ESCIF EUROPEAN CONGRESS

ACTIVE AGING OF PEOPLE WITH SPINAL CORD INJURY

ESCIF European Spinal Cord Injury Federation

COMACCHIO
27-30.05.2026

ACTIVE AGING
OF PEOPLE WITH SPINAL CORD INJURY

COMACCHIO, ITALY
27-30.05.2026

ORGANISED BY

FAIP ETS
Federazione delle Associazioni Italiane di Persone con lesione al midollo spinale

IN COLLABORATION WITH

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Società Italiana Midollo Spinale

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WELCOME MESSAGE

LUCY ROBINSON, ESCIF PRESIDENT

On behalf of ESCIF, **we are delighted to welcome representatives from our member organisations, their delegates, and stakeholders working across the spinal cord injury field to Comacchio** for this important conference.

We are especially grateful to Vincenzo and his team at FAIP for their dedication, commitment and outstanding work in making this event possible. Organising a European conference requires vision, coordination and generosity, and we sincerely appreciate their efforts and warm hospitality.

This year's conference focuses on a topic of growing relevance across Europe: ageing with a spinal cord injury. Current trends show that people are sustaining spinal cord injuries at an older age, while at the same time those who were injured many years ago are living longer than ever before. These demographic changes make ageing with a spinal cord injury not only a clinical issue, but a significant social, economic and community priority for our movement.

As organisations working at national and European levels, we share both the challenges and the responsibility of responding to these developments. **By exchanging knowledge, research, lived experience and good practice, we strengthen our collective capacity to advocate for appropriate services, influence policy, and promote dignity and quality of life throughout the lifespan.**

Beyond the formal sessions, this conference also provides an invaluable opportunity to connect, share experiences and reinforce cooperation across borders. Through collaboration and solidarity, we continue to build stronger communities and improve the lives of individuals living with spinal cord injury throughout Europe.

We look forward to productive discussions, meaningful exchanges and a successful conference.

WELCOME MESSAGE

VINCENZO FALABELLA, FAIP PRESIDENT

FAIP is proud to host the annual ESCIF Congress in Italy, a prestigious European event that brings together delegates from over 20 countries. This gathering highlights Italy's active and central role in the international dialogue regarding spinal cord injuries (SCI). The core theme of this edition is "Aging with a Spinal Cord Injury."

The congress aims to address the medical, social, and care-related needs of an aging population through structured and forward-thinking strategies.

For three days, experts, healthcare professionals, and associations will exchange best practices. **The goal is clear: to promote person-centered care models that are effective, inclusive, and rooted in genuine European cooperation.**

The message extends heartfelt thanks to the Vitali Family for their warm hospitality at the Camping Village Florence in Comacchio; the FAIP Federation for representing the Italian network and ensuring the country remains a leader in advocating for the rights, dignity, and quality of life of individuals with spinal cord injuries.

OUR HOSTS

LUCY ROBINSON, ESCIF PRESIDENT

With 17 years of experience across the health, charity, and social sectors, **Lucy Robinson is a dedicated leader specializing in strategic transformation and spinal cord injury (SCI) advocacy**. Her career is defined by a unique ability to bridge the gap between medical expertise, corporate social responsibility, and the lived experience of disability. Lucy's impact is felt globally. In the UK, **she has held pivotal roles at the National Spinal Injuries Centre and the charity Back Up**, where she evolved from designing vocational support programs to her current role as Corporate Fundraiser. Her vision for inclusive rehabilitation even led her to establish a peer-led training program in Bangladesh, which has empowered over 450 individuals since 2012.

Beyond her operational work, Lucy is a prominent figure in international governance. As the President of the European Spinal Cord Injury Federation (ESCIF) for the past four years, she has navigated the organization through the challenges of the post-COVID era, focusing on long-term sustainability and strategic growth. A sought-after international speaker, **Lucy continues to travel the world—from Europe to Australia—advocating for systemic change and practical, sustainable progress for the SCI community**.

