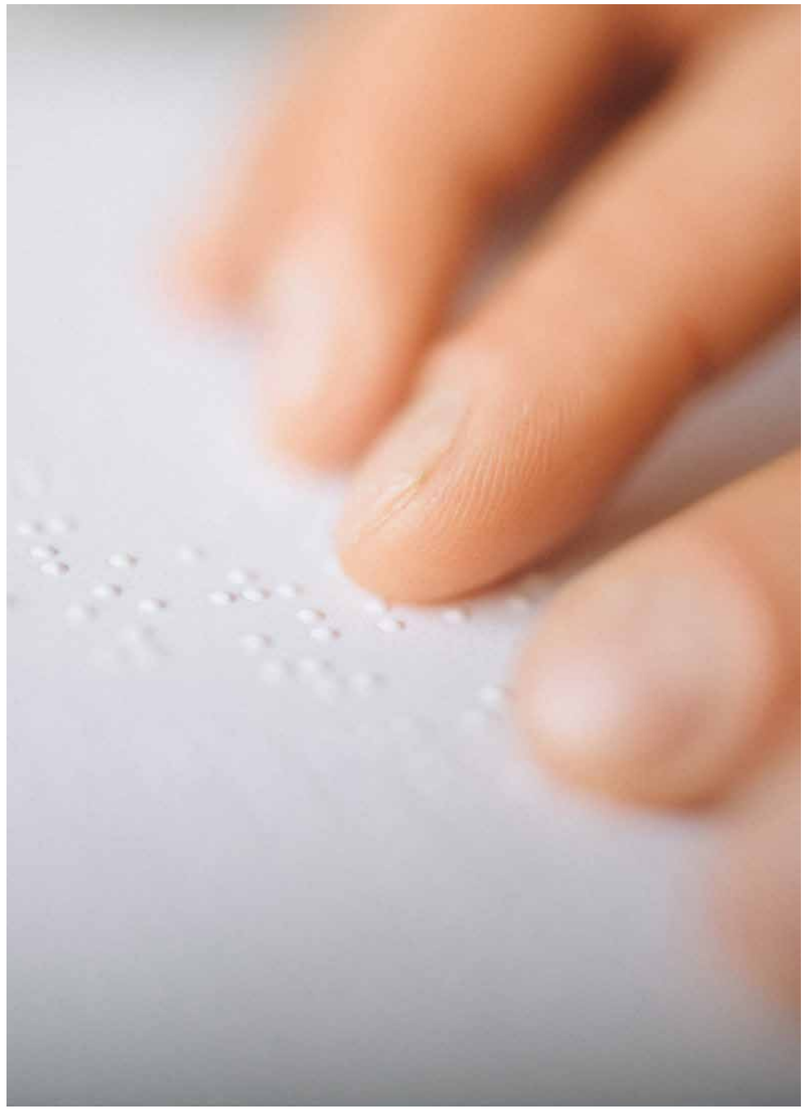
ENVITER

European Network for Vision Impairment
Training Education & Research

Building a European Network

More than Twenty Years of History, Cooperation and Change

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Foreword by the President



Inge Jansen

BFW Düren, Germany

As President of **ENVITER**, I am honoured to reflect on our journey and to share our vision for the future of training, education and research in the field of visual impairment across Europe. **ENVITER** was born out of a shared determination by service-providers, educators and researchers to improve access, quality and inclusion for visually impaired people. From our earliest days, the network has stood for cooperation: exchanging knowledge across national boundaries, building bridges between practice and evidence, and amplifying the voices of learners themselves.

Over the years, **ENVITER** has grown into a dynamic European forum where best-practices are shared, collaborative projects are launched and emerging research is integrated into daily service-delivery. We have supported lifelong learning pathways, promoted accessibility in education and training, and worked to reduce duplication of effort by combining our collective insights.

Looking ahead, we are committed to steering ENVITER into its next phase: one in which digital technologies, user-centred design and cross-sector partnerships become even more central. Together, we will continue to contribute so that every person with a vision impairment can learn, grow and participate fully in society.

