

Emirates breaks 'Invisible Barriers' with Autism Travel Rehearsal at Rome Airport

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 04 March, 2026



Rome: With more than 100 million people worldwide living with autism and sensory sensitivities and nearly 78% avoiding travel due to anxiety around unfamiliar environments, air travel remains a daunting prospect for many families.

In a powerful step toward inclusive aviation, Emirates, in partnership with Aeroporti di Roma (ADR), recently hosted a special “Travel Rehearsal” at Rome Fiumicino Airport, helping children and young adults with autism build confidence before taking to the skies.

Originally pioneered at Emirates’ global hub in Dubai International Airport, the Travel Rehearsal programme has been progressively rolled out across key international gateways following its remarkable success.

At the Rome edition, 12 children and young adults accompanied by 16

caregivers were given the opportunity to experience the airport journey in a calm, supportive setting. Participants simulated the full passenger journey, including: check-in procedures, security screening, navigating terminal spaces, boarding processes. By recreating real-life airport scenarios, the initiative helps reduce stress and sensory overload while allowing families to anticipate potential challenges well before departure day.

Operational success of Travel Rehearsal goes far beyond passenger organisation, demanding the engagement of the entire airport community. This includes comprehensive training for airline staff, to ensure they can recognise and empathetically interact with people experiencing hidden disabilities

Comprehensive training equips airline and airport staff to: recognise hidden disabilities, respond with empathy and patience, provide tailored support where needed. This holistic approach ensures that inclusion is embedded at every stage of the passenger journey. For many families, the initiative represents far more than a trial run. It offers reassurance, dignity, and the possibility of travel without fear.

First introduced in Dubai in 2024 with 30 families, the initiative forms part of Emirates' "Accessible Travel for All" strategy. Since then, the programme has expanded to cities including Barcelona, Brisbane, Manila, Madrid, Toronto, and now Denpasar. To better support neurodiverse passengers and those with sensory sensitivities, more than 30,000 Emirates cabin crew and ground staff have completed specialised autism and sensory-awareness training.

-N