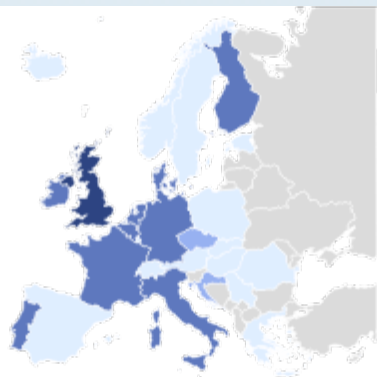


Autistic people's opinions on Applied Behavior Analysis in Europe

EUCAP survey results 2022

This project mapped the views, perceptions and knowledge of autistic people concerning ABA, to provide useful information for autistic people's organisations and communities, policymakers and legislators, as well as educators, therapists, disability service providers and clinicians who work with autistic people.



Responses per country

● < 10 ● 11 - 30 ● 31 - 70 ● > 71

620 responses from countries in Europe, 142 from the USA and 62 from other countries.

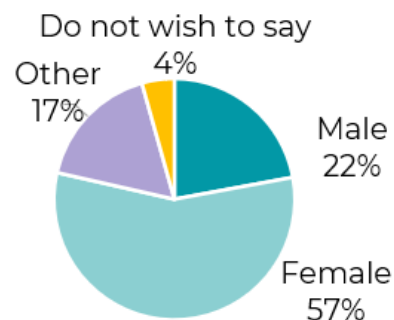
Diagnosis



82.1% had an autism diagnosis and 17,9% self-identified as autistic.

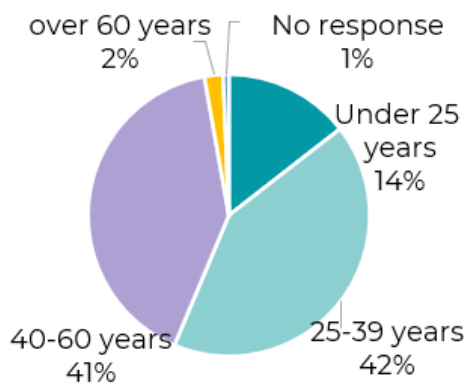
Gender

57% identified themselves as women, 22% as men and 17% as other, including non-binary, agender and others.



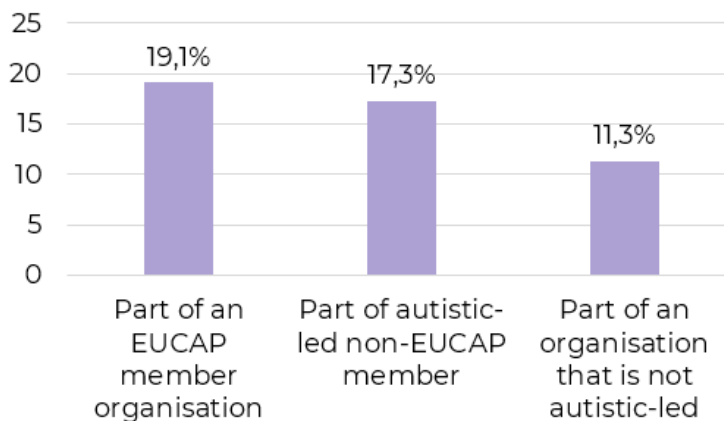
Age

Most responses (42%) were from people between 25 and 39 years, followed by 40 to 60 years (41%), under 25 (14%), and over 60 (2%).



Membership of autism organisations

About 9.7% were a member of more than one type of organisation. Just over half were not a member of any type of autism organisation.



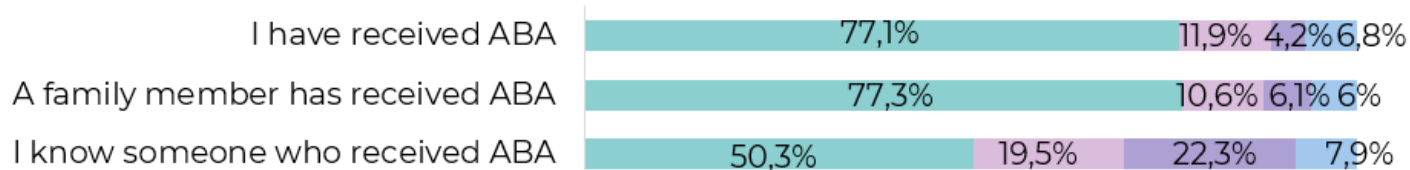
Autistic people's opinions on ABA in Europe

EUCAP survey results 2022

Receiving ABA

About 16.1% received ABA, with 11.9% receiving a little and 4.2% a significant amount. 16.7% had a family member who received ABA, and 41.5% knew someone who received ABA. 5.5% selected that they received ABA and have a family member who received it.

