

European Federation of Hard of Hearing People

# Hearing Loss: The Statistics

## 2015

## Global Hearing Loss Statistics

It is hard to know precise numbers of how many people experience hearing loss across the EU, Europe, and indeed the world. There are many sources of information and different organisations often present their statistics in different ways.

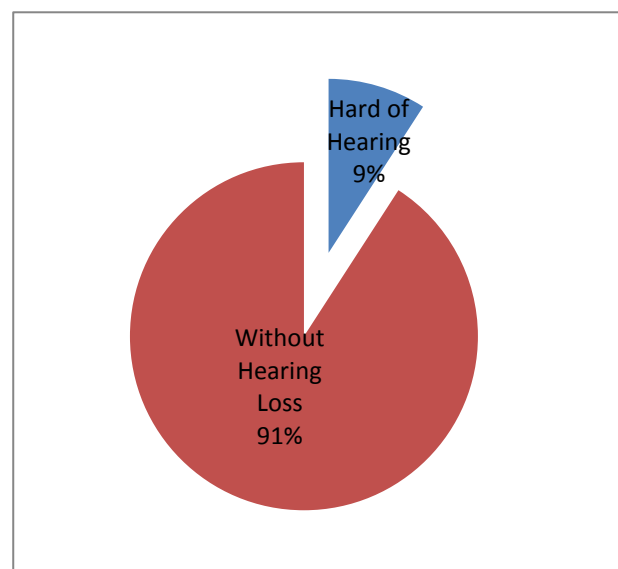
This is what we have:

### EFHOH

At EFHOH we believe there to be 51 million hard of hearing people in the European Union.

This is around 9% of the population of the EU, or approximately 1 in 10.

**EU Population: 507.4 million**  
**Est. Hearing Loss: 51 million**

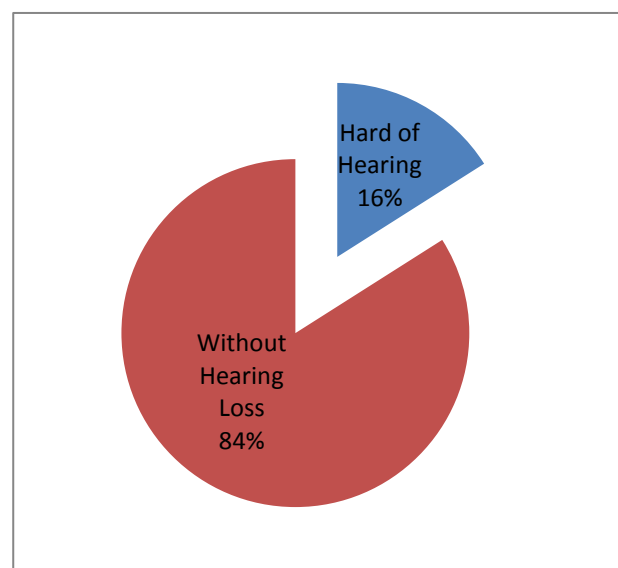


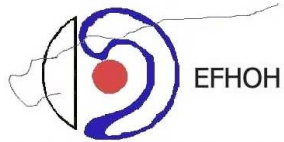
### Hear-it.org

The website hear-it.org estimates that the number of Europeans (not only EU) "with a hearing impairment great enough to adversely affect their daily lives" is 16%.

16% is equal to just under 1 in 6.

**European Population: 742.5 million**  
**Est. Hearing Loss: 119 million**





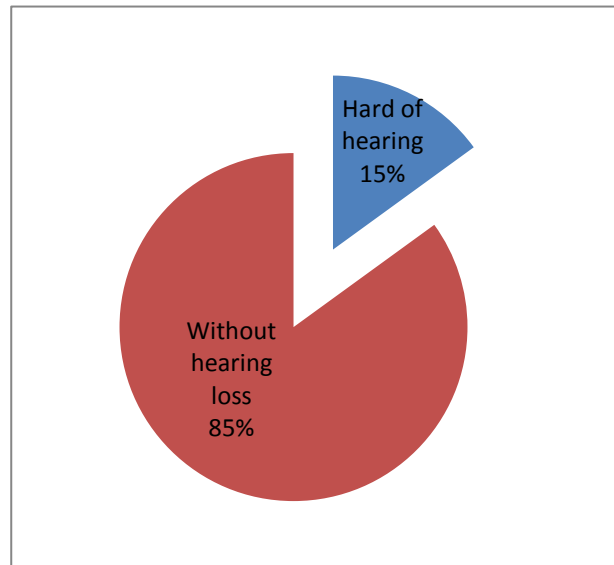
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## World Health Organisation

