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**International Council for Education and Re/habilitation of People with Visual Impairment**

**ICEVI European Newsletter**

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| Coordinated by | Andrea Hathazi | ahathazi@yahoo.com |
| Edited by | Stephen McCall<br>Martha Gyftakos | s.mccall@bham.ac.uk and<br>mgyftakos@yahoo.com |
| Designed by | Istvan Mozes | webmaster@icevi-europe.org |

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**Content:**

## The President's Message

Dear Members and Non-Members of ICEVI-Europe,

I hope you have had a good summer; I am aware that it has been unbearable hot for some and very damp and cold for others. In this exciting issue of the ICEVI-Europe newsletter, I hope you will find something of interest for you – it is full of very useful information about various projects that have been happening and I will summarise those in a minute, as well as our first exciting webinar with ENVITER. So let us start.

I am delighted to introduce you to the vibrant world of the Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnerships in School Education Project, **"Borders of Tangible**." In this newsletter, I hope to immerse you in the journey of collaboration, innovation, and inclusion that lies at the heart of this remarkable initiative **Unveiling Borders of Tangible.**

This project has been unfolding since November 2021 and is set to unfold its final chapters in October 2024. This remarkable venture emerges from the synergy of five distinguished partner organizations, driven by a shared commitment to enriching the learning experiences of visually impaired students within mainstream classrooms.

The Collaborators

- Primary school "Dragan Kovačević," Serbia
- Special Secondary School for Visually Impaired Students, Romania
- State primary and secondary school "Dimitar Vlahov," Northern Macedonia
- The Centre IRIS - Centre for Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion and Counselling for the Blind and Partially Sighted, Slovenia (Project Coordinator)
- The School for Visually Impaired Pupils "Veljko Ramadanović," Serbia

Central to this initiative is the resolute support provided to educators teaching blind and partially sighted pupils in mainstream settings. The consortium's collective efforts extend to adapting didactic materials, such as textbooks, maps, and images, that facilitate a seamless acquisition of learning objectives. This pursuit aligns with the growing wave of inclusive education, underscoring the indispensable role of tailored teaching materials. Read further below for further information.

Also in this newsletter is the project **"Burnout of Professionals and Parents with Children with Disabilities: Prevention, common challenges, and mutually empowering methodologies and practices in Early Child Intervention Services**". This project has been endorsed by the Greek National Agency within the ERASMUS+ Programme, KA220-ADU-Cooperation partnerships in adult education (No: 2021-1-EL01-KA220-ADU-000035230). AMIMONI - the Panhellenic Association of parents and friends of visually impaired people with additional handicaps - spearheads this initiative as the coordinating organization.

Spanning 10 Partners & 1 Associated Partner from 8 countries (Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Belgium, and Albania), the Burnout Free ECI consortium unites Professionals in ECI Organizations, Professors, and private sector experts. Their collective wisdom fuels the project's mission. The Burnout Free ECI initiative seeks to forge a path towards innovative solutions for the intricate challenges faced by parents of children with disabilities (CwD), disability professionals, and organizations in early childhood intervention. Building on

experience and recent studies, the project acknowledges the profound impact of burnout on parents and professionals in this realm. It aims to tackle the pressing issue of burnout, addressing the risk of social isolation for professionals and social exclusion for parents and children with disabilities.

The groundbreaking **"oMERO" project**, again supported by the European Commission's Erasmus Plus program, tackles the pressing need for trained Visual Disabilities Rehabilitators (VDR) across Europe. While viable rehabilitation interventions exist to enhance the lives of those with visual disabilities, the project addresses the lack of formal training and standardized qualifications for these professionals. In most European regions, a trans-disciplinary approach to visual disabilities and rehabilitation remains unrecognized, leaving the crucial role of rehabilitation in the hands of sometimes inadequately trained professionals.

The project's overarching goals center on:

1. Defining a European reference Professional Profile for VDRs, establishing a foundation for formal qualifications.
2. Developing a comprehensive EU curriculum, equipped with guidelines and practical tools, to be adopted by academies for training VDRs.

Guided by the principles of inclusion and human rights as endorsed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the WHO International Consensus Conference on Vision Rehabilitation Standards, the oMERO project is rooted in the critical importance of qualified professionals for effective rehabilitation interventions. I look forward to hearing more on this.

Also in this newsletter we hear about how Visio International have developed**: "Teaching Braille, a manual for teachers, parents and policy makers"**. I will be disseminating this widely within the UK as well.

**Tactiles.eu**, a pioneering initiative, has emerged as the first online database offering a treasure trove of 3D models tailored for the education of students who are blind or partially sighted. In collaboration with partners from Spain, Germany, and Scotland within the 3d4VIP project, Visio has spearheaded the creation of this groundbreaking 3D database. The platform presents a diverse array of subject-specific and practical models, spanning from educational aids to traffic navigation and interactive games. Read below to find out more on how to access it.

Do not forget about ICEVI-Europe's very first **Joint Webinar with ENVITER on Visual Impairment and Relations, Intimacy, and Sexuality**

Date: **21 September, 15:00-17:00 CET**

All blind or partially sighted people (from 0 to 100), regardless of their intellectual ability, should have access to correct knowledge about their body, relations, intimacy, and sexuality and should be given the opportunity to experience this all according to their wants and needs. This statement is the rational for the work at the national Dutch expertise group on relations, intimacy, and sexuality (RIS). They would like to invite you to join an interactive international webinar on **September 21, 15:00-17:00 CET** and share experience and knowledge: sexual development in the lifecycle, practical information and materials, results from scientific research project, personal stories from clients, casuistry, and ideas for attitude and conversations on this topic.