VINCENZO FALABELLA, FAIP PRESIDENT

Vincenzo Falabella is **an association leader and institutional representative committed to promoting the rights of persons with disabilities.** In 2001, following a horseback riding accident, he sustained a spinal cord injury. Currently, **he is president of FAIP, the Italian Federation of Associations of Persons with Spinal Cord Injury and president of FISH** (Italian Federation for the Rights of Persons with disabilities and families) . Currently he is a **councillor of the CNEL** (National Council for Economics and Labour), where he contributes to public policies in the economic and labour fields. He is also a **councillor of Superior Council of Public Education**, part of the Ministry of Education and Merit. In 2023, he was awarded the honour of **Knight of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic by the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella.**

FEW WORDS ABOUT COMACCHIO

Comacchio, **known as "little Venice,"** is an enchanting lagoon city: it is **charming and authentic**, with a vitality that draws strength from respect for its history and the surrounding environment.

Its **seven beaches** are the ideal destination for a vacation with family or friends, or even for a **relaxing weekend, to rest in the sun** or **celebrate in the entertaining nightlife** of the beaches.

OUR VENUE

FLORENZ HOTEL: OPEN AIR RESORT

VILLAGE DIRECTLY ON THE SEA
WITH FACILITIES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

WEDNESDAY 27TH MAY 2026

3 - 7 PM	CHECK-IN AT THE FLORENZ OPEN AIR RESORT, CONGRESS REGISTRATION, WELCOME DRINK
7 - 8:30 PM	DINNER

THURSDAY 28TH MAY 2026

9.30 - 10 AM — **OPENING SESSION**

Vincenzo Falabella, president of FAIP
Lucy Robinson, president of ESCIF

10 - 11 AM — **INSTITUTIONAL GREETINGS SESSION**

Alessandra Locatelli, Italian Minister for disabilities;
Maria Teresa Bellucci, Italian Viceminister of Labour and Social Policies;
Massimo Fabi, councillor of Region Emilia Romagna;
Daniele Garuti, president of the Province of Ferrara;
Adriana Cassinis; president of SIMS;
Silvia Galeri, member of the Presidency Council of SIMFER

11 - 11.30 AM — **COFFEE BREAK**

11.30- 12.30 AM — **ACTIVE AGING OF PEOPLE WITH SPINAL CORD INJURIES**

Michele Angelo Spinelli, acting director of Spinal Unit Ospedale Niguarda, Milano**;**
Jacopo Bonavita, director of the Spinal Cord Unit Pergine Valsugana, Trento;
Franz Penninx, member of ESCIF
Nicola Longo, councillor of FAIP Ets
Q&A

12..30 AM - 1 PM — **INTERACTIVE SESSION ON MOBILITY AIDS BY MARTIN WENGER**

1 - 3 PM — **LUNCH BREAK**

3 - 4 PM — **RESOURCES FOR SERVICES AND PROJECTS FOR ACTIVE AGING**

Jorge Araya, Secretary of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
Eleni Moumtzi - Nakka, physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist
Serafino Corti, coordinator of the National Observatory for Persons with Disabilities
Q&A

4 - 4:30 PM — **COFFEE BREAK**

4 - 6 PM — **SPONSOR SESSION**

7 PM — **GALA DINNER**

FAIP ETS
Federazione delle Associazioni Italiane di Persone con lesione al midollo spinale

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THE SPEAKERS

Michele Angelo Spinelli

Spinelli has evolved from a specialist to the Head of Neurourology and Acting Director of Hospital Niguarda. He is a **pioneer in pharmacological and electrical treatments for neurogenic bladder and the inventor of innovative surgical techniques for sacral and pudendal nerve stimulation**

Nicola Longo

Longo has been tetraplegic since 1988 following a diving accident. After undergoing rehabilitation in France and the United States, he later earned an MBA in Turin and built a professional career in consultancy and telecommunications. Alongside his professional work, **he serves as the president of the "Stand Up Campania" Association and is a pegional Board member of FISH.**

Jacopo Bonavita

With a specialization in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Bonavita have dedicated my career to intensive neuro-rehabilitation. After nearly two decades of clinical practice across the AUSL of Bologna, Ravenna, and the Montecatone Institute, **he currently serves as the Director of the Spinal Unit and the Director of the Clinical Department of Rehabilitation at Montecatone**, leading specialized care for spinal and brain injuries

Franz Penninx

After **founding, building and staffing the new Rijndam Rehabilitation Center (incl. SCI department) in Rotterdam**, Penninx was CEO of home care organizations and the CFO of a large mental health institu tion. He was a **board member of the Dutch SCI Association from 2009 until 2018** and has been advisor to the board since then.