Our network remains a platform of mutual support and ambition — because only by working together we can achieve lasting, inclusive change.

Aim of the Network



ENVITER develops and implements standards and methodologies of professional practice which enable the continuing inclusion of people with visual impairments within their own communities.

ENVITER is aware of growing European Unification and of the necessity for co-operation on a permanent basis within the EU in order to promote these activities.

Core Objectives

- Provide a network for service providers working in the field of lifelong learning with and on behalf of people with visual impairments.
- Provide a European forum for the exchange of knowledge, expertise and experience of the members of this network.
- Promote and influence good practice in the field of services for people with vision impairment.
- Jointly to conduct and support research, training and dissemination of evidence based learning directed towards improving access to lifelong learning and other services for people with visual impairments.
- Share expertise and experience in a peer reviewed setting in order to promote the development of services and the accompanying best practices, thereby minimising duplication of resource expenditure on service development.

Members

ENVITER
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41 Network Members	22 Countries	Status September 2026

The road of ENVITER

“ From Düren’s perspective, the origins of ENVITER go back to the founding managing director of BFW Düren: Siegfried Wiedenlübbert. He advised me, as his successor, to establish contact with Het Loo Erf in Apeldoorn and with Piet Pelikaan and Jaap Witfliet. A visit revealed that we shared many common ideas about the future of vocational rehabilitation for blind and visually impaired people, and there was also good chemistry between us: a relationship of mutual trust was beginning to form.

Shortly before that, in parallel with my role as managing director at BFW Düren, I had provisionally taken over the Chair of “Vocational Rehabilitation” at RWTH Aachen University. The Dean, Prof. Dr. Dieter Heller, found the idea of a meeting about research cooperation with the colleagues in Apeldoorn exciting. Also attending were Prof. Dr. Peter Riedel, the managing director of BFW Cologne, and from BFW Düren, Jürgen Hüllen. Initially, the idea for implementation had a Euroregional focus. Meetings were held with colleagues from the universities of Lille and Maastricht. However, this group ultimately failed due to the differing orientations of the institutions and universities involved.

At Apeldoorn and BFW Düren, projects for blind and visually impaired people were the main focus. This led to BFW Cologne withdrawing, but they brought to the table the experienced BBRZ Linz from Austria, which ran a rehabilitation centre for visually impaired people in Graz—this is how Konrad Mager joined. Jaap and Piet, who left Visio, and his successor Herman Philipsen had contacts in France: Angers (Francis Guiteau and Phillip Belseur), Plénée-Jugon (Loïc Haffray) and Lille (Dominic Wiart), as well as in Denmark (Hellerup, with Birgit Kähler).

There was great interest in closer cooperation, since, for example, in the area of technology (such as the transition from DOS to Windows), similar challenges in vocational rehabilitation for blind and visually impaired people existed across borders. The now-legendary dinner at the Chinese restaurant Fong Cheng, which was also attended by Teijo Venema, the director of the Dutch institution Sonneheerdt, marked the beginning and sealed the cooperation.
Thus, visionaries and pragmatists came together. However, the secret to continued success was this: without Jürgen, Jaap, Phillip, and later Ulf, we would probably have reverted to purely bilateral relationships.

The road of ENVITER

The group grew: Francis had contacts in Poland, in Kraków (Mieczyslaw Kozlowski). Belgium, with Brussels (Eddy DeLandtsheer), and England, with Hereford (Chris Stevenson), joined as additional partners, as did BFW Halle from Germany, with Robert Bonan and Dr. Ulf Gläser, who in turn had connections to the National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) and thus to Blaithin Galagher.

*Coordinating this circle required a common platform, and so the **European Council of Service Providers of Institutes for Vision Impaired Persons (ECSerProVIP)** was founded. One year later, in Linz, the articles of association for cooperation were signed. The first president was Herman.*

*The collaboration with Mr. Siegers' agency in Brussels aimed to establish joint lobbying efforts and to become involved earlier in decision-making processes regarding the promotion of participation for visually impaired people at the European level. Mr. Siegers from the agency recommended early on that we adopt a more concise name. We agreed and accepted Francis's offer: **ENVITER** was registered as an association in France.*

The 11th General Meeting, still under the name ECSerProVIP, took place in Düren from 8–11 March 2005, and the 12th, from 21–23 September 2005 in Angers, was the first ENVITER General Meeting.

