

ENVITER 2026 CONFERENCE

“Future-Proof Care: Innovation and Sustainability in Support for People with Visual Impairment — Balancing quality, accessibility and affordability in a changing world.”

Conference Program and Abstracts

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Theme 1: Person-Centred Care

1. “Futureproof School – Living in the present with one foot in the past and the other in the future”

by Agnes Somorjai, BSB Hungary, Eszterhazy Karoly Catholic University Hungary

The study explores the issue of sustainable service provision in the context of evolving needs in the care of children with visual impairments and the corresponding institutional responses. Advances in medical science, together with the expansion of inclusive education, have resulted in a student population characterized by increasingly complex and heterogeneous needs, thereby necessitating a fundamental reconsideration of both the content and organization of services.

Drawing on the practice of a comprehensive special education institution, the 200-year-old School for the Blind in Budapest, the paper illustrates how differentiated, needs-based service organization, the promotion of autonomy, and the systematic sharing of professional knowledge have contributed—and continue to contribute—to the realization of sustainability. Formulates proposals for the transformation strategy of institutions to operate more efficiently for children with complex disabilities.

The study argues that sustainability should not be understood solely in economic terms; rather, it constitutes a dynamic process of balancing quality, accessibility, and resource efficiency. Furthermore, it underscores the pivotal role of strengthened network collaborations in the development of a service system capable of long-term viability.

The conclusions emphasize that future-oriented and resilient operation is grounded in continuous professional reflection, adaptive capacity, and institutional resilience.

2. “Moving beyond rhetoric to provide robust, person-centred care: evaluating services through a human rights lens”

by James Forbes, ChildVision, Ireland

‘The decent society is one in which its institutions do not humiliate people.’ Avishai Margalit *The Decent Society* (Harvard University Press, 1996). As a far-right resurgence occurs across what was once thought to be the inherently liberal West, we see colour, ethnicity, sexual identity, gender and religion all becoming, again, sites of discrimination and injustice. As toxic debates flare everywhere, we witness too an increase in hate crime against people with disabilities—including against people with vision impairment—reminding that this is, perhaps, a dangerous time to fall outside a perceived or imposed norm, a dangerous time to be different. Yet, this is also, supposedly, the era of human rights, the era of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) (CRPD).

Recognising the CRPD as a paradigm shift that turns on the acknowledgement of disability as simply part of human diversity, the Convention’s core aim is to promote respect for the

inherent dignity, equality and individual autonomy of disabled people. But the CRPD is also and perhaps above all an invitation to solidarity, a call to the wider society and its institutions to sustain disabled people's freedom to live the lives of their choosing by providing appropriate social supports.

Thinking about the organisations that comprise ENVITER as institutions which are inherently powerful in the lives of people with vision impairment, this proposed presentation seeks to challenge the basis and use of that power.

The presentation will argue that all institutions have to fight against their natural tendency to position their institutional interests ahead of the people with whom or in whose name they work, suggesting that even in the midst of growing far-right and populist forces the goal must be to meaningfully commit to human rights and the practices of freedom. In particular, the presentation will call on ENVITER organisations to place the FREDA principles - fairness, respect, equality, dignity and autonomy - at the heart of their individual and collective reflection, inviting the use of these principles to assess how well they are doing in modelling the kind of wider social solidarity the CRPD must achieve if it is to aid vision impaired people and the wider disabled community finally achieve and robustly hold membership in that decent society to which we all aspire.

3. “Moving toward Stepped Care at Royal Visio“

by Mark Lanting & Jolien Makkinga, Visio, The Netherlands

Across the visual-impairment sector, organisations face growing pressure to deliver accessible, high-quality services while maintaining sustainability. At Visio, we see stepped care as a promising approach for addressing these challenges. Stepped care enables us to provide only the care that is needed (no more, no less) while strengthening prevention, self-reliance, and efficient use of specialist expertise.