Eleni Moumtzi - Nakka

Moumtzi has been a **physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist** in the army since 2015 and from 2018 onwards studyied geriatrics. She served as a director of the **PRM department** in a military hospital in Athens and the last two years are trying to include rTMS therapy for our patients.

Jorge Araya

Since 1996, Mr. Araya has worked in the field of human rights for the United Nations. Professor Jorge Araya is **Secretary of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and an official of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**

Serafino Corti

A Psychology graduate from the University of Padua, he earned his PhD from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, focusing his research on the **quality of life of people with disabilities and their families.** Furthermore, he designed and implemented an experimental model to support caregivers

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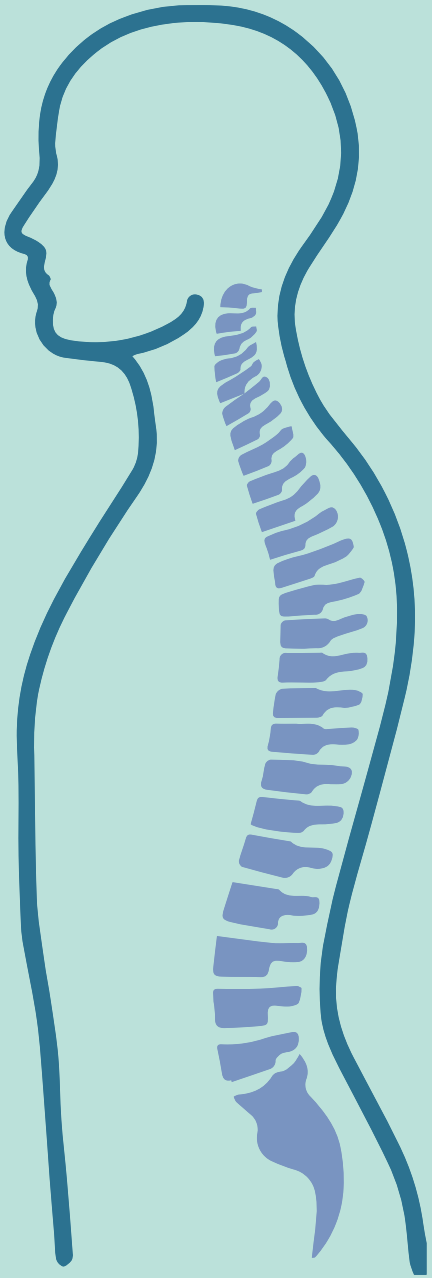
FRIDAY 29TH MAY 2026



09.30 – 10:15AM	**AI AND ACTIVE AGING OF PEOPLE WITH SPINAL CORD INJURIES** **Matteo Moro**, AI expert University of Genova; **Andrea Volterrani,** professor at the Tor Vergata University of Rome; **Fiovo Bitti**, CNEL councillor
10 :20- 11 AM	**PRESENTATION OF THE "IN SCI ITALIA" PROJECT** **Raffaele Goretti**, president of Fondazione Serena Olivi **Alessio Baricich**, president of SIRN
11 – 11:30 AM	**COFFEE BREAK**
11:30 AM - 1 PM	**THE PERSONALIZED AND PARTICIPATORY LIFE PLAN AND SPINAL UNITS** **Paolo Bandiera**, coordinator of group "Progetto Vita OND Italy", **Laura Simoncini**, director of Spinal Cord Unit - Montecatone; **Silvia Galeri**, director of the Spinal Unit, ASST Papa Giovanni XXIII, Bergamo **Richard Church and Jason Gunn**, experts of Spinal cord injury, UK **Shareback of personal experiences - Crossabili** **Q&A**
1 - 3 PM	**LUNCH**
3.30 PM	**CULTURAL ACTIVITIES**
7 PM	**DINNER**

THE SPEAKERS

Paolo Bandiera

Bandiera, for thirty years, he has been a key figure at AISM (Italian Multiple Sclerosis Association), where he serves as Director of General Affairs and Advocacy. He is a leading expert in disability, inclusion, and third sector policies, representing patients' rights at national and regional institutions. Among his main achievements are the “Charter of Rights” and the “MS Barometer.”

Laura Simoncini

A physiatrist by training, Laura Simoncini is the **Director of the Spinal Cord Unit at the Montecatone Rehabilitation Institute**. This unit is the largest in Italy and one of the most significant in Europe, boasting a capacity of 88 beds.