Beyond the professional and formal aspects, there were many anecdotes and personal encounters that led to deep understanding, respect, and friendships. At ENVITER's 10th anniversary in 2011, held in Berlin at the Federal Ministry of Labour, the State Secretary remarked:

"This kind of cross-border collaboration in working with people with disabilities is irreplaceable."

Indeed, that statement still holds true today."



Hans-Joachim Zeißig
BFW Düren

The road of ENVITER

ENVITER
European Network for Vision Impairment Training Education & Research

1998 2000



ADAPT and Horizon projects “Let‘s Vitalize” and “Umbrella”

(1999 project meeting “Umbrella”, in Halle-Germany)

2000



Negotiations about establishing a Network

6 founding members, 4 countries

2001



Foundation of the Network ECSerProVIp

Founding members:

- Birgit Kähler, IBOS - Denmark
- Loic Haffray, Plenee Jugon - France
- Dominique Wiart, Voir Ensemble - France
- Hans-Joachim Zeißig, BFW - Germany
- Francis Guiteau, Institut Montéclair - France
- Rob Meijer, Het Loo Erf - The Netherlands

The road of ENVITER

“First official announcement about the foundation of the Network, in 2001”

A new network of directors of Institutes of Rehabilitation, Vocational Training and Employment of Persons with Visual Impairment.

During the past few years an inspiring collaboration has grown among several European institutes for the visually impaired. This collaboration was mostly based on European projects subsidised by the European Community (for instance Umbrella).

Because of the project-based collaboration there was no guarantee for continuity. We thought it necessary to establish continuity in the collaboration by founding a Council for Directors of European Institutes for rehabilitation, vocational training and employment of the visually impaired.

After the founding conference in Het Loo Erf (Apeldoorn, Netherlands) ECSerProVip was established in Linz (Austria) in March 2001. The network is called: ECSerProVIp. This means: European Council of Service providers for Visually Impaired persons, especially within the EU.

The aim of this council is to promote the activities of these institutes in their work to improve the position of visually impaired persons. ECSerProVip is aware of the growing European unification and the necessity of co-operation on a permanent basis within the EU. One of the most important objectives of the Council is selecting and discussing subjects for necessary collaboration among the institutes and finding financial resources for the realisation of the projects. At this very moment we are working on a project to develop a European qualification model for professionals in our institutes working with visually impaired persons to create a qualification standard within the partner institutes.

The partner institutes are located in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany and the Netherlands.
We meet twice a year in one of the participants’ institutes.

The Council has a board with a president (Rob Meijer, Het Loo Erf, Netherlands), vice president (Hans Joachim Zeißig, BFW Düren, Germany) and a treasurer (Francis Guiteau, Institut Monteclair, France).
Every year two new institutes will be admitted based on an established procedure.

The Council is willing to have close co-operation with relevant European organisations such as EBU, EASPD and naturally ICEVI.

The road of ENVITER

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2005

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Renaming of the Network to ENVITER

2011



10th Anniversary Berlin, Germany

in the rooms of the Federal Ministry of Labour and the "German parliamentary Society"

17 members,
13 countries

2013



Strasbourg EUNESIS Conference, France

"Developing Networks:
Celebrating Progress and Embracing the Future"

