



Autism Europe Congress 2025

Championing inclusive event design

Introduction



The 14th Autism-Europe International Congress, held in Dublin from September 11–13, 2025, marked a significant milestone in inclusive event design.

Hosted by AsIAM, Ireland's Autism Charity, the congress welcomed over 1,800 participants—including Autistic individuals, families, researchers, professionals, and advocates—from across Europe and beyond. The theme for the Congress "Quality of Life – Research, Policy and Practice" was identified through a European wide consultative process, the first time such an inclusive approach was taken. The aim was to organise a Congress which adopted a neuro-affirmative, human-rights based approach to Autism and with the agenda taking a practical, evidence-based approach which aligns with the priorities of the community.

AsIAM is the first Autistic led organisation to host the Autism Europe Congress. AsIAM is committed to a vision of an Ireland in which every Autistic person is accepted "as they are" – equal, valued and respected. Core to this vision is Autistic people having the same chance in every aspect of our societies and exploring, understanding and achieving a high-quality of life for Autistic people.

AsIAM partnered with Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority on an intentional impact project to define and measure the positive impact of the Autism Europe Congress. As part of this collaboration, Inclusive Event Design was identified as a key priority. Working closely with Keynote PCO and the Royal Dublin Society (RDS), this vision was successfully brought to life, resulting in a truly inclusive event experience.



Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Authority of Ireland is placing a strong emphasis on accessible and inclusive tourism and is working with the tourism industry to position Ireland as a recognised leader in Accessible and Inclusive Tourism.

Fáilte Ireland established its Accessible and Inclusive Tourism team in 2024. The creation of this dedicated team marked a significant step in the commitment to making Ireland a world-class destination for all visitors, regardless of ability, identity or personal circumstances.

To ensure an accessible and inclusive event, the Accessibility and Inclusivity Event Team at the Autism Europe Congress 2025 adopted Fáilte Ireland's Business Access Checklists – Event Organisers and Business and Community Event Venue's, which is part of a broader initiative to ensure that all delegates feel genuinely welcome and included at events across Ireland.

The checklists are designed to help event organisers and venues assess how ready the event is, and helps to identify practical changes that can be made to enhance the overall accessibility of the event, from pre-travel information to event communications, to access around the event and customer service. It supports event organisers and venues in making sure that delegates feel included and can fully participate in the event experience, gaining the maximum benefit.

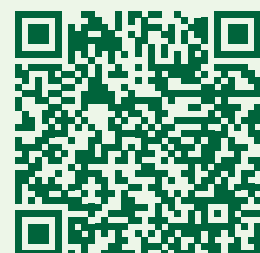


Checklist – Accessible & Inclusive Tourism

Event Organisers



For more information, visit [Accessible and Inclusive Business Support Hub.](#)



Dublin plans to become the World's First Autism Friendly Capital City

Dublin's commitment to working with AsIAM to become the world's first Autism-friendly capital city added symbolic and practical significance to the event.

In 2023, Dublin City Council, in partnership with AsIAM, launched this ambitious multi-year plan designed to make Dublin more accessible and inclusive environment for Autistic individuals and their families across all aspects of city life. The city is working to AsIAM's innovative Autism-Friendly Town Framework developed in 2018.

The Autism Europe Congress served as a powerful platform to showcase Dublin's vision to an audience of 1,800 international delegates.

For more information on Autism Friendly Towns – [click here](#)



Accessible and Inclusive Event Design

AsI Am was committed to creating an inclusive and accessible environment for all delegates attending the Autism-Europe Congress 2025. A significant proportion of attendees represented the Autistic community, making accessibility and inclusivity central to the event's design.

Prior to the Autism Europe Congress 2025, registered delegates were surveyed. The purpose of the survey was to anonymously gather delegates previous experiences of attending conferences. This provided us with valuable insights on the impact of accessibility barriers, and potential solutions to address them in advance.

Pre – Event Survey results

Previous conference experiences included;

-  59% of respondents indicated that a lack of detail had led to feelings of uncertainty and unpredictability.
-  72% of respondents felt that conference hosts/planners had not considered adjustments around sensory overload and difference.
-  57% of respondents felt that conference hosts/planners had not considered adjustments around communication and social interaction differences.
-  65% of respondents felt that had needed to mask their Autistic traits in order to network successfully.

Post – Event Survey results

Comparatively, following the congress, positive results were received;

-  73% of respondents felt that the pre-event visitor information reduced uncertainty and unpredictability.
-  71% of respondents felt that the Autism Europe Congress hosts/planners had considered adjustments around sensory overload and difference.
-  68% of respondents felt that the Autism Europe Congress hosts/planners had considered adjustments around communication and social interaction differences.
-  The ethos of the Autism Europe Congress reduced the need to mask while attending.

Accessibility and Inclusivity Measures

From its very inception, the Autism Europe Congress has embodied a profound commitment to co-creation with the Autistic community. This dedication was evident from the outset, beginning with a community-wide consultation to select the Congress theme.

Autistic voices were placed at the heart of every stage of planning and delivery — from a majority-Autistic scientific committee and speaker lineup, to clear guidelines for all contributors to ensure Autism-affirming content. Every element of the event was thoughtfully co-created to reflect and respect the lived experiences and expertise of Autistic individuals.