**Click here to register for the event: https://forms.gle/g9yVtpjFYiG4K1H36.**

I was very interested to read the brief report of the successful event that took place on the 9th of June 2023. INSEI (Institut national supérieur pour l'éducation inclusive) organized a **French-speaking day** in Suresnes, near Paris, together with ICEVI-Europe. The event, titled **"Visual impairment and inclusive education, what's new?"** takes place annually and this year the theme focused on digital technology and students with visual impairment. The event was attended by around a hundred people, including teachers for the visually impaired, psychologists, transcribers, librarians, orthoptists, occupational therapists, O&M instructors, teachers' assistants, parents, INSEI students, researchers and teachers' educators from all regions of France.

Equally I was very pleased to hear about **The Nordic Conference regarding infants and preschool children with visual impairment** that was held on June 8-9, 2023, in Copenhagen, Denmark. The conference was organized by Synscenter Refsnæs in collaboration with NOVIR - Nordic Visual Impairment Network. The event focused on the theme "Prepared and equipped for transitions" and aimed to provide Nordic professionals working with preschool children with visual impairment and those with further functional impairment with lectures, workshops, and demonstrations of materials from Australia, Iceland, Norway, and Denmark see below, as well as, other information about virtual reality, 3D printing and other networking days. Our colleagues in Denmark have been busy and thank you for sharing all this fantastic information.

I hope you enjoy this summer issue of the newsletter and please send us any and all news you would like to see included in the future issues of our publication.

Warm regards,

On behalf of the Board of ICEVI-Europe,

**Dr John Ravenscroft**

**Professor of Childhood Visual Impairment**

**President**

## Visual Impairment and Inclusive education - What's new?

**A report by Nathalie Lewi-Dumont – ICEVI Europe Board member for French Speaking Countries.**

On June 9th, a one day conference for French speakers took place in Suresnes near Paris. The meeting was organized by INSEI (Institut national supérieur pour l'éducation inclusive – the National Institute for Inclusive Education, formerly INSHEA: https://www.inshea.fr/fr), together with ICEVI-Europe. This event entitled 'Visual impairment and inclusive education, what's new?' takes place every year. The general theme this year was 'Digital technology and students with visual impairment'.
Around a hundred people attended the venue. Almost half of them were teachers for the visually impaired, but there were also psychologists, transcribers, librarians, orthoptists, occupational therapists, O&M instructors, teachers' assistants, parents, INSEI students, researchers and teacher trainers who came from all regions of France. Unfortunately, this year, there were no participants from Belgium but there were two persons from Switzerland.
The presenters were researchers and professionals from the field. There were plenary sessions, workshops and a round table discussion.
After a welcoming speech from Murielle Mauguin, head of INSEI, Caroline Treffé, a teacher educator at INSEI in charge of training programs in the field of visual impairment, outlined the program for the day. Nathalie Lewi-Dumont, board member of ICEVI-Europe, announced upcoming conferences including a seminar of the Teachers' Interest Group that will take place in Paris on May 23-24, 2024 (the theme will be diversity and specificity of teaching practices in educating students with visual impairment - more news soon on our ICEVI-Europe website!) and the ICEVI-Europe conference in Padova, may 15-17, 2025: "Supporting Children and Young Adults with Visual impairment: What can we do? What can be done?"

Two young researchers, spoke about their doctoral research:

- Laetitia Castillan's thesis in psychology dealt with digital textbooks used by partially sighted high school students in France and Sweden https://www.theses.fr/2020TOU20018.
- Mathieu Gaborit, who will defend his PhD in educational sciences next October, presented some of the data from his work, collected from middle school students with visual impairments and their teachers, dealing with helping strategies for students using information and communication technology in mathematics lessons.

Ludovic Petitdemange, a researcher in astrophysics (

https://sciences.sorbonne-universite.fr/portraits/ludovic petitdemange https://www.facebook.com/ludovic.petitdmange/?locale=fr_FR), presented a project aiming to make sciences more accessible to people with a visual impairment through a Moodle platform.

From the Lab Cherchons pour voir (« Let's research to see » https://cherchonspourvoir.org/le-laboratoire/) Toulouse, Céline Barbancey, QTVI, and Christophe Jouffrais, researcher, presented two research projects, DERI, interactive raised drawings https://cherchonspourvoir.org/projet/nos-projets/deri-la-

surface-interactive/ and Tangiblebox https://cherchonspourvoir.org/projet/projet-tangible-box/

Mathieu Muratet, assistant professor in INSEI, presented some of the useful resources about visual impairment which are on the ORNA (Observatoire des ressources numériques adaptées - digital adapted resources) website.. These are part of the INSEI resource collection covering a variety of special educational needs https://inshea.fr/fr/content/orna-observatoire-des-ressources-numeriques-adaptees).

Attendees had to choose 2 out of 5 practical interactive workshops:

Sandrine Boissel, QTVI and teacher educator, and Jean Marc Vincent, assistant professor in Grenoble University, gave two sessions about unplugged computers and their adaptation. It was very new and stimulating for participants.