In this presentation, we will outline why Visio is moving toward a stepped-care model, which challenges we encounter in this transition, and how this approach supports future-proof service delivery across all target groups. We will illustrate this movement with two concrete examples (depending on time available, we can cover both):

1. The Visio Knowledge Portal, which offers accessible, early information to clients, families, referrers, and professionals.
2. Generic care modules for people with MS, which help us deliver lighter, more consistent support where possible and reserve specialised care for when it is truly needed.

Together, these examples show how stepped care can increase autonomy, improve collaboration across the care chain, and contribute to sustainable, proportional support for people with visual impairment.

4. “Promoting Inclusion Through Shared Living“

by Christing Richardson, ChildVision, Ireland

An individual’s sense of belonging is a fundamental human need, contributing to their sense of identity, their well being and overall quality of life. However, people with disabilities often experience social exclusion, isolation and barriers to full participation in community life leading to reduced opportunities for social interaction and feeling accepted by and connected to others.

This presentation aims to explore the perspective of inclusion from the viewpoint of a person with a visual impairment and, specifically, how an experience of shared and supported living - with those who have a similar experience of visual impairment- can foster that sense of belonging, identity, well-being and overall quality of life.

The presentation will look beyond policy and physical access, to the persons feelings -those of acceptance, being understood and being valued within a shared community. For many people with a visual impairment, mainstream environments can sometimes reinforce feelings of difference. In contrast, shared living settings with others who have similar disabilities can provide a strong sense of safety and belonging. In these environments, individuals often feel more comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgement.

Experiencing daily life alongside others with similar challenges fosters friendship, confidence, encourages shared learning, and builds a collective understanding of individual needs. Importantly, this supportive foundation can equip people with the confidence and skills needed to engage fully and independently within the wider community.

This presentation will promote a shared living model by highlighting its positive impact. It will draw on research, statistical evidence and the real-life experiences from those who attend or have attended ChildVision’s residential services.

Theme 2: Technology and AI

5. “From Compliance to Competitive Advantage: The European Accessibility Act, Harmonised Standards, and the Strategic Role of Accessible EU”

by Klaus Höckner, Hilfsgemeinschaft – Austria

The European Accessibility Act (EAA) marks a fundamental evolution in the European regulatory landscape by establishing accessibility as a binding requirement for a wide range of products and services, including ICT, financial services, transport, and e-commerce. This presentation explores how harmonised European standards—most notably EN 301 549 and EN 17161—operationalise the directive by translating legal provisions into measurable technical and organisational requirements.

The paper further investigates the AccessibleEU initiative as a strategic implementation mechanism that supports Member States and market actors through knowledge transfer, capacity building, and the dissemination of good practices. Particular focus is placed on the interaction between regulation, standardisation, and market forces, illustrating how accessibility is increasingly positioned as a driver of innovation, expanded customer reach, and long-term economic resilience, especially in ageing and digitally transforming societies.

In addition, the presentation addresses critical organisational challenges such as procurement alignment, governance structures, and early integration of accessibility into product development lifecycles. It argues that organisations shifting from reactive compliance toward strategic accessibility leadership will be better positioned to navigate regulatory complexity while unlocking new market opportunities.

Participants will gain a structured understanding of the European accessibility ecosystem and actionable insights for leveraging the EAA not only as a compliance obligation but as a catalyst for sustainable and inclusive growth.

6. “AI as a subject in vocational training for visually impaired people. Areas of application”, by Jürgen Hüllen, BFW Düren – Germany

Artificial Intelligence is no longer a distant promise—it is a practical, everyday tool that can significantly enhance participation, independence, and employability for people with visual impairments. This presentation explores how AI is becoming a powerful subject within vocational training, opening new pathways for learning and professional integration. Participants will gain insight into real-world applications of AI in dedicated apps and smart

glasses that support scene analysis, text-to-speech, object recognition, and orientation in everyday environments.

Beyond assistance, AI also enables creative and analytical empowerment: visually impaired learners can analyse and create graphics using accessible AI tools, opening doors to design-related tasks and data interpretation that were previously difficult to access. AI-supported writing tools further facilitate the creation of professional documents, such as job applications and business correspondence, strengthening confidence and autonomy in vocational contexts.