Sensory walk through of the venue



A sensory walk-through of the RDS venue was arranged with AsIAM, Keynote PCO and Fáilte Ireland. The walk-through was designed to assess the venue from the perspective of the delegates — identifying potential sensory challenges and exploring ways to make the space more inclusive and welcoming.

Pre-event visitor information



A tailored Visual Guide was created with AsIAM and Keynote PCO to support delegates at the Autism Europe Congress. Sharing visual guides in advance of events is important as it reduces uncertainty by providing clear, predictable information. Using images, icons, and simple language makes content easier to process and more accessible.

Registration



Attendees were given the option to select a quiet registration. This was designed by AsIAm and Keynote PCO to accommodate delegates. Those who opted in were directed to a dedicated quieter registration desk, where they could collect their name badges in a more peaceful setting. Delegates had the option of registering the day before the congress as an additional offering to access registration at a quieter time.

Regulatory equipment



The Congress recognised that delegates might require various forms of regulatory equipment—such as headphones, sunglasses, comfortable clothing, hats, or fidget tools. These items were respected as essential tools for participation, just like notebooks or stationery.

Wayfinding



To ensure a smooth and inclusive experience for all attendees, comprehensive wayfinding measures were implemented by AsIAm and Keynote PCO throughout the venue. Clear, accessible signage was positioned strategically across the site, making navigation straightforward for delegates.

To further support delegates in familiarising themselves with the venue in advance, a registration walkthrough video was shared prior to the event. This resource allowed attendees to visualise arrival at the venue and the interior layout ahead of time, reducing uncertainty and helping to build confidence in navigating the space.

Congress website and app



Digital inclusion was actively embraced to ensure that all attendees—could engage meaningfully with the congress website, and app. In advance of the congress, an accessibility audit was carried out to identify and address potential barriers that may affect the user's experience. The Congress website has accessibility section and features. This proactive approach helped shape a fully accessible digital experience.

The Congress website and app developed by Keynote PCO, was actively used by 1,618 attendees across devices. The app served as a central hub for navigation, session details, live updates, and accessibility tools, including the visual guide and quiet room information.

The Congress was recorded to maximise reach for those who could not attend in person.

Staff and Volunteers



There was a large number of Autistic staff and volunteers working at the congress which helped to inform inclusive design and best practice. This ensured that Autistic delegates felt represented at the heart of the Congress process.

All event staff and volunteers had received training focused on understanding and affirming the Autistic experience of conferences and large events. With Keynote PCO facilitating the overall integration of these elements into the overall delegate experience. In addition, significant outdoor areas were provided. This training developed by AsIAm and Keynote PCO focused on the accessibility barriers (communication, sensory and judgement) that conference goers often experience and the environmental and personal adjustments staff could make to address these barriers. Trained event staff and volunteers were available at key points to provide directions or support as needed—always offering assistance with sensitivity and without judgment.

Communication



Communication measures were implemented. Delegates were given time, space, and respect for different methods of processing the environment, including stimming, movement, and extended time for verbal information. All delegates had received communication stickers, offering a visual cue to indicate their social interaction preferences.

In advance of the social event, it was emphasised that individuals may choose to participate in ways that align with their personal preferences, and all forms of engagement are equally valued and respected.

Quiet Spaces



A dedicated Quiet Space was available in the President's Room throughout the Congress. This was an accessible, low-stimulation area open to all delegates who may need a quieter environment to rest, reflect, or take a break from the busy event spaces. Guidelines were issued in the pre-event visual guide around respecting the quiet room to ensure that this space was a peaceful and conversation free space.

A mobile sensory space was provided by Dublin City Council and sensory friendly furniture was provided by congress partner Codex. Significant outdoor areas were provided for delegates to enjoy movement or take a break from the busy environment.

Noise reduction



Free ear plugs were made available at the Registration desk to help manage potential overstimulation.

To reduce sensory unpredictability, 'flappause' was used throughout the Congress—delegates waved their hands instead of clapping to show appreciation, minimising auditory stimulation.

Consideration had been given to quieter registration processes, and quiet spaces, with further details provided in the delegate guide.

Translation and Real-Time Captioning



The Congress used Wordly's AI-powered platform to provide real-time translation and captioning in over 60 languages across all sessions, which could be easily accessed using smartphones and headphones.

The platform also offered real-time English captioning, which proved invaluable not only for non-native English speakers, but also for neurodivergent delegates and others who may benefit from alternative means of processing the presentations. It also enabled participation from quieter spaces outside the main room. This flexibility ensured delegates could remain engaged with the content while prioritising their own comfort and needs.

Catering



A menu was selected that was inclusive and considerate of sensory sensitivities. Dietary requirements were requested during registration in advance of the event. The catering staff were on hand to support where possible. A list of alternative food suppliers located close to the RDS were provided in the visual guide.

Accessibility

Accessibility was embedded at the heart of every aspect of the Autism Europe Congress 2025, ensuring that individuals with access requirements could fully engage and participate in the event.