- Anaïs Brard and Sophie Blain from the children's book publisher 'Les doigts qui rêvent' (Dreaming fingers https://ldqr.org) invited participants to think about the adaptation of images chosen from four children's picture books and showed how they had modified them for children with visual impairment in digital books
- Florence Bernard, teacher educator in INSEI, showed how a teacher can very easily create an auditory landscape or a story and use it with students by recording various sounds with his/her cell phone. Participants were able to try thre technique for themselves in the beautiful INSEI park.
- Céline Chandran and Amandine Kohler, QTVIs in the Lausanne special school (Switzerland), presented a tool they are working on: for assessing the use of digital devices for students with VI https://cellcips.ch/ressources/referentiel-de-competences

A round table discussion, held at the end of the afternoon and facilitated by Caroline Treffé, included specialist teachers in elementary and secondary inclusive schools (Elise Méry and Catherine Miguet) and Kevin Bustamante who is an adviser in this area. The teachers pointed out the interesting challenges of supporting digital learning and teaching the use of IT devices. Catherine presented case studies of two of her students, who were able to explain the choices they made between different types of digital material. Kevin has now finished college and is an access specialist He showed the pitfalls and successes of his own path through school, stressing that what has been good for him won't necessarily be the same for all the blind learners. His comments were really inspiring and sometimes moving, when he said that his first Teacher of the Visually Impaired was in the room, and was the person who taught him braille and supported his first experiences of inclusion!

During lunch time, attendees were able to visit some exhibitors: editors of adapted books, adaptive computers companies and organisations of and for the visually impaired.

Digital access is a real need for visually impaired students if they are to be independent and included, and their teachers have to keep a close watch on all the technical improvements that occur, which is not always easy. This kind of day is helpful because it allows professionals to get together and exchange ideas and is especially important for itinerant teachers who are often very isolated.

As attendees pointed out in the evaluation forms, the day was very productive, although a little too packed, and the weather was particularly warm that day, which was nice, but tiring!

## The oMERO Project

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Practical and achievable rehabilitation interventions that foster quality of life, societal engagement and continued productivity for people living with visual disabilities are currently available in Europe. However, to support these interventions, fully trained rehabilitators, with the necessary skills and expertise to manage a range of visual disabilities in different settings, is essential.

Unfortunately, in most regions of Europe, recognition and training for this type of professional does not exist. In many EU countries Visual Disability Rehabilitators (VDR) have no formal nationally registered status and rehabilitation is often carried out by professionals who have not been trained in trans-disciplinary approaches. Worldwide, the professional training of VDR is often left to sporadic and independent initiatives that have no official certification or agreed competencies, and relevant competencies are most likely to be gained directly on the job.

These are the practical professional issues that the oMERO project, supported by funding from the European Commission's Erasmus Plus program, aimed to tackle. There are two main goals:
- to define an EU recognised Professional Profile (PP) for Visual Disabilities Rehabilitators (VDR), as the baseline of a professional qualification
- to provide an EU curriculum for the VDR, complete with guidelines and practical tools, to support academic institutions in its implementation.

The aims are not only driven by the needs of national healthcare and social services, where the labour market is constantly in need of well trained professionals, but also by international and European legislation relating to inclusion and human rights, such as the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, art 26) and the WHO International Consensus Conference on Vision Rehabilitation Standards (2015, 2020).

The WHO has reported that globally at least 2.2 billion people have a visual impairment or are affected by blindness and that this number is set to increase due to the growing and ageing world population. Moreover, their World Report on Vision (2019) states that, as far as effective rehabilitation interventions are available, there is a need for qualified rehabilitation professionals to apply new transdisciplinary and person-centered approaches in their daily practice.

The oMERO project aims to overcome this high-skills gap and to formalize a Higher Education curriculum leading to a specialist profile, the VDR, who provides physical, mental and sensory rehabilitation services in a new trans-disciplinary, user-centred and ICT-based approach. The new VDR can be employed both in the public and in private sectors, in residential, semi-residential or outpatient healthcare facilities.

Operational StepsTtaken

The VDR Professional Profile (PP) that has been developed is based on a needs analysis and existing professional profiles (PP) for related roles, which already exist at EU level and internationally, focusing on a multidisciplinary approaches and specialization.

The PP forms the basis for a competence-based role and identifies 17 Key Activities and several core competencies, compliant with EU standards and included in the ESCO registry.
The VDR is intended to develop, implement, and monitor the global rehabilitation interventions of visually disabled users of any age, assuring the highest level possible quality of life and autonomy through empowerment, communication, learning, orientation and mobility, and daily life skills.

The Erasmus+ project led to a defined EU Curriculum, that is general and "across-the-board", but also sufficiently modular and flexible in order to be adaptable to any country and Higher Education Institution. The Curriculum is intended to meet the learning needs of students and the skills demand of labour market, supporting transparency and international mobility, as well as recognition of both formal and informal competences. It guides he delivery of the curriculum content and provides definition of a precise body of knowledge relating to the Visual Disabilities Rehabilitator.
The VDR EU Curriculum defined in this document includes 89 Learning Outcomes grouped into 17 Units of Learning Outcomes (UoL): 9 UoLs are defined as "core units", since they target competences which are specific to the VDR, while other 8 units are defined as "cross-cutting" since they target competences which are "transversal" to other professionals.

Finally, oMERO project delivered a full Set of tools and guidelines, to support academic institutions to endorse, adapt and implement courses to train future VDRs.

The design of four pilot courses in the Academic institutions involved in the project is only one of the main results in this scenario; the designer's kit provides tools for implementation that areopen access and downloadable for use in any other Higher Education Institution. They incorporate opportunities to balance ICT credits and to design teaching modules. Moreover a set of Lesson Plans and Digital Materials was developed for teachers to foster innovative educational approaches within the courses, leading to more collaborative, interdisciplinary and experiential lessons.

