

Italy – Best Practices Identified During the Embrace UAM Mobility

Holistic, Community-Based & Trauma-Sensitive Support for UAM



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Introduction

During the Embrace UAM mobility in Italy involving 5 professionals per partner – Urbanes Kulturteam, Zeuxis, Parsec, hosted by **Parsec in Rome**, participants visited several reception and support facilities for unaccompanied foreign minors, including:

- **Colombi Reception Center**
- **Felix Community**
- **Parsec's semi-independent housing facility**
- **Parsec's community-based projects**

The visits, exchanges with professionals, peer educators, intercultural mediators, and local stakeholders allowed the partnership to identify a number of highly transferable and practice-oriented best practices related to the reception, integration, and psychosocial support of unaccompanied minors. Rather than focusing only on accommodation, the Italian approach observed during the mobility demonstrated a broader understanding of integration as a long-term, relational, and community-based process.

Best Practice 1: Active Family Communication & Reduction of Emotional Pressure

One of the most innovative and human-centered practices identified during the mobility was the active communication maintained between professionals and the families of unaccompanied minors in their countries of origin. Professionals explained that many minors arrive carrying not only trauma related to migration, war, or displacement, but also strong emotional and financial pressure from family members abroad. Families often expect minors to quickly find employment and send financial support back home immediately after arrival in Europe. To address this issue, staff members regularly establish direct communication with families through:

- phone calls,
- online communication,
- updates about the well-being of minors,
- explanations of legal and educational procedures,
- clarification of asylum processes,
- and discussions regarding realistic timelines for integration and employment.

Professionals openly explain that:

- minors first need stability,
- legal procedures require time,

- language learning and education are priorities,
- and immediate employment is often impossible.

Why It Is Innovative

In many reception systems, communication focuses almost exclusively on the child inside the shelter. The Italian model recognises the broader transnational family dynamic and the psychological pressure that minors may experience due to expectations from relatives abroad.

By involving families:

- unrealistic expectations are reduced,
- minors experience less guilt and anxiety,
- emotional stability increases,
- and professionals can better support long-term integration pathways.

Transferable Value

This practice can be transferred to other contexts as a low-cost but high-impact psychosocial intervention contributing to:

- emotional stabilisation,
- improved trust,
- reduced stress,
- and stronger cooperation between minors and professionals.

Best Practice 2: Opening Reception Centers Toward the Local Community

A second highly important best practice identified during the mobility was the transition from isolated, closed reception structures toward open and community-connected support models. Professionals from the Felix Community explained that, in earlier years, shelters were highly secured and socially isolated from surrounding neighbourhoods. Local residents often had no contact with the minors living inside the facilities and therefore developed mistrust, fear, and stereotypes. In some cases, shelters reportedly experienced hostility and attacks because residents associated them with insecurity or criminality.

As a response, the organisation gradually changed its approach by:

- opening reception spaces to the local community,
- organising open-door activities,

- promoting interaction between minors and local residents,
- developing tandem initiatives where locals support minors with language learning, digital skills, and everyday integration,
- encouraging participation in neighbourhood activities,
- and strengthening relationships with nearby businesses and services.

An especially interesting example was the decision to intentionally cooperate with local bakeries, shops, and businesses instead of external suppliers. This transformed local actors into active stakeholders in the reception process.

Why It Is Innovative

The practice shifts the philosophy of reception: from protecting minors through separation toward promoting protection through inclusion and social connection. Instead of viewing local communities as passive observers, the model actively engages them as partners in integration.

Transferable Value

The practice contributes to:

- reduced prejudice,
- stronger social cohesion,
- increased local acceptance,
- safer environments,
- and more sustainable integration processes.

It also demonstrates how small everyday interactions can have long-term effects on social inclusion.

Best Practice 3: Peer Educators with Lived Experience

One of the strongest practices identified during the mobility was the integration of former unaccompanied minors into reception structures as peer educators and support staff. At the Felix Community, participants learned that some part-time staff members were themselves formerly accommodated in the reception facilities as unaccompanied minors.

These peer educators now:

- support communication with current residents,
- assist in educational and integration activities,
- help minors navigate daily challenges,

- participate in workshops and discussions,
- and serve as authentic role models.

Because they share similar migration experiences, they are often perceived by minors as more approachable and trustworthy than traditional authority figures.

Professionals explained that peer educators:

- can communicate through shared experience,
- understand emotional realities more directly,
- and often have stronger credibility among minors.

Why It Is Innovative

The approach transforms former beneficiaries into active actors within the support system.

It promotes:

- empowerment,
- participation,
- continuity,
- and representation.

Rather than seeing unaccompanied minors only as recipients of care, the system recognises their future potential as contributors and community actors.

Transferable Value

This practice can support:

- stronger trust-building,
- increased participation,
- improved communication,
- reduced conflict,
- and more empowering reception environments.

It also offers positive long-term integration narratives for newly arrived minors.

Best Practice 4: Step-by-Step Transition Toward Autonomy

Another highly transferable best practice identified in Italy was the existence of gradual transition pathways from protected reception toward independent adulthood.

Participants visited semi-independent housing facilities designed for:

- young people with vulnerabilities,
- minors requiring additional psychosocial support,
- and youth pursuing educational or tertiary pathways.

Professionals explained that turning 18 should not automatically mean the abrupt end of support structures. Instead, the Italian model observed during the mobility promotes:

- gradual autonomy,
- individual transition planning,
- life-skills development,
- educational continuation,
- vocational orientation,
- and supported independent living.

Some young people are allowed to remain in supportive accommodation until the age of 21, especially when:

- they continue education,
- require additional stability,
- or remain in vulnerable situations.

Why It Is Innovative

Many reception systems create a sharp institutional break at adulthood, often exposing young people to sudden instability. The Italian approach recognises that integration is a long-term developmental process requiring continuity and flexibility.

Transferable Value

The practice contributes to:

- reduced risks of homelessness and exclusion,
- stronger educational continuity,
- improved preparation for adulthood,
- increased self-confidence,
- and more sustainable long-term integration outcomes.

Best Practice 5: Multidisciplinary & Holistic Reception Management

The reception facilities visited in Italy combined multiple dimensions of support within coordinated structures, including:

- accommodation,
- psychosocial care,
- legal guidance,
- intercultural mediation,
- educational support,
- vocational orientation,
- healthcare access,
- and community integration.

Professionals from different backgrounds worked closely together:

- educators,
- psychologists,
- social workers,
- intercultural mediators,
- legal experts,
- and integration staff.

The approach ensured that minors were not treated only through isolated interventions, but through individualised and interconnected support pathways.

Why It Is Innovative

The model avoids fragmentation between services and instead promotes coordinated care around the actual needs of the young person. It reflects a rights-based and person-centered understanding of reception.

Transferable Value

This practice can inspire:

- stronger interdisciplinary cooperation,
- more efficient support systems,
- improved continuity of care,
- and more comprehensive integration strategies for unaccompanied minors.