The presentation also highlights the growing importance of AI competences in light of the EU AI Act (EU) 2024/1689, which requires adequate skills and responsible use of AI in business environments. Drawing on initial experiences from training courses developed within the ERASMUS+ project “Visually Impaired Go for AI,” we share encouraging experiences: learners show high motivation, strong interest, and tangible learning progress. AI, when taught thoughtfully, can become a cornerstone of inclusive vocational education.

7. “Vigo4AI Visually Impaired go for Artificial Intelligence”

by Dr Irene Sudy, Hilfsgemeinschaft – Austria

The VIGO4AI (Visually Impaired go for Artificial Intelligence) project is an Erasmus+ funded initiative aimed at empowering visually impaired and blind individuals by enhancing their digital competencies through the use of artificial intelligence (AI).

Running from 2024 to 2026, the project brings together a consortium of European partners with expertise in accessibility, education, and assistive technologies. Its central mission is to ensure that people with visual impairments are not excluded from the rapidly evolving AI-driven digital landscape, but instead are equipped with the skills and tools necessary for active participation in both social and professional contexts. To achieve this goal, VIGO4AI develops accessible curricula, tutorials and teaching materials specifically tailored to the needs of visually impaired learners and their educators. The project focuses on three key areas: the use of AI-supported assistive technologies, the effective application of generative AI tools for text and image creation, and the development of AI-based chatbots using user-friendly platforms. These learning modules are complemented by pilot training courses for educators, who act as multipliers by transferring their knowledge to a broader audience as well as by pilot training courses for visually impaired people to promote their digital skills. Additionally, all materials are made available as e-learning modules in multiple languages to ensure wide accessibility and long term impact.

Ultimately, the VIGO4AI project seeks to promote inclusion, innovation, and digital literacy by enabling visually impaired individuals to confidently engage with AI technologies in their daily lives. By fostering both technical skills and educational capacity, the initiative contributes to a more inclusive digital future in which artificial intelligence serves as a tool for empowerment rather than a barrier.

8. “EMVI app”

by Henri de Vroey, EMVI – Belgium

EMVI, a revolutionary hands-free application, stands as the pioneering all-in-one solution for individuals with visual impairments. This AI visual assistant leverages the power of artificial intelligence (AI) to seamlessly connect users with their environment. By utilizing the camera on the user's mobile device, EMVI offers comprehensive visual support, while enabling the user to experience a more profound and meaningful connection with the environment and others. The application boasts a rich set of features, including scene description, scene understanding, and advanced object and text recognition. Beyond these capabilities, EMVI also possesses a unique ability to interpret emotions. It can discern emotional cues from various sources, including facial expressions, body language, and even artistic pieces. This emotional intelligence adds a nuanced layer to the user experience, making EMVI a comprehensive and versatile tool for individuals with visual impairments. EMVI's versatility empowers users in various aspects of their lives, from locating lost items and reading written text to recognizing emotions and aiding in navigation. It excels at tasks such as identifying bus numbers, street names, house numbers, and even providing clear guidance, offering a comprehensive and inclusive solution for the visually impaired community.

Theme 3: Rehabilitation

9. “From Instructions to Understanding, Teaching Navigation Through Segmentation – A Practical Framework”

by Þorkell J. Steindal, NIFBVID – Iceland

This presentation introduces a structured methodology for teaching orientation and mobility (O&M) through route segmentation and multi-format information delivery. The approach is grounded in lived experience as a blind traveller and instructor and is informed by contemporary understanding of how the nervous system learns—by reducing uncertainty through prediction and confirmation.

Traditional route instruction often presents information in large, continuous sequences, which can lead to cognitive overload, inconsistent learning, and high repetition demands. In contrast, this method divides routes into small, clearly defined segments. Each segment includes a start point, end point, movement description, and sensory confirmation cues (auditory and tactile). This structure reduces cognitive load and allows the learner to focus on one manageable unit at a time.