To deepen the ICTs suitability in the VDR's training, an augmented reality simulator (REALTER) was developed as part of the project; a device that gives students in real-time, simulated visual experience ofimpairment conditions, to be used with particular reference to the "orientation and mobility" and "personal autonomies" technical competencies.

Thus alongside the aims of the project, the partners also addressed the need to up-skill and re-skill academics with new competences related to the design and delivery of the innovative VDR curriculum. This chance was taken during the training week, allowing to refine and share the developed pathways, engaging different professionals within the partner's organizations.

Under the terms of the project, the full documents and tools delivered by the partners are published under a common creative licence and are available on the project website www.visualrehabilitator.eu

Perspectives

The oMERO partnership is looking forward to lasting and wider cooperation, at a European level, to perpetuate the project's results in a sustainable wayand to::

- To stimulate discussion towards a specialized VDR Qualification for professionals that will contribute towards person-centred integrated care services that meet VIPs needs.
- To support the implementation of the new European VDR Curriculum in Higher Education Institutions
- To focus on the importance of innovative learning methods and 'experiential' approaches in VDR training, to help better understand the feelings and barriers experiencd by visually impaired people.

Partners

- Fondazione David Chiossone (APPLICANT), Italy - www.chiossone.it
- Università degli Studi Di Genova, Italy - www.unige.it
- Mutualité Française Paca Ssam, France - www.lamut.fr
- Lietuvos Sveikatos Mokslu Universitetas, Lithuania - www.lsmuni.lt
- Si4life – Scienza e Impresa Insieme per Migliorare La Qualita' Della Vita Scrl, Italy - www.si4life.it
- The Provost, Fellows, Foundation Scholars & the other members of the Board of the College of The Holy & Undivided Trinity of Queen Elizabeth , near Dublin, Ireland - www.tcd.ie
- Umea Universitet, Sweden - www.umu.se
- Université Côte D'Azur, France – www.univ-cotedazur.fr
- University of Gothenburg, Sweden - www.gu.se/en

## Burnout FREE ECI Project & AccessCoVE The European Center of Vocational Excellence in Accessibility

**By Vassilios Argyropoulos (ICEVI Europe National Representative of Greece)**

## Aim and Synthesis

"Burnout of Professionals and Parents with Children with Disabilities: Prevention, common challenges and mutually empowering methodologies and practices in Early Child Intervention Services" was approved by the Greek National Agency under the ERASMUS+ Programme, KA220-ADU-Cooperation partnerships in adult education (No: 2021-1-EL01-KA220-ADU-000035230). **The project was submitted by AMIMONI-Panhellenic Association of parents and friends of visually impaired people with additional disabilities and constitutes the coordinating organization of the project**.

The **Burnout Free ECI consortium** consists of 10 Partners & 1 Associated Partner from 8 different countries (Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Belgium and Albania). The project partners comprise a remarkable group of Professionals in ECI Organizations, Professors and professionals in the private sector who will bring their knowledge and expertise to the project in order to accomplish its aims.

The **Burnout Free ECI project** aims to craft a roadmap to better outcomes and lead to innovative, mutually empowering techniques and solutions to some of the most complex challenges that hinder the prospects of children with additional disabilities (CwD) in early childhood, and are faced by the parents of children, professionals in the disability field and Organizations. Our own experiences from working with parents and Children with Disabilities (CwD) and recently published studies have revealed the seriousness of the implications of burnout on both parents of children with disabilities and professionals in the disability field. The Burnout FREE ECI project addresses the tremendously serious issue of professionals' and parents' burnout on the family centered Early Child Intervention.

It has also revealed a need to enhance the protective factors for family and ECI professionals and reduce the burnout risk factors which threaten to result in social isolation of professionals and the social exclusion of parents and children with disabilities.

Through an Innovative Interdisciplinary Burnout Free approach applied in ECI services, the project will address the needs of parents of children with disabilities and of the professionals who work with them in order to:

- strengthen their personal, emotional and social skills; enhance parenting capabilities and professionals' competences and improve their cooperation to meet the requirements of their demanding roles and cope with challenges.

- identify, avoid or recover from burnout by enhancing their resilience, improving their wellbeing, and ensuring that professionals and parents remain socially active

- have direct access to structured, flexible, and high-quality learning opportunities, adapted to the learning needs of adults so as to better support children with disabilities.

## Burn Out activities and news: a wealth of experience and ideas

Burnout-Free-Workshop-Family-Centred-ECI-Conference-Tirana-Albania

9.6.2023

2nd Multiplier Event of the Burnout FREE ECI Project

5.5.2023

3rd Transnational Project Meeting - Burnout FREE ECI Project

16-17.3.2023

The Burnout Free ECI project is at the middle of its roadmap. Many exciting and interesting events and tasks are going to take place. We keep you informed through the very rich and informative ICEVI European Newsletters

**AccessCoVE**
**The European Center of Vocational Excellence in Accessibility**

**By Vassilios Argyropoulos (ICEVI Europe National Representative of Greece)**

## Aim and Synthesis

The European Center of Vocational Excellence in Accessibility (AccessCoVE), funded by the European Erasmus plus program for the upcoming four years, has recently commenced its operations. **Professor Konstantinos Papadopoulos, affiliated with the University of Macedonia (Thessaloniki, Greece), is the project leader**.

