Autistic Mothers project

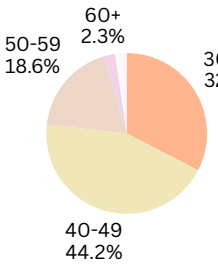
Funded by European Disability Forum

AUTISTIC MOTHERS' EXPERIENCES ACCESSING SERVICES 2026 - SURVEY

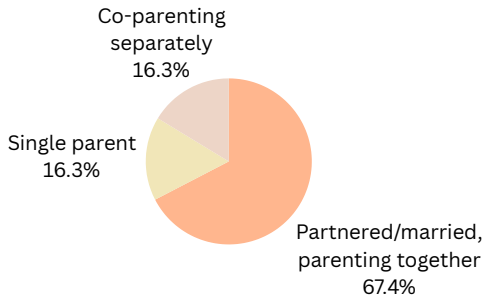
ABOUT THE SURVEY

Responses were collected during 2026, through an online questionnaire. 42 responses were received from 11 countries: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal, UK and others.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHICS

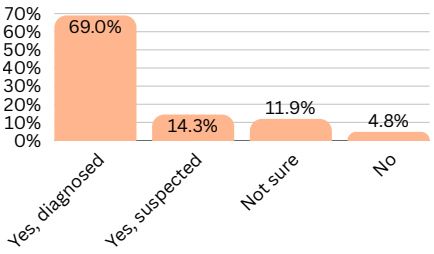


Participants identified themselves as LGBTQIA+ (21.4%), immigrant (7.1%), racialised minority (7.1%) and religious minority (4.8%).



CHILDREN

Autistic mothers had an average 1.6 children, with a maximum of 5 children. The children were an average of 15.5 years old, ranging 3 months to 52 years old.



8 out of 10 had a child who is suspected or diagnosed as autistic, neurodivergent or disabled

78.5% had the diagnosis after becoming a parent, with 95.2% receiving diagnosis after adulthood.

PARENTING

Autistic mothers **found joy** in:

- playing with their children or organising activities;
- advocacy, acceptance and supporting;
- teaching and educating them;
- caring, loving, nurturing and connecting with them.

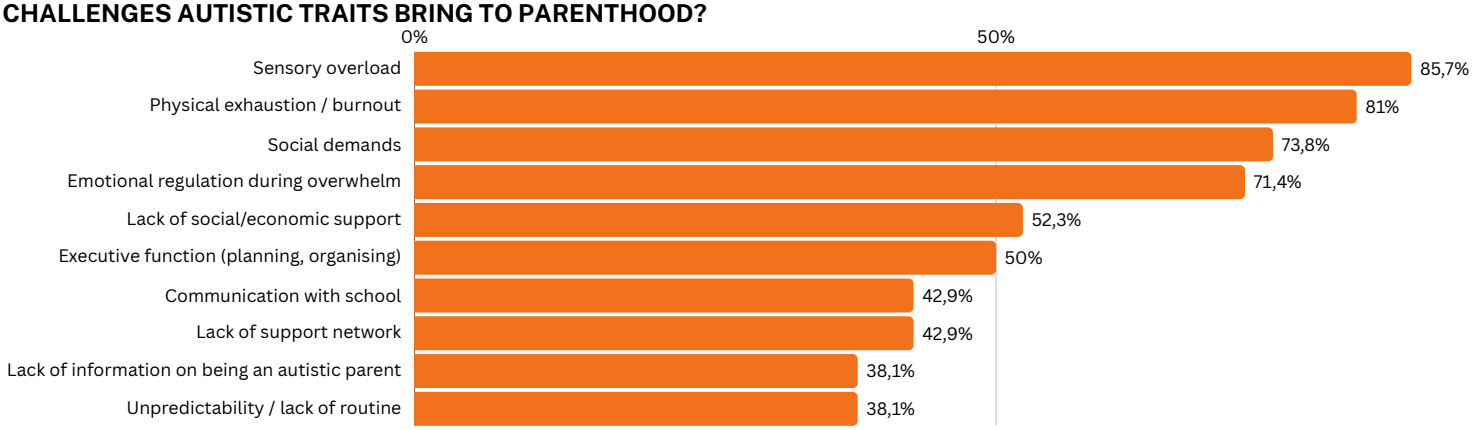
95.2% felt their autistic traits were a strenght in their parenting

What **helps managing** or coping:

- Talking with family or friends;
- Having a supportive partner taking over;
- Decreasing demands outside or inside the house;
- Alone time, sleep or engaging in interests;
- Regulating themselves or use adaptations.

