary to invest into raising the awareness of people regarding the background and implications of being affected by ASD, leading to a more inclusive working environment (Riedel, 2018).

A further justification for why the employment rate of people with ASD is relatively small in Germany is based on two aspects:

First, implications as a result from ASD: people with ASD often miss a kind of filter in their head, they often have many thoughts at the same time and gain the impression that they need to work on several tasks parallel, which could lead to higher stress. Additionally, they often experience deficits in social communication, which makes it difficult to integrate into a team. Especially, besides the workplace, e.g. during breaks when people are binding with their colleagues, this often represents a high burden for them (Riedel, 2018). Other individual barriers which Riedel (2018) identified involve the job interview (difficult to understand for people with ASD why it is carried out in the way it is), the integration and acceptance of hierarchies (having issues in understanding why communication differs between positions), accepting injustice in the workplace, deciding about the prioritising tasks.

Second, issues resulting from the work environment. Riedel (2018) mentions the high pressure of fitting in, which might be difficult to fulfil for people with ASD having specific individual needs, mobbing among colleagues (also mentioned below) and the issue that required (and missing) key competences are often valued higher than the technical competences that are brought along by people with ASD. Problems might also result from quantitative performance is valued higher than qualitative performance and missing flexibility from the employer side makes it even harder for people with ASD in the workplace.

### ***3.4 Implications for employers and young adults with ASD***

To enable the participation of people affected by ASD in the first labour market, besides focusing only on this specific target group, it is necessary to involve human resource management, business leaders and colleagues.

The HR department often states the framework for the company's diversity and inclusion policy (Böhm, 2014). It is necessary to bring the needs of ASD people to their attention and make sure they understand what possible adaptations are necessary to open the company's environment for them and become an attractive employer for this target group.

Additionally, it is necessary to involve leaders, too. They need to be trained to understand the behaviour of the ASD target group and to react accordingly (e.g. referring to job appraisals) (Böhm, 2014). Otherwise misunderstandings and a negative climate might be the consequence.

The HR department as well as business leaders also need to ensure that the colleagues working with ASD people are well trained as otherwise conflict situations or a feeling of unfair or even privileged treatment could result. This would not only make the colleagues unhappy, but also the person affected by ASD, as he/she could develop a feeling of being less accepted by the team (Böhm, 2014).

Employers need to understand the potential that they might lose out on when they decide to exclude disabled people from their workforce. As Böhm (2014) explains, a disability can evolve over time meaning while people are already in the working world. To risk a loss of these talents when deciding to make them redundant, can have severe consequences for the company. Especially during a time of talent shortage should make them rethink to use the potential of groups affected by disabilities like ASD. Additionally having a diverse workforce is not only seen as a necessity nowadays to be able to compete on a tight labour market, but it also brings along several advantages for the companies like a higher chance for innovation, a range of perspectives which lead to improved performance.

Moreover as people affected by disabilities are representing also a large group of customers, it might be a valuable opportunity to employ people from this target group as well, as the customers then could develop a closer relationship with the company. And lastly, companies focusing on involvement of disabled people – beyond the legal requirements – are often talked about positively in public, leading to positive word-of-mouth and public opinion of the company (Böhm, 2014).

A report by Knaak & Traub (2019) contains practical advice on technical tools that could support the work inclusion of people with ASD, e.g. noise cancelling headphones to prevent acoustic stimuli and other noise protection measures around the workplace, support for orientation regarding time like electronic calendars with a reminder function, communication supporting tools. Moreover, personnel support is also mentioned as a critical fact to support the workplace integration. It is suggested to involve mentors or job coaches for guidance and ensuring a appropriate and comfortable workplace insertion. Additionally, they could also provide a special social training for people with ASD and they could also intervene in a crisis situation as a mediator, which could be very helpful for the working climate.

While the inclusion of people affected by disabilities, including ASD, has comprehensive positive consequences for the company, it is also evaluated positively by the (young) people with disabilities themselves. Several studies have proven that they claim to have a higher life quality while being involved in the labour market since this can fulfil their existential needs (like earning own money for a living), relationship needs (feeling accepted in society) and growth needs (self-fulfilment) (Böhm, 2014) (Alderfer, 1972).

## **4. Relevant studies on inclusion of people affected by ASD in the labour market**

As seen above, there are several barriers and resulting necessities that need to be adapted to enable a comprehensive inclusion of people with ASD in the workplace. But, how can a company benefit from their inclusion?

It is proven that people with ASD often have a high potential. They often have great technical knowledge, a sense of justice, working detailed, trying to implement tasks perfectly, are loyal, are enthusiastic about their job, monotonous work does not make them tired as fast, they are often more honest, highly creative and provide a new perspective on issues (Riedel, 2018).