A key component of the methodology is brief pre-rehearsal of each segment, enabling the learner to form a prediction before movement begins. As the learner encounters confirmation points along the route, these predictions are validated, creating small, repeated successes. These “micro-confirmations” reinforce learning, build confidence, and increase engagement.

The presentation also demonstrates how a single raw audio recording of a route can be transformed into structured training materials, including text, audio, and AI-supported practice formats. This enables independent repetition, pre-arrival familiarization, and scalable instruction.

Importantly, the structure is not the end goal but a scaffold. As skill develops, the segmented process becomes automatic and integrated, supporting fluid, confident navigation. This approach aligns instructional practice with how humans naturally acquire complex skills, ultimately promoting independence

10. “Inpatient Ophthalmological Rehabilitation in Germany: A Holistic, Interdisciplinary Approach”

by Prof Dr habil. Kathleen S Kunert, Dr-Ing. Oliver Kolbe, Henneberg Rehaklinik Masserberg – Germany

Visual impairment profoundly affects quality of life. Germany's only specialised inpatient clinic for ophthalmological rehabilitation offers a sustainable, person-centred model of care —

addressing not just clinical needs but also individual participation in daily, social, and professional life.

A multi-professional team operates under ophthalmological guidance, delivering care grounded in SGB IV §42 and current case law. The programme is holistic, multimodal, and interdisciplinary, targeting both the impairment of visual functions and its broader impact on activity and participation. Services include comprehensive medical care, visual aid provision, low-vision counselling, tailored visual and balance training, mobility support, workplace adjustments, and psychological and socio-legal guidance.

By reserving specialist inpatient support for those who truly need it and aligning services with individual rehabilitation goals, this model exemplifies the principle of providing the right care at the right time. Funding and access are determined by individual insurance status and rehabilitation needs, ensuring equitable access to specialist services. This approach demonstrates how high-quality, accessible ophthalmological rehabilitation can be delivered sustainably within existing legal and financial frameworks.

11. **“Find the Puzzle – Coping with Vision Loss after Brain Injury”**

by Estella Björnsson, Sjónstöðin(IS) Fræðslsetrið Starfsmennt (IS), Rapture-Games (ESP), Blindensorg Licht En Liefde(BE), Berufsförderungswerk Halle(GE)

Vision loss after acquired brain injury (ABI) often goes unrecognized by healthcare providers due to limited awareness, leaving many (older) adults without the support they need. The *Find the Puzzle – Coping with Vision loss after Brain Injury* Erasmus+ project (2025–2027) aims to address this gap by raising awareness amongst care providers and pointing towards resources and practices that explicitly support the rehabilitation and habilitation of people experiencing vision loss due to ABI.

The project has two main objectives. First, it will map and analyse existing rehabilitation programs that support individuals with vision loss following ABI. Second, it will develop open-access training materials to ensure that care professionals, caregivers, and policymakers are better equipped to provide access to essential support services. These materials will be designed to be integrated into existing professional development frameworks. In addition, the project will create a dissemination platform to share insights and resources, supporting ongoing development in vision-related rehabilitation for people with ABI-related vision loss.

The Enviter network will play a key role by helping to identify existing programs, initiatives, and (best) practices. At the meeting in Dublin (Apr. 2026) members will have an opportunity to actively engage. Enviter members are considered well positioned to help raise awareness and promote the project outcomes and dissemination resources within the broader field of visual rehabilitation.

Theme 4: Media Adaptations

12. **“Support for Families of Children with Cerebral Visual Impairment in Serbia: Use of Adapted Materials and Development of a Support Network”**

by Valentina Martać, Vesna Vučinić, Branka Jablan, Videti Jasno – Serbia

Cortical/Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI) is considered the leading cause of visual impairment in children in developed countries. In Serbia, early detection, organized family support, and access to adapted materials for children with CVI are still in the early stages. As part of ongoing efforts to improve the systemic support for people with CVI, the association *Videti jasno* - CVI Serbia was established on the initiative of families of children with CVI, with support from a group of TVIs. Its main goal is to provide timely support to families, raise awareness of the specific characteristics of CVI, and promote understanding of the needs and potential of individuals with CVI.