38.1% experienced constant or often burnout in relation to parenting, with 95.2% experiencing at some point in their life

CHALLENGES AUTISTIC TRAITS BRING TO PARENTHOOD?

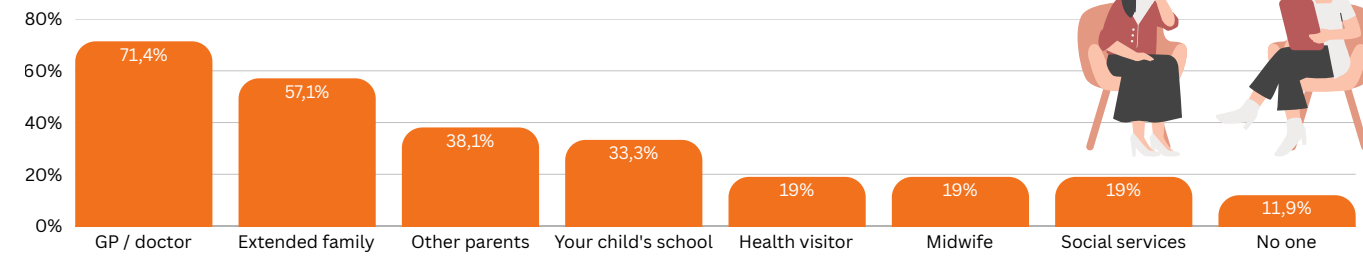


For more information on the survey, visit https://eucap.eu/projects/autistic-mothers/

Copyright © 2026 by European Council of Autistic People

SEEKING SUPPORT

AUTISTIC MOTHERS DISCLOSED THEIR AUTISM DIAGNOSTIC TO:



92.8%
felt pressure to mask or appear neurotypical as a mother

Autistic mothers **disclosed their autism** to advocate for themselves, be understood, be accommodated or to show their children or others there is nothing to be ashamed about it. They did not disclosed due to bad experiences of dismissiveness or lack of knowledge of autism, fear of judgment, discrimination or stigma towards themselves or their children. Most evaluates the situation to assess safety to disclose their autism before disclosing it.

61.9%
avoided seeking support because they feared judgement or negative consequences

Reasons to avoid seeking support was due to stigma and afraid of not being believed or their diagnosis being dismissed, being blamed for their children's difficulties, their diagnosis being used in custody fights against them during divorce proceedings or their mental health being used by authorities against them to take away their children, and being afraid their ability as mothers are questioned and that social services are called and they lose their children.

45.2%
faced allegations of being unfit for being a parent, from family, during custody proceedings, by social services, and others.

The **support** that would make the biggest difference would be:

- Peer support groups;
- Reasonable adaptations in services;
- Financial support;
- Personal assistance;
- Being believed and supported;
- Early diagnosis
- Better government-funded childcare;
- Having a better support network and time to recover;
- Autistic-friendly information and psychological support;
- Being able to access support for their children;

ACCESSING SERVICES FOR THEMSELVES

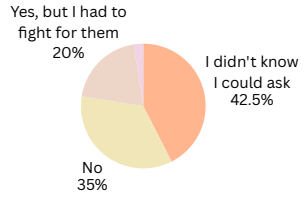
90.5% found difficult or very difficult to access services for their needs

81% gave up on getting support because the process was too overwhelming, laborious or unlikely to get results.

Access to sexual and reproductive services

"I am really easily missunderstood. I can not have the right treatment or examinations. I got my premenopause symptoms 11 years ago, but still I am without treatments or help."
"I was unable to gain abortion even though that was what I would have needed."
It was a nightmare."
"It was dismissed until it became serious"
"Repeated miscarriage, it was awful, no support, after care or understanding."