AccessCoVE aims to structure excellence in Vocational Education and Training in the field of Accessibility. **Twenty-two partners from four different countries** (Greece, Sweden, Spain, and Italy), including two universities (KTH Royal Institute of Technologyand the Polytechnic University of Turin), education and training centers, chambers, companies and non-governmental organizations, joined forces to establish a European multi-level innovative and constantly growing Center of Vocational Excellence - the AccessCoVE - in the field of accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Moreover, AccessCoVE aims to evolve over the upcoming years into the most extensive network of affiliated organizations on an international scale, functioning as constituents of a "global accessibility community."

Through the development of the most up-to-date, valid and trustworthy sources for accessibility issues, AccessCoVE will constitute a key contributor to policy making regarding inclusion in society and accessible digitalisation. In essence, accessibility will be approached holistically starting by researching the end-users' requirements and continuing to research into stakeholders' needs and priorities concerning accessibility issues. The data collected will form the VET programmes and curricula that will lead to the training framework and the certification of two new specialists - the Accessibility Certifier and the Accessibility Consultant. Additionally, AccessCoVE's activities will target the up-skilling and reskilling of specific groups, as well as of students in secondary and tertiary education.

AccessCoVE will focus on promoting excellence which arises from a) innovative VET programmes with their respective teaching and learning activities and tools, b) new specialties that will open new job opportunities while covering the needs that already put pressure on the business sector, c) constant horizontal and vertical cooperation between the VET providers, companies, chambers, federations, HEIs, and regional authorities from the very first moment of the project, d) radical dissemination activities that feed e) a robust sustainable multi-faceted system, which in combination with f) meticulously designed long-term governance and funding plans, will gradually transform AccessCoVE into a transnational platform for accessibility.

## Borders of Tangible - an Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnerships in School Education Project

**by Anja Ponikvar, Centre IRIS - Centre for Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion and Counselling for the Blind and Partially Sighted, Slovenia**

Borders of Tangible is an Erasmus+ project which started in November 2021 and will finish in October 2024.

The project is a collaboration of professionals from five partner organizations, namely:

- The "Dragan Kovačević", primary school Serbia
- The Special Secondary School for Visually Impaired Students, Romania
- The „Dimitar Vlahov", State primary and secondary school for education and rehabilitation, Northern Macedonia
- The Centre IRIS - Centre for Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion and Counselling for the Blind and Partially Sighted, Slovenia (the coordinator of the project)
- The "Veljko Ramadanović" School for Visually Impaired Pupils, Serbia

All organizations in the project provide support for teachers, who teach blind and partially sighted pupils in mainstream schools. This support also includes the adaptation of teaching and learning materials for blind and partially sighted pupils, such as textbooks, maps, images, etc. The development of inclusive education increases the need for adapted teaching materials, which are essential for acquiring learning objectives in subject curricula. A great challenge is how to adapt pictorial material that cannot be replaced by a description, that is not significantly different from the original, that provides the right amount of information for independent tactile exploration, and is freely accessible to pupils and teachers.

The main goals of the project are to raise the competencies of professionals who adapt tactile didactic material for the blind and to raise the competencies of teachers of blind and partially sighted in special and mainstream schools.

The first goal will be achieved by creating an international network of professionals from participant organizations who adapt tactile images for the blind. To this end, we organised a Learning, teaching, and training event, led by Centre IRIS, where we shared our good practice and knowledge in the field of adaptation. All participants learned and tested different computer programs, with which they can create tactile images. During the project we will test adapted materials, so we will be able to prepare unified recommendations for adapting visual materials for the blind. This way we will be able to ensure a consistent high level of professional adaptation of tactile didactic material, and for all partner organizations to participate in the creation of a quality accessible collection of adapted didactic materials for the blind.

Consequently, by achieving the first goal, teachers who teach the blind and partially sighted will also gain much needed skills. The Survey for teachers of the blind and partially sighted at the beginning of the project, showed that the need for a freely

accessible collection of professionally adapted tactile didactic materials is great. The collection provides teachers of the blind and partially sighted opportunities to use adapted tactile images during their lessons. This enables a better implementation of lessons, support for learning content, and more equal and independent inclusion of blind pupils in lessons.

An essential aspect of adapted tactile didactic material is the ability to make right use of it. Therefore, we will also prepare the instructions for using the adapted tactile material in our Collection. We will provide short video instructions on how to use adapted tactile images and how to make a quality audio description. We will also have second Learning, teaching, and training event to exchange good practices and new developments in audio description.

The expected project results are:

- Unified Recommendations for adapting visual didactic material for the blind. This manual is intended for all professionals who adapt tactile didactic material. It will also be used for teachers of the blind and partially sighted to help them get more information on the possibilities for the adaptation of selected didactic material.
- Collection of adapted tactile didactic materials for learners who are blind and partially sighted. The Collection will be freely accessible, and the adapted tactile images will be selected from the curricula and will enable teachers to use them in their lessons. The teacher will select a picture from the Collection, and the selected picture will be printed on swell paper for the blind pupil to use. The Collection will be extensive, as adapted tactile images will be contributed by all partner organizations. It will be possible to add to the Collection even after the end of the project, which enables the sustainability of the project.
- Instructions for the use of adapted tactile didactic material for the blind and partially sighted. Adapted tactile material must be used correctly, therefore freely accessible Instructions are necessary, so the teacher will be able to make proper use of the material. The right approaches will also be presented in short video demonstrations.

The work on the project is equally divided among participant organizations. Each organization will be able to share examples of good practices from its areas of strength and gain new knowledge to improve weaker areas. Both professional adaptors of tactile material and teachers of the blind and partially sighted will benefit from achieving the project goals. This will enables blind and partially sighted pupils to participate more equally and independently in lessons, which is one of the goals of inclusive education.