■ No ■ A little ■ A significant amount ■ Not sure



Delivered ABA

About 6.5% delivered ABA, while 29.4% know someone who delivered ABA, and 1.8% reported that they received ABA and delivered ABA.

■ No ■ A little ■ A significant amount ■ Not sure



Learning about ABA

Only 1.9% had an ABA certification, even though 6.5% said they delivered it. Around 13.4% studied it but were not certified. The most common form of learning was through social media (80.3%), followed by informal learning (75.2%). The form of learning relates to opinion, with persons with an ABA certification having a higher opinion, while any other form of learning relates to a lower opinion.



1.9% had an ABA certification



13.4% studied it but are not certified



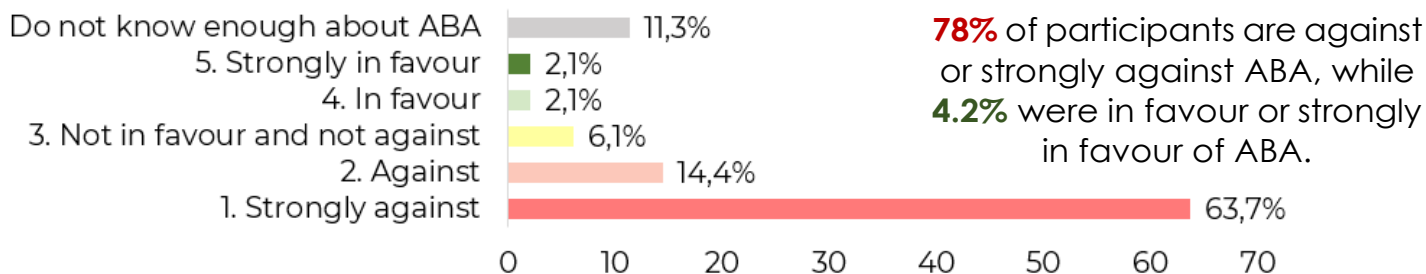
75.2% learned about ABA informally



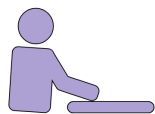
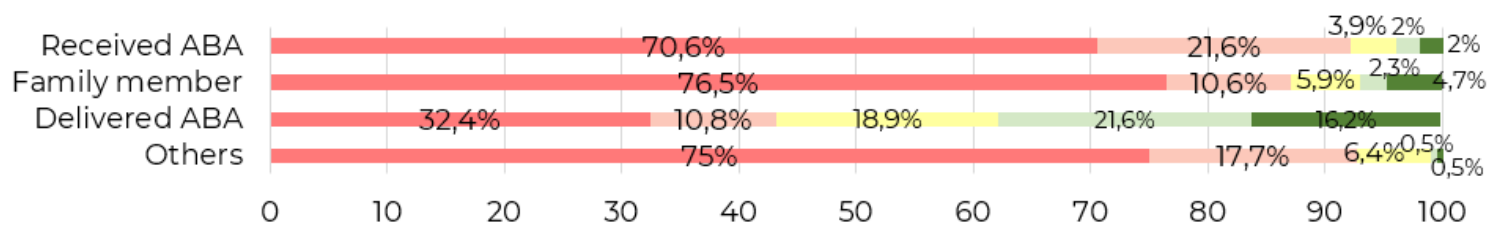
80.3% learned through social media

Autistic people's opinions on ABA in Europe EUCAP survey results 2022

General view and opinion of ABA



If we consider the participants based on the type of experience they had with ABA, people who received ABA are more strongly against ABA, closely followed by family members, with people who delivered ABA being the group most in favour of it.



92,2% of participants who received ABA were against or strongly against ABA.



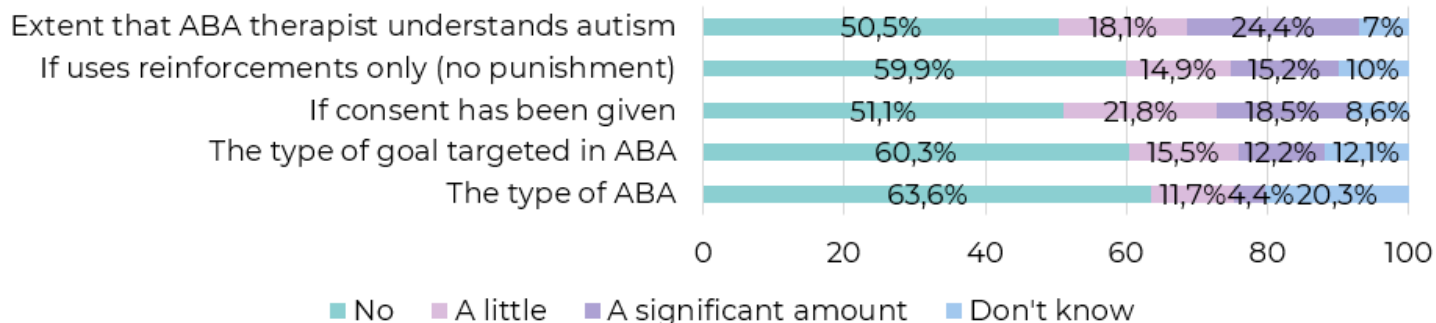
87,1% of family members of people who received ABA were against or strongly against ABA.



