ICCA
Association
Community

A Congress with Purpose: Turning Accessibility into Lasting Impact

How ISLRR Vision 2025 Left Its Mark on Florence

BLUE PAPER

2026

October
2026



ICCA Association Community

THE VISION: MORE THAN A SUCCESSFUL CONGRESS

The story of the ISLRR Vision 2025 Congress in Florence did not begin when delegates arrived at the venue. It began years earlier, with a simple but ambitious idea: what if a scientific congress could leave behind something far more valuable than a successful event?

From the outset, the goal was not only to host the world's leading experts in low vision research and rehabilitation, but also to create a lasting impact for people living with visual impairment, for the city of Florence, and for all future events that would follow.

A JOURNEY BUILT ON PARTNERSHIP

Every meaningful transformation starts with collaboration, and this project was no exception.

What brought the vision to life was the close partnership between the **International Society for Low Vision Research and Rehabilitation (ISLRR)**, **OIC Group**, **Firenze Fiera**, the **Destination Florence Convention Bureau** and a network of local experts in ophthalmology and rehabilitation.

Working together from the bidding phase in 2021 through the final delivery of the congress, these stakeholders shared a common belief: the event should not only generate knowledge but also create a measurable and enduring legacy.

This collective approach allowed the team to think differently from the very beginning. Rather than asking how to organise a successful congress, they asked a more ambitious question: how could the congress make Florence a more accessible and inclusive destination long after the delegates had gone home?



THE POWER OF COLLECTIVE EFFORT

The initiative depended on the active engagement of stakeholders bringing different perspectives, expertise and resources to a shared objective. ISLRR's scientific and specialist knowledge, OIC Group's event organisation expertise, Destination Florence Convention Bureau's destination connections, Firenze Fiera's venue involvement, and the contribution of local organisations and professionals all played a part in shaping the project.

This collaborative approach helped connect the congress with the wider community, ensuring that accessibility was considered not only in the scientific programme and event environment, but also through experiences and initiatives beyond the venue. The partnership demonstrated the value of engaging stakeholders from the earliest stages of planning and working towards a common ambition.





TURNING ACCESSIBILITY INTO OPPORTUNITY

The answer began with accessibility.

When preparing the bid, one requirement was clear: the venue needed to be genuinely accessible to people with low vision. Rather than treating this as a technical challenge to overcome, **Firenze Fiera** embraced it as an opportunity to improve its facilities permanently.

Together with **ISLRR** experts and the local organising committee, a comprehensive accessibility audit examined every stage of the participant experience, from arrival and navigation to information access and environmental design.

This process resulted in a series of significant improvements. Wayfinding systems were enhanced, lighting and sensory elements were reviewed and optimised, inclusive design principles were further integrated into the venue, and digital platforms became more accessible.

One of the most innovative outcomes was the creation of tactile maps within **Palazzo degli Affari,** allowing visitors with visual impairments to navigate the venue more independently.

Most importantly, these improvements did not disappear once the congress ended. They remain a permanent part of Firenze Fiera's infrastructure, benefiting future visitors and setting a new benchmark for accessible events.

As planning progressed, it became clear that the legacy should not be confined within the walls of the congress centre.

BRINGING THE MISSION TO LIFE

With the support of **Destination Florence Convention Bureau,** the project expanded into the wider community, connecting delegates with some of Tuscany's most important organisations working in accessibility, rehabilitation, and inclusion.

Participants visited the **National School of Guide Dogs,** explored the **Braille Printing and Typhlodidactic Centre,** and learned about rehabilitation initiatives at **Meyer Hospital.**



At the **Uffizi Gallery,** tactile experiences offered new ways to engage with art, while the immersive "Dark on the Road" experience provided a powerful opportunity to understand the daily realities of living with visual impairment.

Community Involvement: Through these initiatives, Florence itself became part of the congress experience. The city transformed into a living classroom where science, awareness, and community engagement came together.

ACCESSIBILITY AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

These initiatives reflected the very essence of ISLRR's mission. The society is committed to advancing research, encouraging collaboration, promoting education, and improving understanding of vision impairment and rehabilitation.

In Florence, these objectives were achieved not only through the scientific programme but also through hands-on experiences, educational visits, knowledge exchange, and community involvement.

The congress moved beyond discussing accessibility as a concept. It demonstrated what accessibility looks like in practice and showed how inclusive principles can be embedded into real environments and experiences.



A LEGACY THAT CONTINUES

The true success of the project lies in its lasting impact.
The initiative contributed directly to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11), and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).

TURNING MISSION INTO ACTION

Yet perhaps the most significant achievement is that the legacy neither started nor ended with the congress itself.

It began years before the opening session through collaborative planning and continues today through improved accessibility, stronger partnerships, increased public awareness, and tools that empower people with visual impairments to navigate spaces more independently.

What started as a scientific congress ultimately became an opportunity to create permanent change.

Florence gained a more inclusive venue, a more aware community, stronger local networks, and a model of accessibility that can inspire future events around the world. The lasting legacy of ISLRR Vision 2025 is not only what happened during the congress, but what continues to happen because of it.





Paolo G. Limoli

LOC President and Low Vision Academy Scientific Coordinator

Paolo Limoli is Scientific Director of the Low Vision Research Centre in Milan, where he leads research into visual rehabilitation. The Centre's research focuses on the development of reading tests and methods for evaluating reading performance, virtual visual rehabilitation, fixation studies, visual neuromodulation, visual neuroenhancement and cell therapies. Paolo has also published works on retinal restoration, ophthalmic law and low vision, and visual neuromodulation.

Gianni Virgili

University of Florence, Professor, Chair



Gianni Virgili is Professor of Ophthalmology at the Department of NEUROFARBA, University of Florence, and Honorary Professor at the Centre for Public Health at Queen's University Belfast, where he previously held the position of Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology in 2021–2022. His research focuses on ophthalmology, evidence synthesis and epidemiology.

ISLRR

PRISMA

POLO SCIENTIFICO
IAPB ITALIA
PREVENIRE E RIABILITARE

DESTINATION FLORENCE
CONVENTION BUREAU

FIRENZE FIERA

oic group

COMUNICAZIONE ITALIANA .NET

Low Vision Academy
Association for Research in Visual Rehabilitation and Neuroretinal Neuroenhancement