Based on a study carried out by Riedel in 2018, he developed a list of practical and easily implementable tools to improve the situation of professional inclusion of people with ASD. He suggests providing a “translation support” document for them, which e.g. contains how to understand irony, hints and communication in the work environment. It is also important that the employees receive clear and unambiguous feedback. Another advice he gives is that the working environment might be better for ASD when they receive a written description of tasks around the workplace that are normally not written down, i.e. activities that are expected from them although they are not part of their main activities (e.g. making coffee, copying documents etc.). In context with this point, it would also be good to provide people with ASD with a clear guiding document about certain structures: e.g. breaks, meetings, whom to contact for what issue etc. It could also be helpful to assign one specific contact person for people with ASD, in order to not stress them about thinking whom to contact. As already stated above, it would also be a good idea to flexibly adapt working hours (e.g. part-time work, working early, working from home).

However, Riedel (2018) also points out that besides this information might be useful for many employers working with people with ASD, one should not forget that ASD is very individual and, therefore, it is important to keep the person's individual needs in mind and adapt the general suggestions.

Another interesting study is the so-called REHADAT Survey regarding the topic autism and jobs („Mit Autismus im Job“), that was conducted in 2018. This research involved 200 people that are working and that are diagnosed with autism. What was most interesting to see is that approximately half of them were only diagnosed with autism while already being active in working life. Furthermore the survey also investigated challenges and success factors for the vocational integration of people with ASD (REHADAT, 2019).

A report by Knaak & Traub (2019) gives interesting insights in abilities and characteristics that are often visible for people with autism, although, of course, they are not applicable for every person having this disability. The first aspect they list is perception: people with ASD are often highly detailed focused, which could be highly valuable for the working life. E.g. if a person with ASD having this characteristic is employed in a data analysis field, he/she could easily detect mistakes in large amounts of data. Related to details-orientation is also the awareness for high quality, concentration and stamina in repeating tasks. The second aspect these authors talk about is environmental stimuli: as already mentioned above, people with ASD do not have a filter for stimuli and they could e.g. be distracted by very quiet noises. The next point is special interests: sometimes people with ASD have a very keen interest in a specific subject, e.g. foreign languages or music. If they could work in a field that matches their interests, they could be of a very high value for their employer. Communication and social behaviour: often people from the field of ASD have problems in communicating (e.g. small talk) and other people might perceive them as arrogant.

Additionally ASD people frequently have difficulties in decoding non-verbal behaviour which needs to be kept in mind in a working environment. The last point mentioned is working methods: the report states that people with ASD often like to have foreseeable and rules-based tasks. They need to receive plans and frameworks on how the work is structured as otherwise they might get lost in details (Knaak & Traub, 2019).

For more information on the topic of Autism and apprenticeships, the webpage AUBI-Plus is recommended: it provides a valuable overview about what autism is, what implications it has and suggests certain jobs that often fit people with ASD. It also offers a tool where people can investigate their professional interests and try to find suitable jobs (AUBI-plus, 2021).



## 5. Best Practices

<b>Title of the good practice</b>	<b>SAP – Autism at work</b>
<b>Country</b>	Germany (but also 13 countries worldwide)
<b>Level</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/> National <input type="checkbox"/> European <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> International
<b>Responsible organization</b>	SAP
<b>Year/Duration</b>	Beginning in 2013
<b>Website of the practice</b>	<a href="https://www.sap.com/germany/about/careers/your-career/autism-at-work-program.html">https://www.sap.com/germany/about/careers/your-career/autism-at-work-program.html</a>
<b>Description of the good practice</b>	<p>After piloting a Autism at Work project in India, SAP is now also implementing a similar project in Germany. The company employs approximately 40 people with ASD in their locations around Germany. The work in different fields: software development, service &amp; support, IT security. Important points in this practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SAP sends detailed information about the job interview previously, so that people with ASD are less stressed</li> <li>• SAP highly values the motivation and interests of people with ASD to enable them to work to their full potential</li> <li>• They use a buddy system besides the support of integration offices and health department to ensure inclusion</li> <li>• The teams working with people with ASD receive a training on autism (e.g. regarding simuli or noise reduction in the office)</li> <li>• SAP closely cooperates with local networks that are experts in the job inclusion of people with ASD</li> </ul>

<b>Target group(s)</b>	People with Autism Spectrum Disorder
<b>Impact</b>	SAP found out that not only people with autism benefitted from their programme, but it has advantages for all employees (e.g. more direct communication, increased consideration) The programme was also expanded to 13 countries and is applied in 24 different job profiles.
<b>Conclusions</b>	A well-rounded programme with many interesting aspects. It also received several prizes worldwide.