The road of ENVITER

ENVITER
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2019

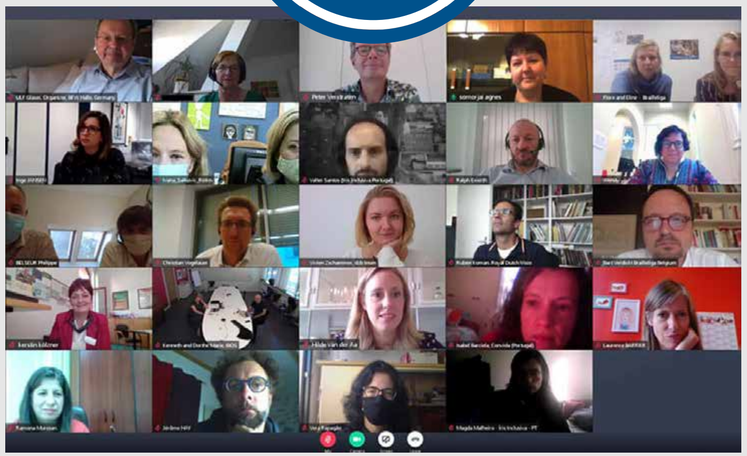


First Blue Sky Meeting

New Enviter Logo

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2020



Online Conference
Due to COVID

“Digitisation - challenge and opportunity for the blind.”

2022



20th Anniversary
GM, Conference Townhall of Angers, France
“Positive side effects of covid on inclusion of VI people” – Good Practices, Opportunities, Future Plans, Takeaways”

New ENVITER Website

First Training Event, Düren, Germany
“The production of tactile teaching materials for blind students using 3D printing”

The road of ENVITER

The years 2019–2022 marked a remarkable and defining phase in ENVITER's history. When the world came to a sudden standstill during the COVID-19 pandemic, the network once again proved to be a strong and essential connector between organisations across Europe. The rapid shift to remote collaboration strengthened the ties within the network and demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of its members.

In this context, ENVITER launched its first series of online webinars, which quickly grew into a valued, recurring part of the network's activities. What began as a practical response to travel restrictions soon evolved into a sustainable and accessible way to exchange knowledge and connect experts across countries. The ENVITER 2020 Online Conference, "Digitalization – Challenge and Opportunity for the Blind", set the tone for the years that followed. Subsequent webinars explored topics such as Augmentative and Alternative Communication for VIP, Distance Learning and Training for Visually Impaired People, and other issues closely linked to the educational and social challenges of the pandemic.

As the series expanded, so did its thematic reach. Webinars such as Visual Impairment and Serious Mental Illness: a Double Burden?, Obstacle Detection With Smart Shoes, CVI in the picture, and the introduction of the ICF Core Set for Vision Loss illustrated ENVITER's role as a driver of professional development, innovation, and cross-border knowledge exchange during a time when physical meetings were limited or impossible.

By 2025, the webinars have become a fully established activity within the network. That year alone, ENVITER organised eight webinars that attracted more than 200 participants, reflecting both the growing interest in the topics addressed and the increasing visibility of the network. To ensure long-term accessibility and wider outreach, ENVITER maintains an active YouTube channel, enabling interested professionals, students, and partners to watch all webinars at any time — extending the impact far beyond the live sessions.

Throughout this period, one thing became clear: even in times of crisis, ENVITER's sense of community remained stronger than ever. The experience of 2019–2022 demonstrated the network's ability to adapt swiftly, embrace digital forms of cooperation, and continue bringing together professionals from across Europe in pursuit of a shared mission: improving opportunities, services and participation for people with visual impairments.

