

### III. Myths and facts

Autism is often misunderstood by the public and remains shrouded in myths and misconceptions. It is essential to challenge these myths and misconceptions to foster a better understanding of autism and to support those who are on the autism spectrum. Education and awareness are key to dispelling these false narratives.

**Myth: All autistic people are good in mathematics and other STEM subjects.**

**Fact:** Just like non-autistic people, autistic people can have their talents, strengths, and passions. While some autistic people are truly fascinated by maths and numbers, many others can be bad at maths but excel in arts, literature, or any other discipline.

**Myth: Autism is an illness.**

**Fact:** Autism is neither a disease nor an illness, but a lifelong developmental condition. The autistic brain is built differently from a non-autistic brain and works differently. It can be said that autistic people have a different operating system. Some autistic people view their autism merely as a difference, most others identify as disabled. It is up to each autistic person to define how they experience their condition.

**Myth: Autistic people lack feelings and empathy.**

**Fact:** Autistic people experience the same emotions as non-autistic people do. However, they can express their feelings differently, or their mimics and gestures might not correspond to the feelings (e.g. an autistic person can smile or laugh when sad or frightened). Additionally, a large percentage of autistic people have difficulties identifying their emotions.

**Myth: “We are all a little bit autistic.”**

**Fact:** Some behaviours and traits that are more prevalent among autistic people can also be observed, in varied degrees, in the general population. But having some of those traits (e.g. disliking social chit-chat or having a passion for a narrow subject) does not make a person “a little bit autistic”.

**Myth: Autism is overdiagnosed.**

**Fact:** When autism was first described in 1943, it was a rare condition. Currently, the World Health Organization estimates that 1-2% of people worldwide are on the autism spectrum. The increase in diagnoses is caused by a better understanding and recognition of autism and broadened diagnostic criteria. In many parts of the world and in many social groups, autism is still severely underdiagnosed.