<b>Title of the good practice</b>	<b>Auticon</b>
<b>Country</b>	Germany (but also operating in 7 other countries worldwide)
<b>Level</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Local <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> National <input type="checkbox"/> European <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> International
<b>Responsible organization</b>	AUTICON
<b>Year/Duration</b>	Founded in 2003
<b>Website of the practice</b>	<a href="https://auticon.de/unternehmen/">https://auticon.de/unternehmen/</a>
<b>Description of the good practice</b>	<p>Auticon offers counselling services in the IT sector. It is the first company in Germany that only employs people with ASD as IT consultants. It wants to give as many people with ASD as possible a place to work, therefore, it also expands internationally.</p> <p>Important points in this practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• auticon states to have a broader range of perspectives and an increase performance because of mixed teams (people with and without autism)</li> <li>• auticon consultants and customers are supported by job coaches and project managers</li> </ul>
<b>Target group(s)</b>	People with Autism Spectrum Disorder
<b>Impact</b>	Abilities of people with ASD are considered to be extremely valuable for the IT sector. Auticon creates workplaces that are sustainably relevant for the economy and society.
<b>Conclusions</b>	Auticon is often mentioned as a pioneer regarding autism and work in Germany.

<b><i>Title of the good practice</i></b>	<b>Inclusion in Bavaria</b>
<b><i>Country</i></b>	Germany (Bavaria)
<b><i>Level</i></b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/> National <input type="checkbox"/> European <input type="checkbox"/> International
<b><i>Responsible organization</i></b>	Bavarian Federal Ministry for Family, Work and Social Affairs
<b><i>Year/Duration</i></b>	/
<b><i>Website of the practice</i></b>	<a href="https://www.arbeit-inklusive.bayern.de/zeichen-setzen/emblem-inklusion/index.php">https://www.arbeit-inklusive.bayern.de/zeichen-setzen/emblem-inklusion/index.php</a>
<b><i>Description of the good practice</i></b>	<p>In Bavaria, in the south of Germany, companies that highly support inclusion in the workplace are able to receive an emblem that proves their contribution to a more inclusive working world. The emblem says „Inclusion in Bavaria – we work together“. It is no certification, but rather a visible sign for recognition and an incentive.</p> <p>Important points in this practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the website for the emblem offers valuable advice for companies and people with autism looking for jobs</li> <li>• several companies are presented and it is demonstrated how they implement inclusion in everyday working life</li> </ul>
<b><i>Target group(s)</i></b>	People with Autism Spectrum Disorder and employers
<b><i>Impact</i></b>	The emblem visualises success stories in the inclusion of people with autism in the workplace.
<b><i>Conclusions</i></b>	It is a valuable appreciation for the companies that are extremely successful in inclusion aspects and many success stories are an inspiration for other companies.

## **6. Desk research – Interviews' evaluation**

To gain more comprehensive insights in the field of the professional inclusion of people with ASD, a field research was carried out in Germany. During March and April 2021, five different stakeholders were contacted and invited to share their experiences and knowledge regarding the topic. In Germany, a wide variety of people participated: from project managers at a large vocational counselling institution, vocational schools, people practically supporting the job inclusion of disadvantaged people, a counselling service specifically for women, as well as as the autism department of the largest health institution in the Eastern Bavaria region supported the project with their contributions. First of all, all participants talked about the needs of people with ASD to feel good and confident when entering the labour market. The majority (4 out of 5 people) said that providing tailored workplaces is most important. Three out of five participants also decided that an empathic environment, promoting self-efficacy creating an autism-specific employment focusing on people capabilities to organize and perform specific tasks, as well as having job interviews with no answers to specific question and the opportunity to demonstrate their specific skills is vital. Two out of five answers also considered focusing on strengths instead of weaknesses and offering a sensory-free zone/office to be important.

1. Was brauchen Menschen mit Autismus-Spektrum-Störung, um sich beim Eintritt in den Arbeitsmarkt gut und sicher zu fühlen?