43,2% of participants who delivered ABA were against or strongly against ABA.

Would any of the following change your view of ABA practice?

More than half of autistic people said none of the options would change their view of ABA. The extent that which the ABA therapist understands autism was the most common situation where respondents indicated it would change their view of ABA practice (42.5%),



Autistic people's opinions on ABA in Europe EUCAP survey results 2022

Country views of ABA in Europe

68% were aware of an organisations in their country that have published position statements about ABA.

Note: Sweden was the only country with 5 or more answers that reported no published position statement by an organisation.

40% of participants responded that ABA was **widespread** in their country.*

1. Ireland
2. Italy
3. UK
4. Netherlands
5. France

20.6% responded that ABA was **growing significantly** in their country and 22.3% responded it is growing a little.*

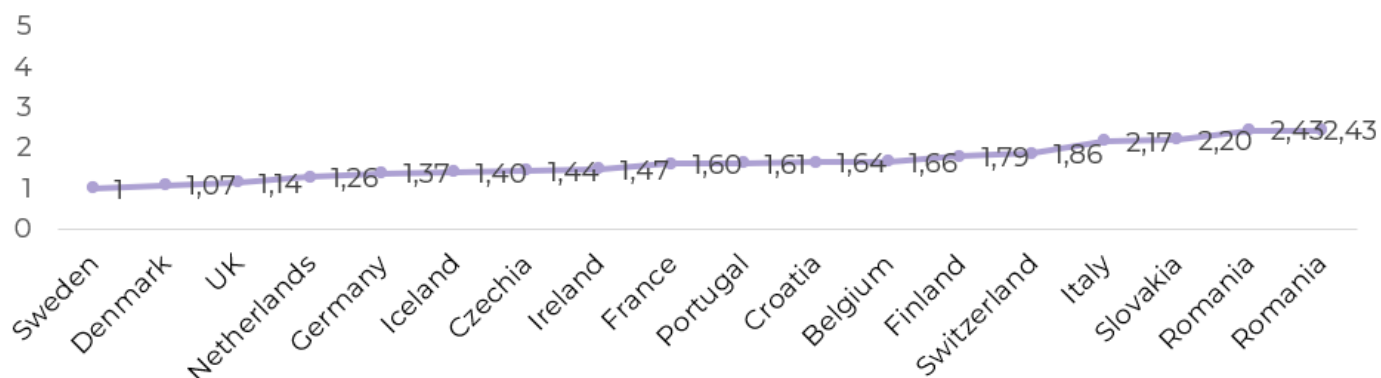
1. Italy
2. Ireland
3. UK
4. Finland
5. France

57.9% reported being **significantly concerned** about ABA in their country and 25.8% responded it was a little.*

1. Ireland
2. UK
3. Germany
4. Finland
5. Netherlands

General view or opinion by country**

Considering the scale from page 3 (1=Strongly Against to 5=Strongly in favour), the general view of ABA by participants appears to be the lowest in Sweden with an average of 1, and the highest in Romania with 2.43. A total of 11.3% indicated not knowing enough about ABA to provide an opinion, with Italy being the country with a higher proportion of respondents selecting this option.



*countries with more than 15 answers. **countries with more than 5 answers.

Due to a low number of responses per country, it is not possible to see if differences between countries are significant.

Autistic people's opinions on ABA in Europe EUCAP survey results 2022

Experiences of people who received ABA

"I was diagnosed with Autism Classic Disorder when I was 3 years old. I was nonverbal and my caretakers were instructed to put me in ABA therapy. I finally became verbal by the age of 6, but the constant punishment if I misbehaved (behaved as an autistic person) has left many damages in my life which I deal with to this day. I'm 35 years old, still have nightmares and wet the bed. "

"The interventions I experienced terrified me. They made me overcompliant which left me vulnerable to abuse in relationships. They left me feeling I was subhuman and unlovable. I can't stop being autistic so I can't stop my autistic behaviours. And that meant I failed the therapy but also, I felt I failed as a person. "

"I wasn't allowed to be who I was and didn't understand what they wanted me to be. Because it was never right, so I ended up not daring to talk or show myself when others were watching. "

"Trauma and subsequent problem with self-image, anxiety, depression.."