- ▶ Accessibility requirements were captured in the pre-event registration. Delegates with specific access requirements or in need of assistance during the event were encouraged to speak with a staff member or contact the team in advance to ensure a comfortable and inclusive experience.
- ▶ Step-free access had been ensured across all main event areas. Step-free access provides a route that does not require using stairs or escalators, making a facility accessible. Clear signage to the elevator is on site at the venue. Two-tiered registration desks were on site to facilitate delegate check in. Accessible toilets were available throughout the venue. Designated accessible parking spaces were provided in the venue's carpark. Assistance dogs are welcome at the venue, and staff are informed on the assistance animal etiquette as needed.
- ▶ The venue's floor plan incorporated open and unobstructed spaces to facilitate ease of movement for all individuals. Accessible collaboration spaces were available throughout the Congress for focused work and interaction.
- ▶ Sign language was offered if required and was captured in the pre-event registration.
- ▶ Carers and assistants of Autistic adults were allowed to attend the Congress on a complimentary basis.



Key learnings

AsIAm

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Hosting the Autism Europe Congress provided us with an opportunity to demonstrate accessibility at scale. Too often it can be assumed that certain environments or experiences are simply not inclusive of our community – in AsIAm we firmly believe that we can co-create accessibility in partnership. For us, this event was far more than just an opportunity to share research and best practise from across Europe – it was about leaving a lasting legacy in our city and country and raising the bar in terms of the expectations our community should have in terms of their right to participate in and access professional events – the opportunity to collaborate with Fáilte Ireland to document this process has created an invaluable opportunity to influence and educate the wider events and tourism sector and, in line with Ireland's Autism Innovation Strategy, to embed inclusive practices across Irish life.

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Fáilte Ireland

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Through our partnership with AsIAm, we gained valuable insights into how true inclusivity can be embedded not only in international events, but also in our day-to-day lives.

One of the most impactful learning experiences was participating in the sensory mapping of the venue. This exercise provided a deeper understanding of the importance of accessibility and inclusion and highlighted practical ways to improve the event experience for all attendees.

Additionally, the opportunity to share our Accessible and Inclusive Tourism resources with AsIAm, Keynote PCO, and the RDS was invaluable. This exchange of knowledge and experience has laid the groundwork for future enhancements, informed by the collective insights of all partners involved.

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Keynote PCO

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Our biggest takeaway from this Congress was the importance of embedding inclusive design from the very first stages of event planning—and doing so in true collaboration with partners like Fáilte Ireland and AsIAm.

Working together allowed us to reframe accessibility not as a box-ticking exercise, but as a guiding principle across all aspects of the delegate journey.

We also learned the critical value of early, consistent communication, particularly for neurodivergent attendees who may benefit from having more time to prepare. From visual venue guides and sensory maps to clearly signposted quiet spaces, this experience showed us how proactive measures can create a more welcoming environment for all.

Above all, engaging directly with organisations and individuals with lived experience ensured that our efforts were grounded in real needs. This collaborative approach challenged us to think differently—and has reshaped how we will deliver events in the future.

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RDS

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The Royal Dublin Society (RDS) was proud to host the 14th Autism-Europe Congress, bringing together over 1,800 delegates from across Europe and beyond for three days of learning, collaboration, and inclusion. The event transformed our venue into a vibrant space for research, advocacy, and lived experience to connect, reflecting the RDS's mission to foster cultural and social progress. Working alongside Autism Europe and AsIAm in delivering such an impactful and accessible international congress, has been a stepping stone for the RDS. Hosting this event demonstrated how we can support large-scale conferences that not only meet operational excellence but also drive meaningful societal change.

Operationally, this event was also transformational for the RDS. In advance of the Congress, our team underwent dedicated accessibility and inclusion training, ensuring that every staff member from front-of-house to technical operations was equipped to support our delegates. This learning experience has left a lasting legacy, enhancing our capability to deliver inclusive and accessible events across all areas of our business in the future.

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Delegate Reflection

“Reflecting on my experience as a neurodivergent doctoral student, I felt supported, welcome, and without the constant need to mask throughout the conference. I felt comfortable taking a break when it was needed, wearing loops when the environment was loud, enjoying some iPad game time with X to decompress, and being able to share my experiences openly with understanding. The consideration of accessibility in this conference was incredible, and I look forward to attending in the years to come.”

Staff Reflection

Inclusivity at the Congress extended beyond delegates—it was also embedded into staff and volunteer training. All onsite team members, including contracted staff, received pre-event training developed in collaboration with AsIAM, focused on understanding of Autism, inclusive communication, and creating a welcoming environment for all attendees.

“I really enjoyed the conference, it was a fantastic experience where I met some wonderful people and learned a lot that I can take into both my day-to-day life and future events. A special mention to the volunteers I worked with during the week. They were exceptional and incredibly helpful throughout, making the experience even more positive and well-supported.”

This feedback illustrates how a well-informed and supported team contributes not only to the success of the event, but to a wider culture of understanding, empathy, and inclusion—values that extend beyond the Congress itself.

To learn more about the Autism Europe Congress, watch the video [here](#)



**Fáilte
Ireland**