5 Antworten

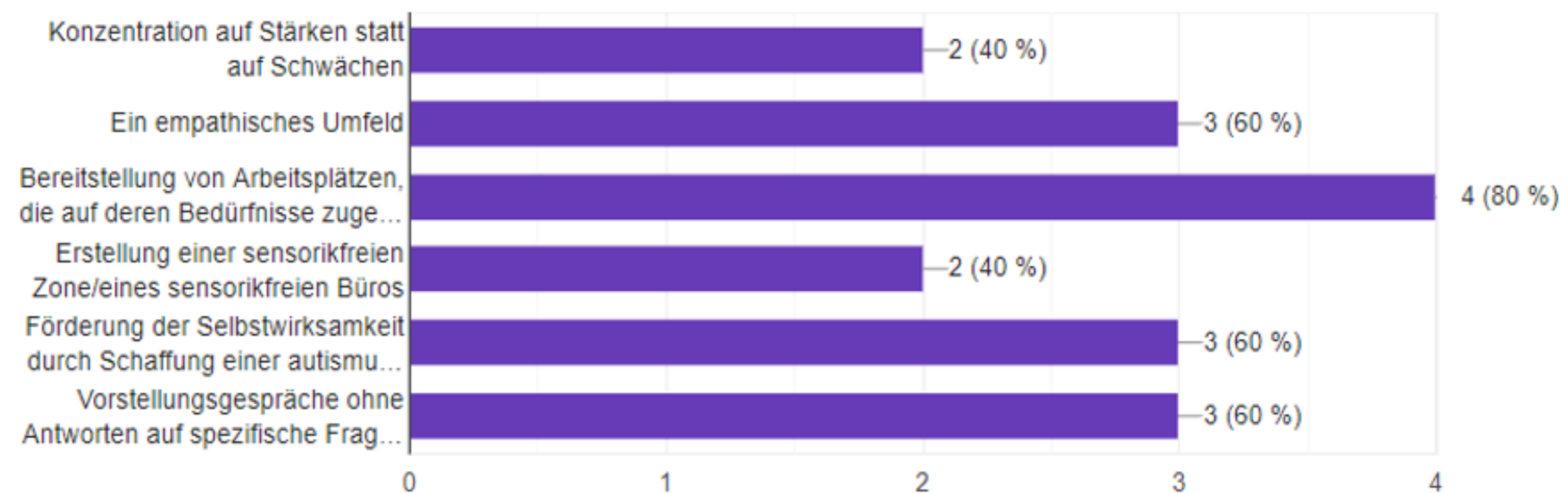


Diagram 1: Presentation of the results for question 1 in German language.

The second question dealt with key difficulties for a person suffering from ASD when entering a workplace. The people questioned had the chance to assign a certain importance (from 1: least important, to 5 highly important) to each one of the named difficulties. This is how the participants evaluated them:

-Meeting specific requirements of an employment during the selection phase: one person did not assign any number, 3 people decided to evaluate this with "1" and one person gave a "2"

-Difficulty in the adaptation to the new job routines: mismatch between personal and work rhythm: two persons did not choose any number, two people gave a "1" and one person assigned a "3"

Difficulty in team working: two people did not assign any number, one person chose „1“ and two persons assigned „2“

-Misunderstanding in social communication: one person assigned a „2“, one person chose „3“, the others did not choose any number

-Animosities, mobbing, bullying: two persons decided for „1“ and one person for „3“, the others did not choose any number

Exclusion/discrimination: was evaluated with „3“ by one person, and „1“ by two other persons, the others did not choose any number

- Clients complain about the interaction manner: „2“ was chosen by two people, one person goes for „1“, the others did not chose any number
- Prejudices: were evaluated with „1“ by two persons, one person decided for „3“, the others did not chose any
- Sensory sensitivity: two people chose “2”, one person chose “1”, the others did not assign any number
- Time management: was evaluated with “5” by one person, the others did not choose any number