Within the association, a pilot project has been launched as one of the first organized support models for this population in Serbia. It includes home visits, assessment of visual functioning in the child's natural environment, and creation of individualized materials for vision (re)habilitation and developmental support. A key component is building a family database and connecting families to exchange experiences, adapted materials, and information, creating a sustainable support network in Serbia.

13. **“Road2Braille”**

by Laurence Barrier, CRDV – France

This project aims to strengthen early Braille education for children aged 0–6 by developing structured and practical learning materials that can be used across home, school, and specialized educational settings. By providing accessible resources tailored to early childhood development, the initiative supports educators and parents in guiding the first steps of Braille literacy. The project promotes continuity in learning environments, ensuring that children experience consistent and supportive Braille exposure both at home and in educational institutions.

Through collaboration among European partners, the project encourages knowledge exchange and the sharing of effective practices in inclusive education. The developed materials will be tested and refined to ensure their usability and pedagogical value, ultimately enhancing teaching approaches and supporting the early literacy development of visually impaired children. To ensure sustainability and broad accessibility, the project will also create a dedicated webpage and disseminate its outcomes through established networks. By strengthening cooperation and providing durable educational resources, the project contributes to more inclusive and accessible learning pathways for young visually impaired learners across Europe.

14. **“Erasmus Project to Create a Bilingual Book on Emotions”**

by Aideen Brady, Aisling McDonagh, Triona Keane, Astric De Foucaud, Louise Balon,
ChildVision – Ireland

Emotional literacy is a foundational component of inclusive education. Children feel big emotions, but they do not always have the words or awareness to explain them. The ability to recognise, understand, and express emotions supports children’s social participation, self-regulation, empathy, and sense of belonging within their learning communities. This is especially true for children with visual impairments but access to emotional learning resources is often limited.

Understanding their own feelings helps children recognise and respond to emotions in others, whilst also helping them build compassion, cooperation, and community. With this in mind, this Erasmus-supported collaboration between ChildVision and INJA addresses this gap through the co-creation of a bilingual tactile book focused on emotions.

Tactile books are incredibly valuable for blind and low-vision children because they support early literacy, cognitive development, and independent exploration in ways that standard print books cannot.

The bilingual nature of the book broadens its inclusivity, supporting linguistic diversity and enabling shared reading experiences across different language communities. This dual-language approach also aligns with Erasmus priorities of cross-cultural collaboration and knowledge exchange.

We will demonstrate the evolution of the book, highlighting the thought processes and design considerations behind each page. Our aim is to make it as interactive as possible, promoting independent use and ensuring accessibility.

15. **“TouchnMatch – Addressing Barriers for VI in fashion sector”**

by Dr Irene Sudy, Hilfsgemeinschaft – Austria

Touch’n Match, a project funded by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency and involving a cross-border consortium from Romania, Poland and Austria, addresses barriers for blind and visually impaired individuals in the fashion sector. This sector is often defined by aesthetics, sight, and visual norms. This exclusion reflects a broader structural gap: the lack of tools, practices, and platforms that allow blind individuals to participate fully, creatively, and independently in cultural life. The project Touch ’n Match fills this gap through the co-creation, testing, and public showcasing of an AI-powered mobile application that makes fashion exploration and design accessible to people who are blind or visually impaired. The app, developed by Asociația Alfabetul Scripor and refined with users across three countries, translates colours, textures, and outfit logic into multisensory experiences, combining tactile feedback, audio descriptions, and the internationally recognised Scripor tactile colour alphabet. These functionalities are complemented by co-creation workshops and a public inclusive fashion show at Transilvania Fashion Festival, where blind participants act as stylists, models, and creative contributors.