Silvia Galeri

Galeri’s career began in 1992 at the Spedali Civili in Brescia, where she practiced until 2002. That year, she was appointed Medical Head of Unit at the IRCCS Fondazione Don Carlo Gnocchi.
From 2016 to 2022, **she served as the Director of the Rehabilitation Department at the "E. Spalenza" Center in Rovato**.
Since February 1st, 2022, she has held the position of **Director of Specialized Rehabilitation at the ASST Papa Giovanni XXIII in Bergamo.**

Richard Church

Paraplegic since 1977, Church spent 35 years at British Airways enhancing travel for PRMs and managing logistics for Paralympic athletes at Beijing 2008. He collaborated with global authorities (CAA, EASA) to improve **aviation accessibility and specialist equipment for disabled children.** Now a peer educator at the NSIC in Stoke Mandeville, he uses his lived experience to teach new patients how to lead successful lives and travel with confidence.

Jason Gunn

Gunn suffered a spinal stroke in 2007, with further complications in 2013 resulting in C4 tetraplegia. Since retiring, **he has become an active volunteer at the National Spinal Injuries Centre (Stoke Mandeville Hospital)**, contributing through patient education, strategic board participation, and goal planning.

Raffaele Goretti

43 years ago, a life-changing accident led Goretti to become a leading advocate for disability rights. **A nurse and educator by trade, he specialized in spinal cord injury care and regional health policy.**
At FAIP, he spearheaded the creation of specialized Spinal Units across Italy and co-founded ESCIF. In 2003, he was honored as a Knight of the Italian Republic for his extraordinary social commitment

Alessio Baricich

Baricich, currently, serves as a Medical Director at the Maggiore della Carità University Hospital in Novara, where **he leads the Rehabilitative Day Hospital and the Osteoporosis Clinic**. His work focuses on managing complex rehabilitation pathways and bone health.

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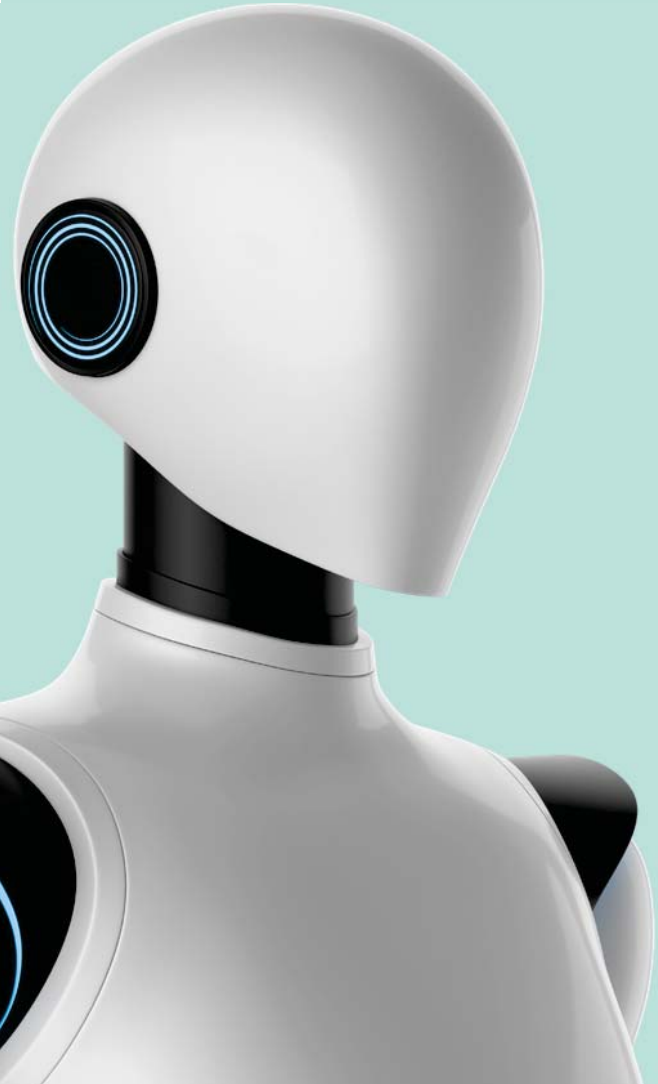
ESCIF EUROPEAN CONGRESS 27TH- 30TH MAY 2026 - COMACCHIO, ITALY