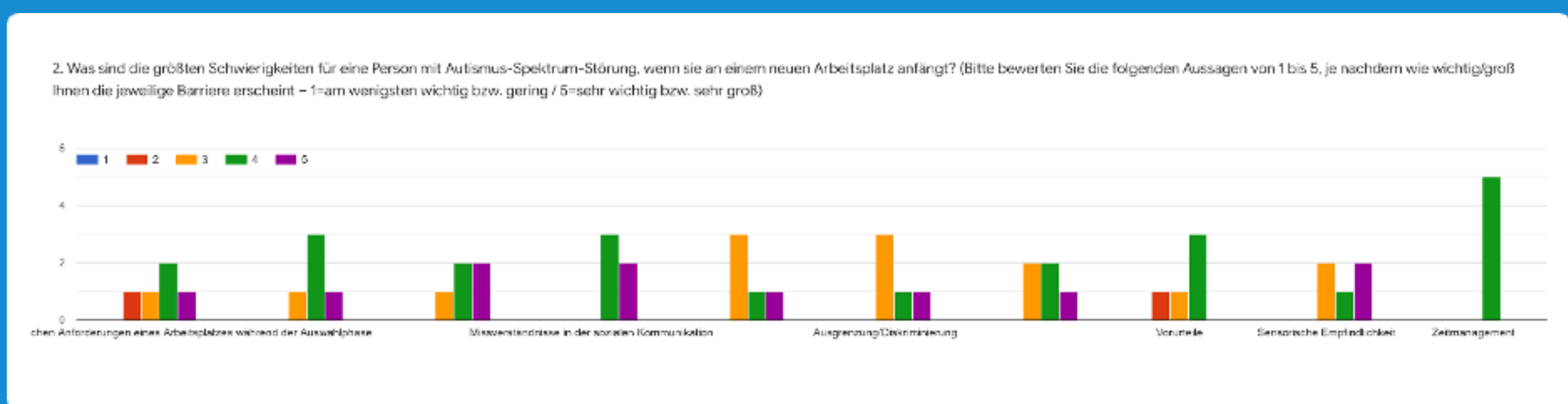


Diagram 2: Presentation of the results for question 2 in German language.

The third question dealt with the interlocutors that are assigned and necessary after a person with ASD got a job. As the diagram below shows, the questioned people have a common opinion that all of them are very important. 60% thought that a mentor/tutor, HR responsible person and colleagues are equally important, and the team manager was also mentioned by 2 people.

3. Wer sind die bevorzugten Kontaktpersonen, wenn eine Person mit Autismus-Spektrum-Störung einen Job erhalten hat?

5 Antworten

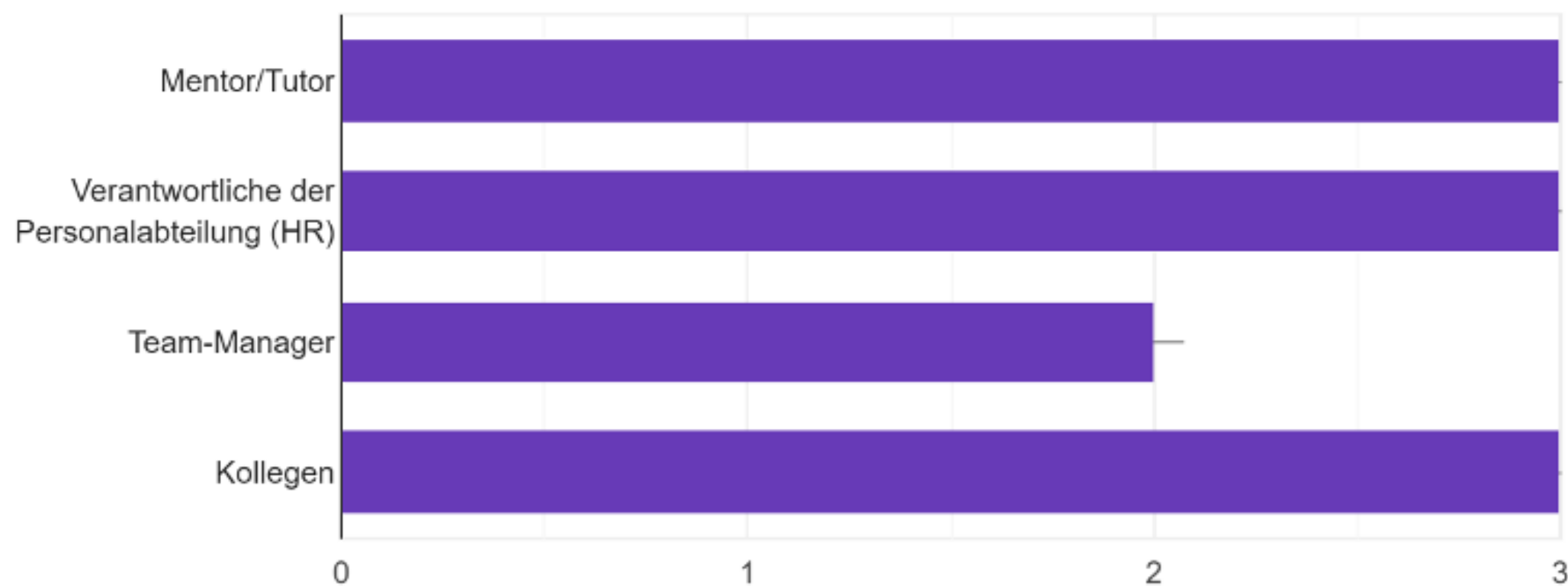


Diagram 3: Presentation of the results for question 3 in German language.