"As a result, I started hiding "unwanted" behavior, which took up a huge amount of energy. Those around me (parents, teachers, etc.) thought I was doing better while I was sinking into depression. It took me a long time to come out of this and to learn to control my behavior. Hiding behaviors and symptoms is not the same as curing them. As an autistic person, it takes a tremendous amount of energy and causes stress and low self-esteem. Practices like ABA should be banned. "

"It teaches autistic people how to mask, which is pernicious to our well-being. "

"I received a form of ABA during secondary school, delivered by "special needs" teachers rather than official behaviourists. It was very unhelpful, and I have a lot of anxiety now over doing the wrong thing, though I don't think I'm as traumatised as others. "

"Very positive, it taught me how to be in real life and interact with normal people, I think it is the most effective way for an autistic person to learn how to approach real life and make somewhat of a career. "

"Therapist guided me in using self-monitoring and self-management strategies in order to reduce self-harming behaviours and increase skills in controlling my anxiety, daily living skills and interpersonal professional skills. Another BCBA assisted me with an intervention to get my very severe eating disorder under control."

Autistic people's opinions on ABA in Europe EUCAP survey results 2022

Experiences of family members who received ABA

"My son was subjected to the method without my knowledge. After a few months had altered behavior and went into sensory and behavioral dysregulation. I suspended all therapies and at the end of 1 week, he returned to his normal state. Then I found out from other parents that the method of two therapists was ABA."

"Several aba techniques were used on me as a child. My son attended a school who used ABA techniques on him without our permission. We moved him to a different, neuroaffirming school."

Experiences of people who delivered ABA

"I participated in a multi-day seminar, which was quite extensive. What shocked me as an autistic woman was pointing out the harmfulness and inappropriateness of repetitive behavior in people with autism - shaking hands, nodding... Etc. It was really marked as worthy of removal. Although some other techniques seemed beneficial to me, what I mentioned above disgusted me with the whole ABA. It struck me as a misunderstanding, a disrespect for the diagnosis. "

"I am an Autistic autism trainer and Support Instructor within a specialist autism support service. I have worked with numerous young adults to try to unpick the harm and distress that has been inflicted upon them by qualified ABA people with no understanding of autism or child development. "

"ABA is a tool that has often been abused and used in abhorrent ways to try and train out autism it trains neurotypical behaviour. I use PBS which uses the principles of ABA to understand a person's behaviour, identify their wants and needs, and facilitate that through changing others' responses, the environment and building skills that help the person better/more quickly/with less adverse impact achieve their wishes. This is not just ethical but an important tool in supporting autistic people who also have a learning disability and use a lot of behaviour to communicate."

"I was often asked to meet goals that made the BCBA and parents happy with no regard for what the client wanted or needed. For example, I'd have a goal where the client would interact with peers during an after-school program— despite the fact that the peers would constantly bully the client. There were also plenty of times where clients were expected to make eye contact for no real reason other than to assimilate into neurotypical culture."

Autistic people's opinions on ABA in Europe

EUCAP survey results 2022

Concerns shared about ABA

'I think the way we deal with autism needs to change fundamentally, and adhering to ABA prevents that. New ideas are needed, not a desperate attempt to make a harmful treatment less harmful.'

'In Germany, ABA was explicitly not included in the recommendations of the official [guidelines for autism therapy](#). Thus, since the publication of these guidelines, ABA is no longer publicly propagated by the authoritative "leading" professional autism experts. Unfortunately, all this now takes place unofficially, e.g. in internal training courses for educators, psychotherapists or parent training groups. because there is no longer any public-effective discourse about it.'

'ABA does not take into account current scientific research on autism. ABA does not take into account current scientific research on learning.'

'It's too much about conformity, too little about inclusion and participation. I see it as ethically highly problematic because it is based on the same principles and techniques that are used in conversational therapies.'

'The appearance of a "new ABA" with the same defects as the original method and the lack of questioning of caregivers and caregivers facing autistic people in distress or a lack of results suggests that proven methods will not be explored, not even in addition. Social networks allow the promotion of the ABA to an uninformed public who then use it without training and without being aware of its limits.'

'I see that for both my son and me, this is the only care option available in my area. This terrifies me because I do not agree at all with this approach (and yes, I have read a lot on the subject, including official texts and feedback from convinced people). The problem in France is that we already have to fight against psychoanalysis which unfortunately remains very present in the field of autism, and ABA is presented as the only way to fight psychoanalysis. As a result, it becomes almost impossible to criticize the ABA.'

'There is no real control of the work of ABA technicians. There are bodies that provide courses and issue certifications to people who have no understanding of autism.'