The road of ENVITER

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2023

European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities

ENVITER, in cooperation with HIPEN, becomes a member of EASPD

2025



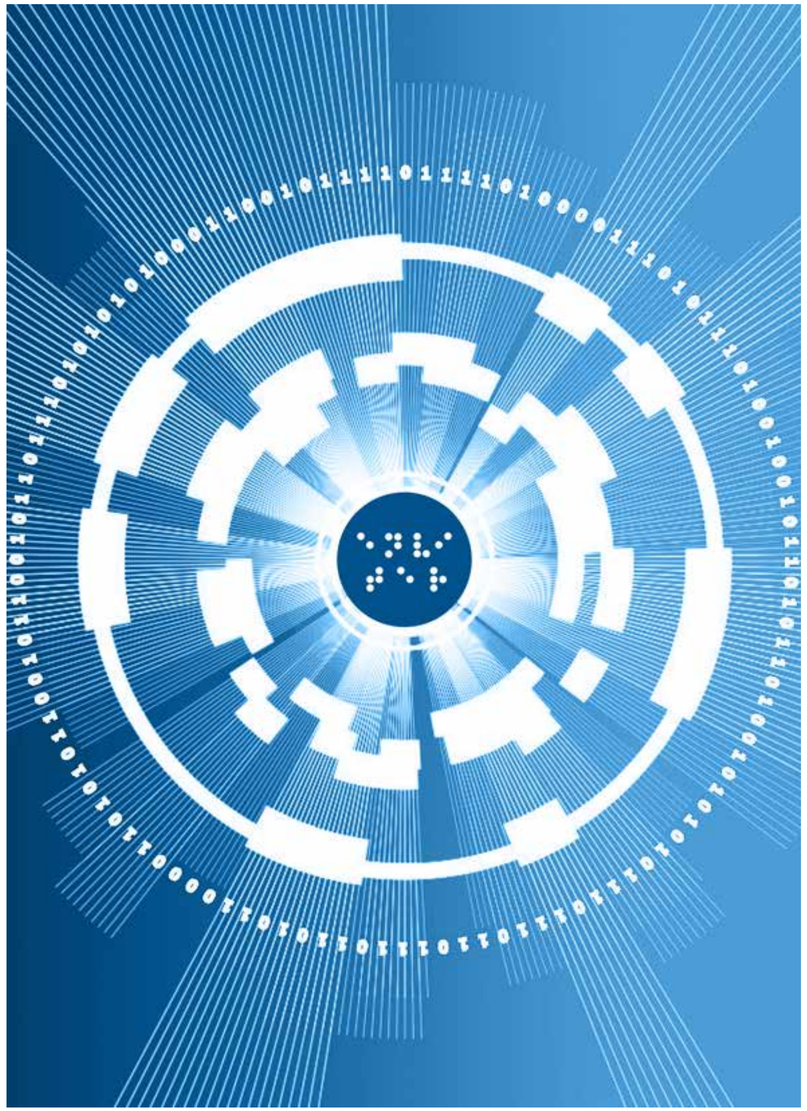
Super Conference in the European Parliament – “New Horizons for our Networks…”, gathering ENVITER, HIPEN and RFDSL.

37 members,
22 countries

2026

More to come!

Eyes to the future



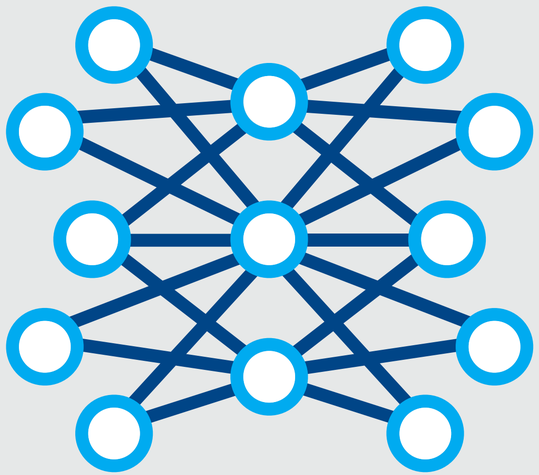
Eyes to the future

Workers from Europe join in ENVITER
For low vision people and those who are blind
Trying to make this world a bit brighter
With eyes to the future, equality in mind

Listening to voices of others who know
Experience and practice to eagerly share
That's how professionals step by step grow
Then – added with love – how they provide care

Peter Verstraten (7 February 2024)

What being a Member means



Network Members

Membership in our network offers far more than affiliation: it provides **active participation in a dynamic European community** committed to cooperation, innovation and professional development.

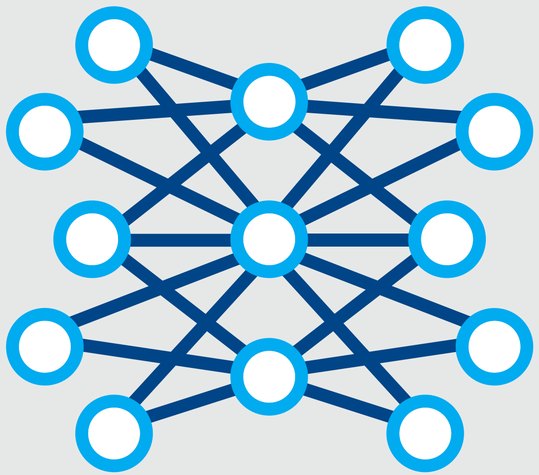
Our **annual General Meetings** combine statutory sessions with conferences, project development activities and valuable networking moments. Hosted by member organisations, these meetings are key opportunities to shape the network's direction while strengthening professional and cultural ties.