Question 4 dealt with possible difficulties that people with ASD might encounter when entering the labour market and also asked the interviewees about possibilities to overcome them and support - people with ASD in their professional inclusion. The following suggestions were made:

- Sensitisation, openness of the employer
- Misunderstandings in social communication (hints, clues, proverbs, small talk), difficulties in team tasks, difficulties in recognising colleagues/regular clients, sensory overload in open-plan offices, non-specific work instructions. Possible adaptations to make it easier for ASD people could be, e.g. to formulate (work) instructions clearly; give orientation on the premises/ in the building in advance.
- It is about adjusting awareness - inclusion should also become a reality for the ASD group
- Create reliable structures, expect little flexibility.



-Entry into regular working life is problematic, among other things, but mainly because many autistic people cannot meet the high social demands of today's working world. In any case, it is important for the integration and self-esteem of autistic people to be able to pursue an activity that corresponds to their individual abilities and interests. Specialised schools, vocational counselling as well as special focus placement agencies could help to find suitable job opportunities/companies and thus promote and establish an autism-friendly working and living environment.

To summarise, all interviewees said that awareness needs to be raised and it is necessary to adapt the working environment and the conditions to the specific needs of people with ASD. Also mutual support and understanding are necessary to ensure the inclusion of people with ASD in working life.

In the next question (no. 5) the interviewees were requested to portray possible chances that companies have when they employ people with ASD. These were their answers:

-People with ASD are reliable, loyal and, under the right conditions, particularly capable employees.

-They have certain strengths: attention to detail, loyalty, special interest and expert knowledge.

-The labour market has to adapt to different people - often the high intelligence of this group of people is also a great resource.

-Often precise and conscientious performance of the task at hand.

-People with autism spectrum disorder (Asperger's) are particularly well suited for certain professions or activities, e.g. in information technology (database management, quality control of software, programming, etc.), due to their often existing partial performance strengths ("insular talent").

As these statements above clearly demonstrate, employing people with ASD offers a lot of chances and valuable advantages for employers.

In the following question (no. 6), the survey participants were asked to explain how tutors/mentors can prepare staff before the arrival of a person with ASD in a company to make work inclusion as smooth and pleasant as possible for all people involved. These were the suggestions made:

- They can act as “translators”, provided the autistic person accepts the mentor due to his/her hierarchical position.

- Psychoeducation: communication on the factual level; observable facial expressions/gestures are limited in ASD and therefore difficult to infer emotions; in breaks, withdrawal may be necessary for the person with ASD.

- Good and patient communication.

- Tolerance training; education about the disease.

- Raise the issue of 'working with people with autism spectrum disorder' in the company in advance, inform, educate, reduce prejudices, coordinate company processes accordingly and, if necessary, restructure, reallocate workplaces (offices, workshops) etc.

To summarise, it can be said that all interviewees agreed that a certain preparation is necessary and especially raising awareness is important to provide understanding, and give them advices, especially regarding communication.

In addition to the support of mentors/tutors also suitable environment features are necessary. Therefore, the interviewees were also asked what prerequisites are necessary before employing a person with ASD and each of the participants named a variety of aspects:

- One person was convinced that this could not be generalised and depends on the individual.

- Low-stimulus (individual) workplace; adjustable lighting; concretise/operationalise work instructions; possibly create a place of retreat (quiet break room); communicate contact person in case of problems.

- Above all, the existing team must be prepared.

- Create order and clear structures

-When employing people with autism spectrum disorder, the individual's level of development must be taken into account in any case. Understanding superiors and colleagues are certainly essential for people with autism. Also important are regulated work processes, clear tasks, no open-plan offices, manageable social contacts, clear communication and the avoidance of polite phrases, which can lead to misunderstandings.

As the "Work-AUT" project will highly focus on the skills and competences necessary for supporting the work inclusion of people with ASD, this was also an aspect that was discussed with the survey participants. In the German interviews, they assessed the following skills/competences to be important for ASD people to have, in order to facilitate their professional inclusion:

Communication was assessed as most important, whereas adaptability and knowledge regarding their own diagnosis were valued most important. Flexibility, decisiveness, independent working and team work were assessed as equally important, but a little bit less important than the other competences mentioned before. One vote was also given for time management and planning each. Organisational and problem solving competences were not assessed as highly important by any of the respondents.