## Announcing the launch of the online manual "Teaching Braille – a manual for teachers, parents and policy makers"

**By VISIO INTERNATIONAL**

To enable and increase access to Braille teaching, Visio International has developed "Teaching Braille, a manual for teachers, parents and policy makers". The online manual is based on Unified English Braille (UEB) and explains the different stages of braille learning, from emergent to beginner braille and onto advanced braille. Focus is also given to Braille teaching methods. The book contains many links, practical examples and attention is paid to the range of materials which you can use to teach Braille.

This book is intended for people who work with blind or partially sighted children, although many of the ideas may be useful if you work with older children or adults. This book focuses especially on techniques that do not solely depend on expensive equipment and materials. The book emphasizes the use of materials you can find or make easily. It is especially aimed at the following people:

- Teachers and classroom assistants who have visually impaired children in their classroom, both in special and mainstream schools
- Parents, caregivers and siblings of visually impaired children.
- Decision-makers: education officers, school principals and others who make decisions about the education of blind and visually impaired children.

You can download the book via the following link:

https://www.visio.org/getmedia/46c1905b-c3c6-4954-8bb8-de034b967aaf/Teaching-Braille-A-manual-for-teachers-parents-and-decision-makers.pdf

## News from Denmark

**Synscenter Refsnæs -- The Danish National Resource Center for children and youth with visual impairment including blindness**

**The Nordic Conference regarding infants and preschool children with visual impairment**

**By Dorthe Marie Degn, Development and Project Consultant**

On 8-9 of June 2023 Synscenter Refsnæs successfully hosted the Nordic Conference regarding infants and preschool children with visual impairment in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The conference was presented in collaboration with NOVIR – the Nordic Visual Impairment Network, a Nordic cooperative in the field of visual rehabilitation. The network consists of national vision rehabilitation institutions from Denmark, The Faroe Islands, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Within the theme "Prepared and equipped for transitions" Nordic professionals, who work with preschool children with visual impairment and those with further functional

impairment, were presented with lectures, workshops and demonstrations of materials from Australia, Iceland, Norway and Denmark. The lectures and workshops included:

- How to facilitate and promote improved transitions in the lives of children with visual impairment. Keynote by Birgit I. P. Jørgensen, psychologist at Synscenter Refsnæs and external lecturer/associate professor at Copenhagen University, Denmark
- Cerebral visual impairment in children. Presentation by Trine Mindegaard, MA in Education, Perkins-Roman CVI-Range endorsement, Advisor for Children with Visual Impairment and additional disabilities at the Center for Communication Disorders, Hellerup, Denmark
- Children who will be learning braille. Stimulating emergent literacy in inclusive settings in kindergarten. Presentation and workshop by Silje Benonisen, senior advisor for the visual impaired at Department of Visual Impairment, Statped, Norway
- Prepared and equipped for transitions - Inclusive facilitation for blind children in kindergarten. Presentation by Sigrid Avsnes, adviser in special education and low vision, Department of Visual Impairment, Statped, Norway
- Playing with Purpose: Tactile Strategies for Developing Pre-braille, Cognitive, Physical and Social Skills through Play. Presentation by Mandy Lau, Researcher and Founder & Director, Reach & Match, Australia
- Explaining developmental delays and transition problems in children with visual impairments. Keynote by Jesper Dammeyer, psychologist, PhD, associate professor, Copenhagen University & Louise Bøttcher, psychologist, PhD, associate professor, Aarhus University. Denmark
- Early reading development – Focusing on reading development steps and transitions. Presentation by Dorte Larsen, Advisor for the Visually Impaired, Special Educator, Braille Specialist, O&M instructor, member of The Danish National and the Nordic Board for Braille. Department for Special, Counselling at Synscenter Refsnæs, Denmark
- Transitions in relation to The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). Workshop by Rikke Kannegaard, Knowledge- and information specialist at Synscenter Refsnæs, and Birgit I. P. Jørgensen, psychologist at Copenhagen University and Synscenter Refsnæs, Denmark
- Facilitating transitions in everyday life settings. How to use Sound-symbols for children with visual impairment and severe disabilities. Presentation and workshop by Anne Liv Madsen, special needs pedagogue in Kindergarten, Denmark
- Just imagine: Tactile books for young children. Workshop by Rannveig Traustadóttir, visual impairment adviser and orientation and mobility specialist at the National center for the blind, visually impaired in Iceland, and Ásta Björnsdóttir, special educational/visual impairment advisor at the National center for the blind and visually impaired in Iceland

The speakers shared theories, methods and approaches about how professionals can support and create an inclusive foundation for preschool children, which can lead to

successful participation in family life, day care and school as well as successful transitions in everyday situations, environments, life stages etc.

By gathering together Nordic professionals, the conference gave the participants a meeting place to exchange knowledge, experience and best practice between the Nordic countries in order to strengthen all in their professional roles. During the two days, research and practice came together as the program offered collegial networking, professional development and inspiration to the daily work for and with children with vision impairment in the Nordic Region.