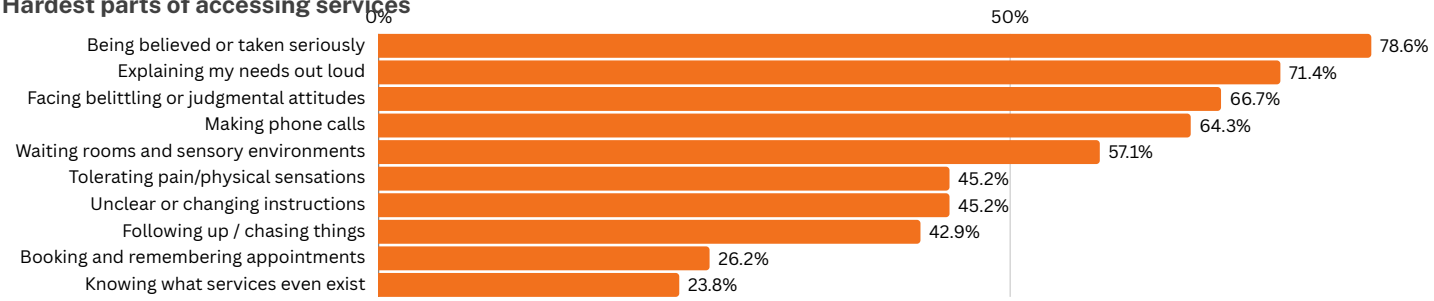
Access to reasonable adaptations



Giving up support

"When facing trouble, I used to believe that I was somehow faulty and deserved lack of care, but I have come to learn that the system is build to avoid caring for me, so it dont need to take it personally."
"After having hit the same wall of not being taken seriously several times, my conclusion was that the only option left was to sort things out by myself."
"Getting admitted to a psych ward is impossible with kids, social service is there in an instant."
"I have diastesis rectis still and I think I'm vitamin deficient from breastfeeding, but every time I try to go to the GP he says everything is "normal" and I receive no help, so I stopped going. The process to book appointments is also through the phone."
"Some things are not worth the fight. And I often give up on my own health issues, so I can be there for my kids."
"Support is not adapted to our needs as a neurodiverse bicultural family. There is a lot of misunderstanding, prejudice and bias."

Hardest parts of accessing services



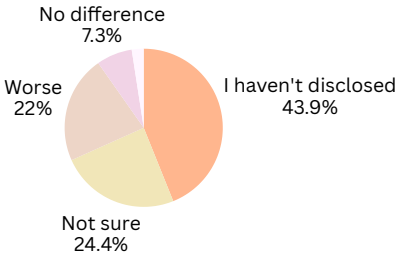
For more information on the survey, visit https://eucap.eu/projects/autistic-mothers/

Copyright © 2026 by European Council of Autistic People

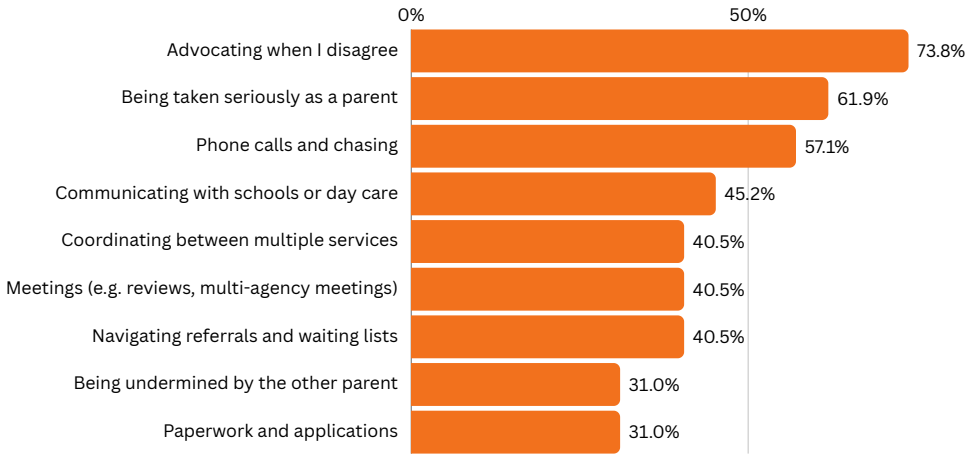
ACCESSING SERVICES FOR THEIR CHILDREN

64.3% found difficult or very difficult to access services for their children's needs