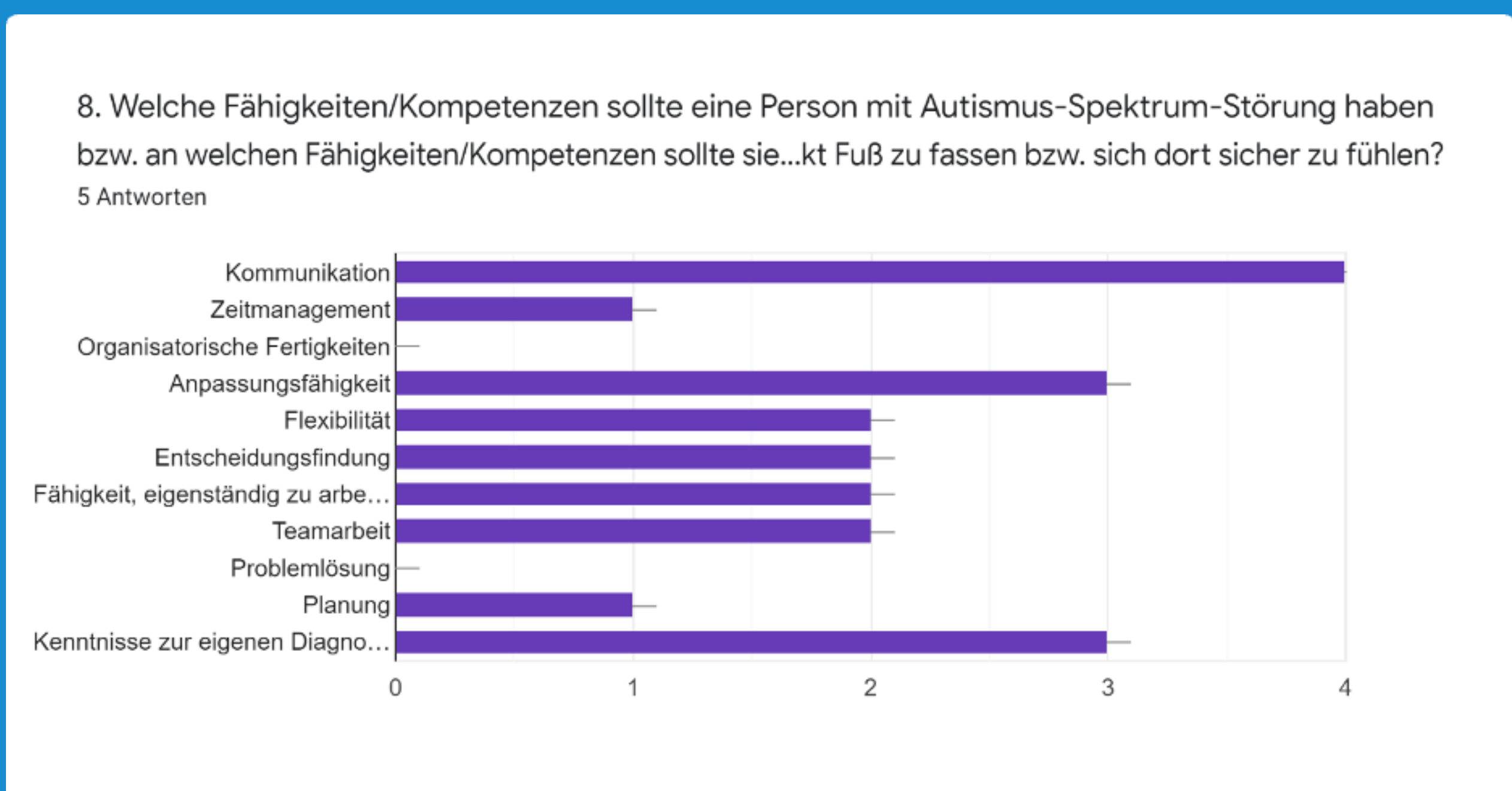


Diagram 4: Presentation of the results for question 8 in German language

The survey participants were also asked about what, in their opinion could be done, to promote the added value for an organisation to hire someone affected by ASD in their working environment (Question No. 9). Many similar responses were given; they involved raising awareness through the means of information and education on this topic, providing financial support and clearly demonstrate and provide an understanding for the positive effects that the employment of people with ASD could have (e.g. having a very structured employee with knock-on effects on the whole workforce).

After discussing the possible environment and the advantages of employing people with ASD, in the following section the respondents' answers regarding the risk of employing people from this target group were evaluated. From the following diagram it is clear that the majority of respondents (80%) see "Isolation" as the biggest risk. Workplace insecurity was identified as the second largest risk (60%). The following risk factors were identified by 20% of the respondents as important and should therefore also be kept in mind: Inertia (Inactivity), lack of interest, inadequacy and unconfident feeling related to his/her own diagnosis. None of the interviewees evaluated loss of workplace and lack of concentration as a risk factor for people with ASD when entering the labour market.