**IBOS - The Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted** (young and adult)

**Trainers for visually impaired students introduce 3D printing – T4VIS-in 3D**

What if you could for example make your own assistive devises, gaming pieces, maps, math figures or create a touchable molecule from a textbook image? IBOS has been a partner in the German BFW-Düren led Erasmus+ project *Trainers for visually impaired students introduce 3D printing – T4VIS-in 3D*, which involved creating and testing curricula and tutorials for teaching professionals, vision impaired persons and their relatives on how to use 3D printing techniques in a safe way. Simple 3D printers have become more affordable and some community centres and libraries now provide access to them. Teaching materials are accessible in German, Spanish, Austrian, Bulgarian, Italian, Danish and English. For more information about the project, see link: www.t4vis-in3d.net. The idea is that 3D-models for VIP use can also be uploaded here.

IBOS´ Danish teaching materials for 3D printing can be found on: https://www.t4vis-in3d.net/project-results-t4vis-in3d/. Contact ICT-consultant Rasmus Paasch, IBOS for further information.

If you want to explore other 3D options, visit this website: www.thingiverse.com

**Virtual Reality for Visually Impaired People - VR4VIP**

Virtual reality is increasingly being used within vocational education and a German BFW-Düren led European partnership has examined how it can be used to raise awareness among teachers and student counselors. Besides being a new fun and interesting way to learn, VR can also bring education benefits in terms of cost and safety, but what are the consequences for visually impaired students of the use of VR in education?

The use of VR constitutes a possible obstacle for students who are blind and severely visually impaired and some may need alternative methods of learning. But VR also presents some new possibilities for others in this group e.g. using VR as personalized sight enhancer for partially sighted students. VR can help low vision users to determine what to focus on, and shield them from visual distractions in the environment. Participation in the Erasmus+ VR4VIP project has enhanced IBOS' and their partners' capabilities in using VR technology for visually impaired people thereby improving their competitiveness in the labor market. Several employees have been introduced to Oculus Quest 2 headset and VR/AR technology through training workshops and hands-on experiences. Please contact Bereichsleiter Forschung und

Entwicklung , Jürgen Hüllen, BFW-Düren or ICT-consultant Rasmus Paasch, IBOS, for further information. VR-partners and the Finnish Valteri School have just been granted a two year Erasmus+ project, led by Instituto Rittmeyer, Trieste, Italy, called VR4Mobility. This project will explore the possibilities of VR in relation to O&M-training, writing curricula and tutorials for O&M training for VIP and for educating O&M-instructors, starting Dec. 2023.

Upcoming event:

**Synsfaglige Netværksdage** (in Danish language)

November 22nd to 23rd 2023 – at Comwell Hotel Køge Strand

The annual National Sight Networking days aim to give sight professionals a chance to participate in workshops relevant to them, learning about new developments and expanding their professional networks. Link: www.ibos.dk/Konferencer

## Press Release: TACTILES.EU - First online database with 3D models for education of blind and visually impaired students

In recent years, 3D printing has become increasingly popular and accessible. As part of the 3d4VIP project, Visio together with partners from Spain, Germany and Scotland, have developed a 3d database that aims to provide educators with specific 3D models that enhance and support the learning experience of visually impaired students.

Tactiles.eu offers a wide range of subject-specific models as well as models that assist with navigating traffic or even playing games. All models available on the platform are free of charge. Currently, the website hosts over 120 models, and this number continues to grow as more designers contribute their creations to the platform. Evert Rasing, a 3D designer who frequently prints 3D models at Visio, remarked, "While 3D models can be found everywhere on the internet, there has never been a site dedicated to models specifically designed for the education of blind and visually impaired students. The website Tactiles.eu is truly unique."

More than just 3D models

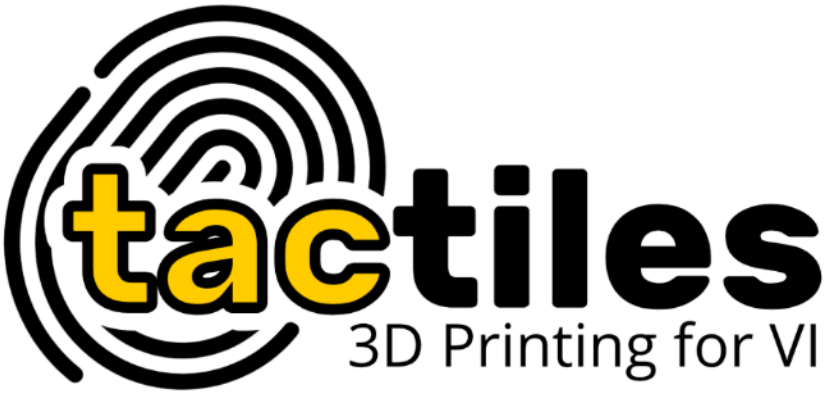
In addition to 3D models, the website also allows users to upload tactile drawings, which can be utilized alongside the 3D models in lessons. Even if you are not familiar with 3D printing, the website is still worth exploring. The website features a section with instructional videos about 3D printing. For those with more advanced 3D design skills, the website provides an extensive list of guidelines to aid in the design process.

3D design as a blind student?

A common question posed to members of the 3D Team is whether it is possible for a blind student to create designs. This possibility has been explored by project members from Germany, one of whom is blind. They have begun to provide recommendations on how blind students can design in three dimensions.

Tactiles.eu has been developed as part of the 3D4VIP Erasmus+ project (Agreement number 2020-1-NLO1-KA2O1-064542), a collaboration between five European

organizations: Sight Scotland (UK), Aspaym (Spain), Visio (the Netherlands), Blista (Germany), and Schloss Schulle Ilvesheim (Germany).