Professionals treat them differently as a parent once they know they are autistic



Hardest parts getting support



"It's as if someone were asking me if the mother is the way she wanted her son to be."
They think I'm transferring my diagnosis to my child ."
"Some have improved the way they treat me and been more supportive but others have become concerned about my ability to parter just because I am autistic - it's mixed and when disclosing impossible to tell what reaction I'll get."
"Some professionals see you as well valued to understand autism better, other see you as uncabable to raise a child."

Others are: getting public services that are trying to save money, helping their children trusting doctors to share their issues.

64.3% accessing services for your child clashed with their own needs

"I can't handle being a mom, constantly burned out."

"It does overwhelm me in a way that I choose to put myself to the back seat."

Child protective services

26.2% had involvement with child protection or social services for being autistic.

11.9% had been offered, threatened or coerced with a placement of their child in a child protection institution or foster home

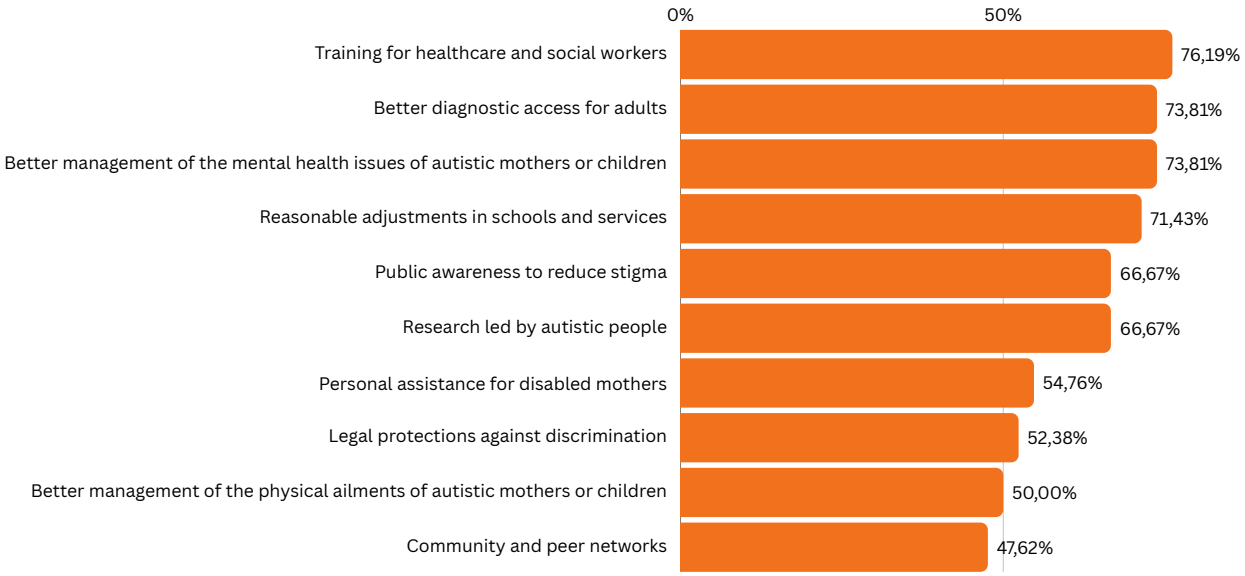
"Being sent on a parenting course that I did not need. Being told that it is my fault that my child was behaving the way that they were, which led to them getting a support worker for a bit."
"I had previously been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, and I was hospitalized for two and a half months. The CPS placed my children in foster families, separating the three siblings. It was during that hospitalization that I was diagnosed with autism (...). It took me a year and a half to regain custody of my oldest and youngest daughters."