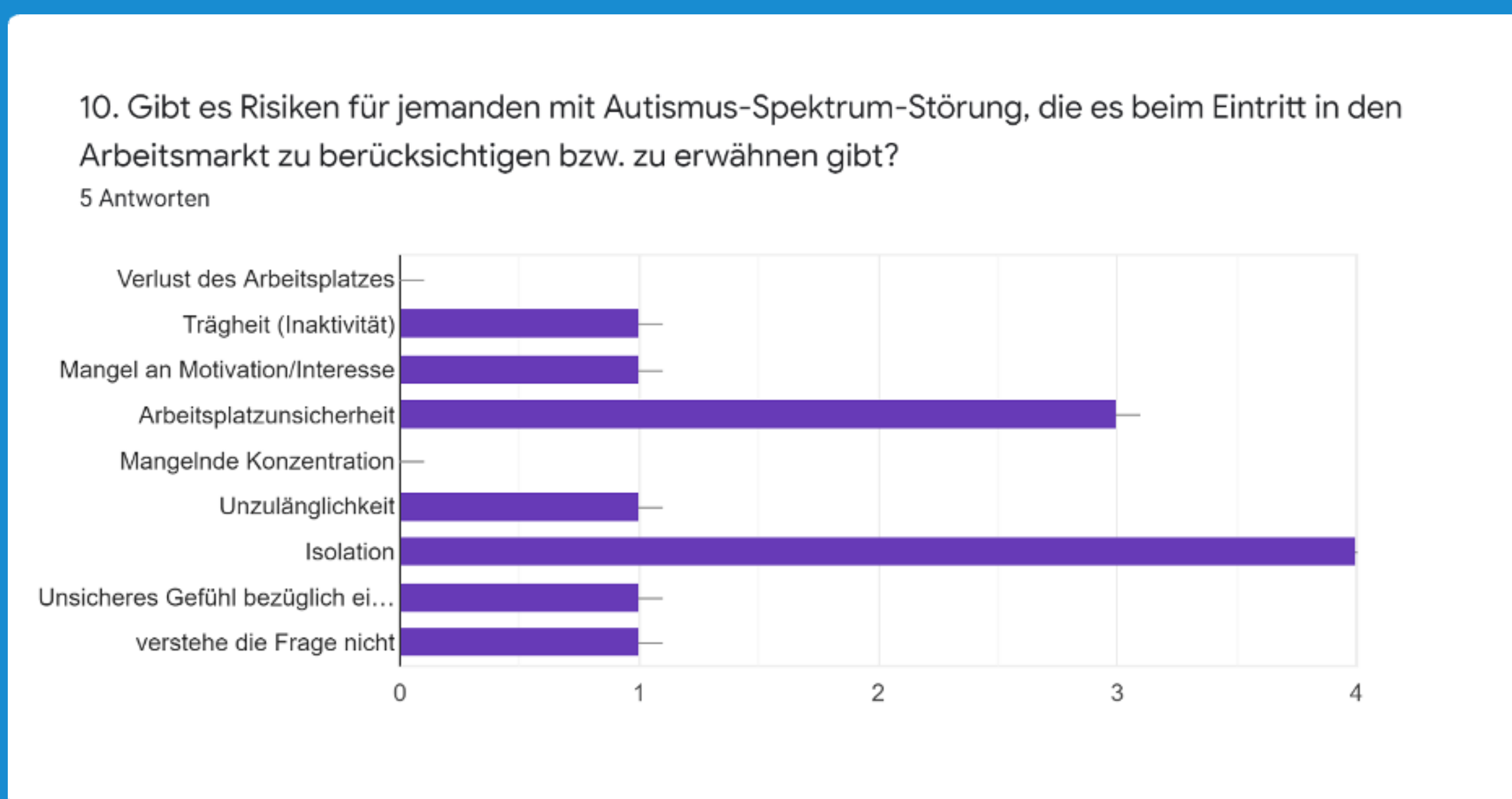


Diagram 5: Presentation of the results for question 10 in German language

In the last question the perspective was changed towards managers, supervisors and colleagues. As seen in the previous answers, it is also important that they have or develop certain skills and competences to avoid risks for the company itself and also for the target group of people with ASD. According to the respondents, the following competences are important: communication (mentioned by 80%), mentoring, adaptability, flexibility, conflict solution and emotional intelligence (60% each), as well as openness and acceptance, which achieved the lowest results (20%), but is still important to keep in mind.



Diagram 5: Presentation of the results for question 10 in German language.

## **7.Conclusions**

As the following comprehensive desktop and field research clearly demonstrates the topic of the inclusion of people with ASD in the working life is a broad field. In Germany, there are many regulations and strategic approaches available to support this aspect, however, as especially the insights of people working in this field shows there is still a lot of potential to fill in. The Work-AUT project could make a valuable contribution towards improving the situation.

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