During annual **Blue Sky Meetings**, members can actively contribute ideas, propose new projects and engage in creative brainstorming without barriers. These sessions are designed to encourage initiative and ensure that every member has a voice in the network's future work.

Being part of our internal **Mailing List** allows to exchange information in a trusted and confidential environment, ensuring open and focused communication. It facilitates direct peer-to-peer dialogue between almost 40 organisations across more than 20 European countries, strengthening cooperation and mutual support. The list enables rapid sharing of expertise, opportunities and good practices, tailored specifically to professionals working with people with visual impairments – other members.

Our **Webinars** provide accessible opportunities for knowledge sharing and discussion, allowing members to present topics, invite speakers and engage colleagues and partners across the network, regardless of location.

What being a Member means



Network Members

ENVITER's **Website** offers member organisations the opportunity to publish articles highlighting their work and, in particular, their projects, increasing their visibility at European and International level. This platform allows members to share results, methodologies and innovations with peers who understand the context of visual impairment. By showcasing projects within the network, members strengthen cooperation, inspire new initiatives and create opportunities for future partnerships.

Regular **projects updates** keep members informed and involved in ongoing projects, applications and emerging ideas, reinforcing transparency and collective ownership.

On some occasions, members' professionals come together for **training events** focused on innovative methodologies, practices and tools, often developed through network projects. These events strengthen skills, foster peer learning and create thematic professional connections within the network.

In addition, you can be part of our **Board** and contribute to ensure effective governance and continuity, supporting a responsive and member-driven Network.

Being a member means **having opportunities to contribute, learn, collaborate and lead.** Whether you are joining the network or already part of it, these activities are designed for you to engage actively and make the most of your membership.

Become a member



We look forward to exploring with you the benefits that **ENVITER** can bring to you and your organisation and that you can bring to **ENVITER**, to the point where you will want to make a formal Application for Membership.

The Application for Membership form that you can download here or submit online using this Google Form gives you the opportunity for describing your organisation.

Your Application will then be considered by the Board of **ENVITER** and we hope that the result will be that we will welcome you as a Member, taking a full part in our discussions and activities.

We look forward to hearing from you!

ENVITER’s Presidents



2001 - 2005

Rob Meijer

Stichting Het Loo Erf,
The Netherlands



2005 - 2009

Hermann Philipsen

Stichting Het Loo Erf,
The Netherlands



2009 - 2014

Francis Guiteau

Institute Monteclair,
France



2014 - 2019

Steven Scheffer

Royal Dutch VISIO,
The Netherlands



2019 - 2021

Michel Mercier

Association IRSAM,
France



2021 - 2022

Peter Verstraten

Robert Coppes Stichting,
The Netherlands



2022 - 2025

Elena Weber

Istituto Regionale Rittmeyer
Per I Ciechi,
Italy



2025

Elmar Fürst

Hilfsgemeinschaft
Austria



Currently

Inge Jansen

BFW Düren,
Germany

Honorary Members



Francis Guiteau

Institut Montéclair
France
HM since 2015



Hans-Joachim Zeißig

BFW Düren
Germany
HM since 2015



Huld Magnúsdóttir

NIFB
Iceland
HM since 2017



John Harris

1st ENVITER Coordinator
Wales/UK
HM since 2017



Ulf Gläser

BFW Halle
Germany
HM since 2022



Peter Verstraten

Robert Coppes Stichting
The Netherlands
HM since 2024



Alexandrina Kostova

National Rehabilitation Center for the Blind
Bulgaria
HM since 2026

Honorary Membership (HM) of ENVITER is a title assigned to a person as an award in recognition of their contribution and supporting role of our Network.

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Contact us

enviter.eu

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