Pregnancy and birth

69% felt that during pregnancy and birth, their sensory or communication needs were not accommodated

33.3% felt that their competence as a mother was questioned during pregnancy and birth because they autistic.

What kind of advocacy or change is most important to you?



For more information on the survey, visit https://eucap.eu/projects/autistic-mothers/
Copyright © 2026 by European Council of Autistic People

PRIORITIES AND CHANGE

What do you most wish professionals understood about autistic mothers?

" That we process the world differently, so we need real support and adaptations to make us feel safe and included in hospitals and clinics. Our sensory challenges are disabling to the point of physical and mental exhaustion. Comunication should be a main concern when treating autistic mothers, predictability is very important and necessary when it can be given. Hipersensitivity when present is to be respected."

"Autism doesn't stop because you're a mother. "

"That some of the autistic traits can be an added value in raising a child : structure, discipline, consistency,.... but also that due to the perfectionism, we can put a lot of pressure on our own shoulders"

"That they understand that it is hard and even impossible for me to meet tot all the demand of motherhood."

"That we can be great parents. And that we often function on the brink of burnout "

"There are mothers who can do parenting and work, but there are mothers that can do only ether one."

"We will have most of the challenges all moms have, plus all the barriers and difficulties that being autistic bring, from communication issues with services, lack of accessibility everywhere and chronic overwhelm from being sleep deprived/overestimulated all the time."

"That they can be great mothers exactly because they have autism"

"It does overwhelm me in a way that I choose to put myself to the back seat."

If you could change one thing about how society treats autistic parents, what would it be?

"Be curious and educate yourself about what it means, to be autistic in general and to be an autistic parent in particular. Importantly: be far less judgemental and far more supportive."

"I would like people to listen to me and believe me."

"I would like autistic parents to be listened to and taken seriously, rather than having to constantly prove themselves before support is offered."

"Respect us. Allow us to do things differently and dont expect us to parent or run the household the same way as everyone else. "

"See us for what we are. Struggeling on a level most people don't understand. And still doing the parenting."

"Stop assuming we are not good parents because we are autistic or because we need support. "

"We are capable but will need support. "

Is there anything else you'd like to share that this survey didn't ask about?

"Did you know maternity notes record autism as a learning disability? So discriminatory "

"When it comes to sensory overload in birth facility and psychiatric institutions and also later senior homes, this is a very important issue. If you calm down the environment around the autistic person you will be able to distinguish autism from abusive response or other psychiatric conditions like psychosis, more easily. And the patient will also be better equipped to avoid epileptic attacks that can cause serious brain damage or death. Provoking tactics just to induce symptoms inside or outside of institutions pose a great health risk but are seen by health and police as a spoiled demand of special treatment. "

"I had to ask for help in the postpartum due to a traumatising birth and a chronic shutdown/autistic burnout that was confused with postpartum depression, but then there was no services that understood these, so I was unable to get support. I did however, had access to some peer support groups with other autistic mothers and that was incredibly helpful. I think autistic needs are not understood during postpartum and that might be seriously detrimental to autistic mother's mental health support and potentially lead to postpartum depression. "

"In many cases the system has failed me because it prefers to have less patients/people in need. The ultimate pressure to mask, and to hide any issues in fear of being misunderstood or there being consequences such as the child being removed from home, makes it so, that I belittle the issues, and thus dont get help. If there was more resources available, I would not need to fight for help. Especially in such a time sensitive (and time restricted) thing as parenthood, I would wish support would be given first, and assessment for the need of it would come once the situation is stable."

"Once a child gets diagnosed, the parents should get perscribed automatically an assessment."

"One of the biggest difficulties I faced was breastfeeding; I didn't have any help from anyone apart from my husband's support."

"My post natal depression was very bad and could have been helped if I knew I was autistic and if health visitor knew what that meant for me. Counselling was offered but not appropriate to my needs as a muslim autistic woman. "

Copyright © 2026 by European Council of Autistic People