## Feel Nova Gorica

**By dr. Mateja Maljevac, Faculty of Education, University of Primorska and Centre IRIS – The Centre for Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion and Counselling for the Blind and Partially Sighted, Ljubljana, Slovenia.**

### Introduction

Access to public services and cultural life for people with disabilities should be a matter of course in all spheres of life, rather than a privilege. People with visual impairments are part of our everyday lives, even if they are still often ignored and unheard. Nova Gorica is a city in western Slovenia on the border with Italy, and in order to bring blind and partially sighted people closer to the city, students of Inclusive Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education of the University of Primorska, together with the Gorizia Museum and the The Nova Gorica Inter-Municipal Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired, have created a model of the city with 14 important buildings. It will be available as part of the exhibition 'GO S50-60, the City and its inhabitants in the 1950s and 1960s'.


The logo of the 'Feel Nova Gorica Project' showing a hand holding four buildings.

**About the project**

The project was created and designed in collaboration with Igor Miljavec, President of the Nova Gorica Inter-Municipal Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired; David Kozuh, Curator of the Gorizia Museum and Professor Mateja Maljevac from the Faculty of Education at the University of Primorska. Twenty one students worked on the model as part of the course 'Methods of Working with the Blind and Visually Impaired, and it formed part of the students' exam requirements. They were divided into six groups and assigned specific tasks:

- The first group started by collecting donations to buy the materials and carry out the project. The group consisted of Julija Lorber, Lejla Šumić and Anja Merc.
- The second group was responsible for building a model out of lego blocks. Valentina Forjan, Janja Razingar, Sara Kolonjak and Eva Zaman built the model.
- The third group worked on the audiodescription of the mock-up itself. The group consisted of Neli Voglar, Nina Tomažič, Maruša Knap and Hiti Stražišar.
- The fourth group prepared adapted texts in large print and braille. The group consisted of Eva Ložak, Neti Friškovec, Urška Brigelj and Luka Kuzma.
- The fifth group selected the type materials. The group consisted of Vita Kozjek, Vendi Balas and Manja Žemva.
- The sixth group was responsible for the coordination and management of the other groups and for the promotion of the project. The group was formed by Urška Kovšca, Monika Rozman and Urška Kalina.

The 1.5 by 1.2 metre model shows 14 historically important buildings in the city, including the railway station, the town hall, the old brick factory, the "Russian" blocks, the municipal palace, the bus station and the skyscraper.

A particular challenge was to choose the right materials for each building and structure so that blind people could identify them by touch. Each building is numbered and labelled with different tactile materials, so that they can be identified with the help of a legend, or by using a talking marker to listen to their history and

origins, and there is also a description in braille. For the partially sighted people, the model is accompanied by a booklet with the text in large print.

The opening ceremony of the model took place on 23 March 2023 in the lobby of the Municipal Palace in Nova Gorica.

Photo source: goriskimuzej.si

The photograph shows seven people standing in a semicircle behind the model of the city.

**Conclusion**

The creation of the model, involved the collaboration of a large number of students and external institutions and required a lot of patience and adjustments on the part of all participants, but the end result is worth all the effort. The model is available not only to the visually impaired visitors of the Goriška Museum, but also to a wider spectrum of the interested public, from kindergarten children upwards, as it offers opportunities for play and education at the same time.

You are very welcome to take a look!

**Save the Date: 10th ICEVI European Conference May 15-17, 2025 in Padova, Italy**

# SAVE THE DATE

## 10th ICEVI

## European Conference

Padova, ITALY, May 15-17,
2025 Town Hall and University

## SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT:

## What can we do? What can be done?

**Conference Theme and Aim**

This conference will focus on the need for a multidisciplinary approach in offering support aimed at ensuring the best quality of life for children and young adults with visual impairment. Presentations will be an opportunity to share experiences on important areas of their lives: medical/psychological care, education, re/habilitation, orientation and autonomy.

Looking forward to 2025, we will involve European professionals in a coparticipatory process. We would like to identify the key principles of the global approach, share what these mean in theory and understand how they can be put into practice. Our final goal is to provide to those professionals who wish to offer a global approach a document of Key Principles which will support their work with children/young adults with visual impairment and their families.

**Target Audience**

All the people who believe in a multidisciplinary approach when supporting children/young adults with visual impairment:

Staff and professionals from all levels of schools. Educators, Psychologists, Re-Habilitation Specialists, Special Education Teachers, Orthoptists, Optometrists, Paediatricians, Ophthalmologists, Neuropsychiatrists, other interested physicians, University researchers and students. Associations and Organizations representatives. Caregivers, parents and families. Manufacturers and distributors of technologies and equipment. Nongovernmental Organizations and Policymakers and Government Officials.

**Who and Where**

ICEVI-Europe is an association of professionals and professional organisations that promotes equal access to appropriate education and re/habilitation of people with visual impairment, so that they may achieve their desire to actively participate as full members of society. www.icevi-europe.org

The Robert Hollman Foundation (RHF) is a private non-profit making organization of Dutch. It offers free consultation and support for the development of children (0-14 years) with visual impairment. www.fondazionerobertholIman.it

Padova is an historical city dating from XIII century B.C. and it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Town Hall is housed in the Palazzo Moroni which was built in the 16$^{th}$ century.

The University of Padova was founded in 1222. It is one of the oldest Universities of the World. Its Aula Magna Bo' (known since 1399) gave hospitality to Galileo Galilei where he taught.

Padova Town Hall and University will host the Conference in their prestigious and historical buildings (Palazzo Moroni and Aula Magna Bo').

Hoping you will join us to share thoughts and experiences and help us to create a document of Key Principles for supporting children and young adults with visual impairment and their families!