AI AND ACTIVE AGING OF PEOPLE WITH SPINAL CORD INJURIES

29TH MAY 2026



SPEAKERS

MATTEO MORO

Fixed-term Research Fellow **Department of Informatics, Bioengineering, Robotics, and Systems Engineering** - DIBRIS Inter-school Section of Mathematical, Physical, and Natural Sciences within DIBRIS

ANDREA VOLTERRANI

Associate Professor of Cultural and Communicative Processes at the University of Rome Tor Vergata, he serves as the Director of the Master's programs in Social Communication and Social Farming. **He leads several national and European research and training projects centered on hybrid participatory processes for sustainable community development, social communication, health prevention messaging, and social and digital vulnerabilities**

FIOVO BITTI

Active in the trade union movement since 1995, he began his career focusing on leadership training and specializing in key areas such as **occupational health and safety, workplace inclusion, and the protection of labor rights.**

SATURDAY 30TH MAY 2026

9:30 - 11 AM	ESCIF ASSEMBLY AND CONGRESS 2027 ANNOUNCEMENT
11 - 12 AM	MEMBERS INPUT
12 AM	CLOSING CEREMONY AND GOODBYE DRINKS

Have a safe journey home!

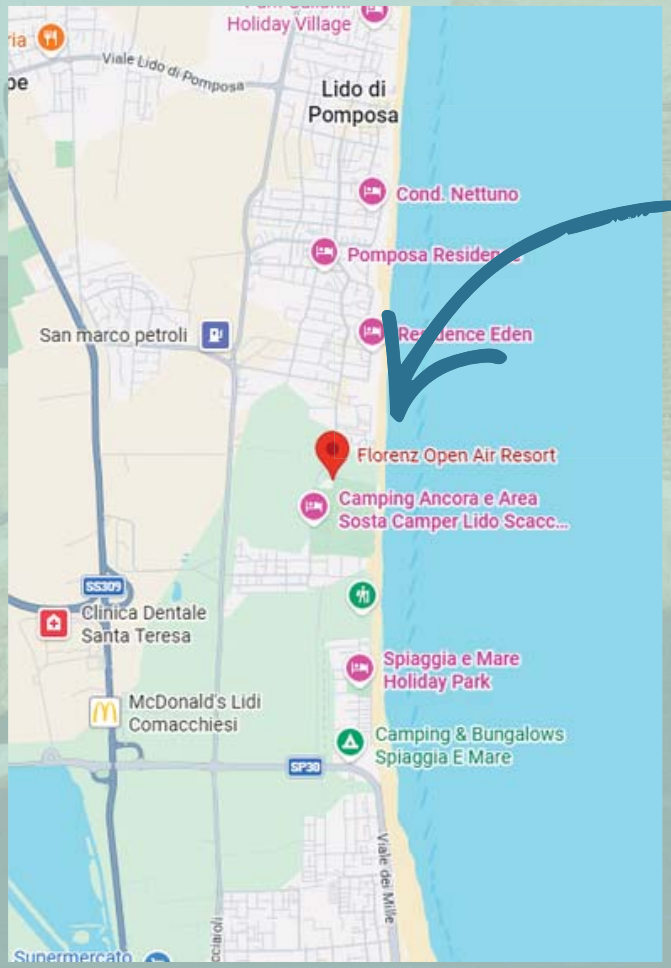
MEMBERS INPUT SESSION

- **SLOVENIA**: **Presentation of a project to improve accessibility of buildings: "I would like to go in there too"**;
  by Matej Verbajs, professional worker employed at Paraplegics Association of Slovenia

- **DENMARK**: **Embracing a changed body – 15 portraits of pleasure. Challenging myths about sexuality, aging and spinal cord injury through lived stories**;
  by Henriette Kirkegård Rask, nurse and specialist in sexological counselling - Specialized Hospital for Polio and Accident Victims, Denmark

A FEW MORE INFORMATION....

YOU ARE HERE!



ABOUT THE ACCESSIBILITY OF COMACCHIO,
CHECK THIS GUIDE OUT!
(IN ITALIAN)

FOR ANY EMERGENCY OR NEED:

segreteria@faipets.it

See you ...

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... in 2027!