

PRESS RELEASE

“AUTISM, TRAVELLING THROUGH THE AIRPORT”: ENAC AND SACBO PRESENT THE SITUATION UPDATE A YEAR ON FROM THE ADOPTION OF THE PROJECT AT MILAN BERGAMO AIRPORT

One year on from Milan Bergamo Airport's joining the “**Autism, travelling through the airport**” project created by ENAC, in collaboration with Assaeroporti, airport-management companies and sector associations, the organisation and SACBO, the company managing the airport, presented the current situation regarding the project as of today, 8 November 2017.

The project, which was launched as a national “pilot project” at Bari Airport in November 2015, has been developed in collaboration with the non-profit organisation the Italian Foundation for Autism, and the non-profit organisation Federazione Fantasia. Its main aim is to help autistic people to take a flight in tranquillity, allowing them, through a process created by ENAC in coordination with the airport management companies, to be able to visit the airport in advance and to receive detailed information regarding the experience that they are due to go through, with the support of didactic materials published on the websites of the companies taking part in the initiative.

One year on from the application of the Autism Protocol at Milan Bergamo Airport (October 2016), a meeting was organised which was open to Social Services from the territorial organisations, to civil associations for the disabled and invalid, and to day-care communities and associations, in order to favour wide-ranging discussion on this theme.

The company managing Milan Bergamo Airport has adopted the protocol published on its own website (www.orioaeroporto.it) in the section dedicated to reduced mobility, accompanying it with a description of the so-called “social process”. The project “**Autism, travelling through the airport**” aims to provide a number of simple indications and elementary strategies aimed at those accompanying autistic children and adults in order to help them accept the stages of their journey in tranquillity. SACBO is prepared for the welcoming of autistic persons belonging to the category DPNA (disabled passenger with intellectual or developmental disability needing assistance) with dedicated and specialised structures, services and personnel. In order to provide suitable and personalised assistance appropriate to the needs of individuals with autism, SACBO has involved day centres, support structures and local organised associations which are capable of providing support to families and/or companions in preparatory and preliminary phases of air travel.

One year on from the adoption of the assistance protocol for autistic subjects, SACBO is completing training for all personnel with the support of expert psychologists, and is setting up a dedicated area inside the Amica Hall, which is equipped with aids and visual references to the social process.

Today's meeting saw the intervention of **Monica Piccirillo** Airport Director for ENAC Lombardy, **Fulvio Cavalleri** Vice President Assaeroporti, **Emilio Bellingardi** Director General of SACBO and **Aldo Vignati** Director of Quality and User Relations for SACBO.

The head of Airport Direction Lombardy for ENAC, **Monica Piccirillo**, highlighted the characteristics of the project developed in many national airports:

*"The project **"Autism, travelling through the airport"** was created two years ago with the 'pilot' project in Bari Airport, which was followed by many other airports, starting with Bergamo, which have harmonised the high social importance of the project with the needs of individual situations, also involving local organisations which deal with the problems associated with the autism spectrum. One of the main aims of ENAC is that of guaranteeing the right to mobility for all citizens, paying particular attention to the protection of disabled persons' rights. Thanks to the commitment of all of the subjects involved, the airport is ever more focused on integration with the territory and the promotion of initiatives aimed at improving passenger assistance and the quality of services. Within this scenario, familiarisation with the environment and the welcome to the airport are important instruments for assisting autistic subjects and their families, seeking to contribute to rendering the particular experience of air travel as tranquil as possible".*

Fulvio Cavalleri, Vice President of Assaeroporti, stated: *"Assaeroporti immediately lent its support to this highly important project organised by ENAC, which has also seen the involvement of SACBO, as is the case with various other airport management companies, with the aim of supplying an effective contribution to the improvement of the experience of travel for autistic persons. As well as Bergamo airport, which was the first to adopt the protocol after Bari - identified by ENAC as a pilot airport - the project has also seen the involvement and implementation of the provided activities by the airports of Bari, Olbia, Rome Fiumicino, Rome Ciampino, Milan Malpensa, Milan Linate, Naples and Venice. Having joined the programme, the airports of Florence, Pisa and Genoa are also completing the process.*

The quality of the service offered to passengers is a fundamental element for the development of the national airport system in an every-increasingly competitive market context. This is something well-understood by Italian airports which, through targeted infrastructure interventions, are investing their resources in the upgrading of services dedicated to Persons with Reduced Mobility (PRM)".

*"SACBO has welcomed the initiative launched by ENAC, in collaboration with Assaeroporti, considering it as added value to the ever-present undertaking to guarantee the best and most complete level of assistance to those who form part of the PRM category. The Protocol of Assistance for Autistic Subjects, adopted one year ago by our airport, has confirmed the importance of attention paid to more disadvantaged subjects, who must be allowed to take advantage of air travel - stated **Emilio Bellingardi** Director General of SACBO*

- The accompanying of subjects with autism, which begins with a process of familiarisation with the airport environment, is a demonstration of the openness, professionalism and sensitivity of the operational personnel and all of those who, for various reasons, form part of the process of welcoming passengers with reduced mobility and disabled passengers".

*"Since the introduction of the Protocol of Assistance for Autistic Subjects, we have received, on average, one subject per week, generally accompanied by one of their parents. The social process allows to assess the capacity of the subject to follow the various stages, from their arrival at the airport to their transfer to the apron for boarding - explained **Aldo Vignati**, Director of quality for airport services and user relations for SACBO. - Autistic subjects, almost always adolescents, do not always accept the entire experience, but the result is in any case a useful experience for the family, who are able to assess the possibility of flying or not. It is important to make families with autistic members aware of the opportunity, in a context which, with regards to Bergamo airport, will see over 45 thousand reduced-mobility*

passengers this year for national and international flights, 6% more than in 2016. It must be stressed - added Vignati - that the assistance procedures have been agreed with the main local associations representing disabled persons, certified according to the international ISO 9001 regulations and approved by ENAC, which regularly verifies the quality of the services provided. The assistance process takes into consideration all of the procedures and points of passage both inside and outside of the terminal, and is based in the Amica Hall, equipped with wide-screen televisions, monitors providing information on the state of flights, dedicated toilets and personnel permanently on call”.

Bergamo, 08 November 2017

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