WHO figures suggest that, worldwide, 15% of adults have some degree of hearing loss. This figure falls to 5.3% when children are also included.

This figure of 15% seems to support the information put forward by hear-it.org

**Global Population: 7.125 billion**  
**Est. Hearing Loss: 328 million adults**  
**32 million children**



## National Hearing Loss Statistics

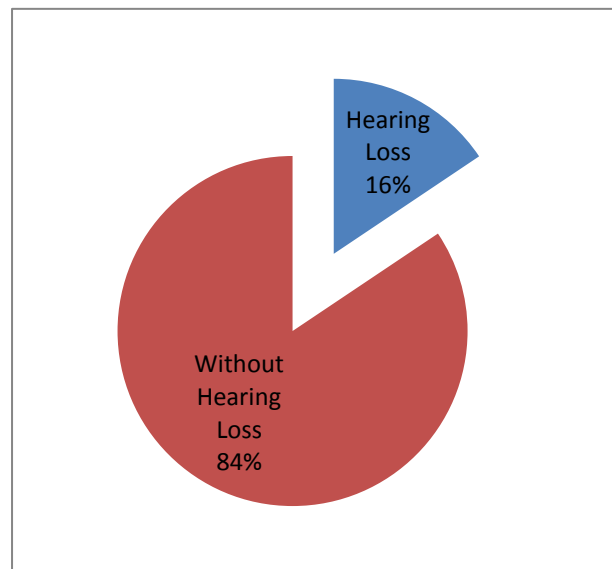
Data from some individual states, for example the United Kingdom, is easier to come by than larger scale data. Some countries have different measures of what constitutes a hearing loss, making it difficult to get a general picture.

### Action on Hearing Loss

Action on Hearing Loss states that there are more than 10 million people in the UK with some form of hearing loss.

This is approximately 14% or, again, around 1 in 6.

**UK Population: 64.1 million**  
**Est. Hearing Loss: 10 million**

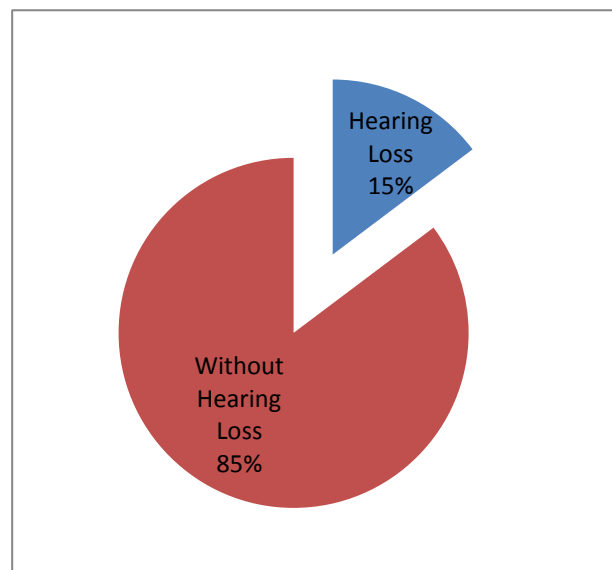


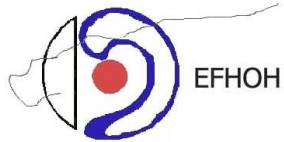
### HRF (Swedish Association of Hard of Hearing People)

HRF currently estimate there to be 1.4 million hard of hearing people in Sweden.

This is around 13% of the Swedish population, or between 1 in 6 and 1 in 7.

**Swedish Population: 9.5 million**  
**Est. Hearing Loss: 1.4 million**





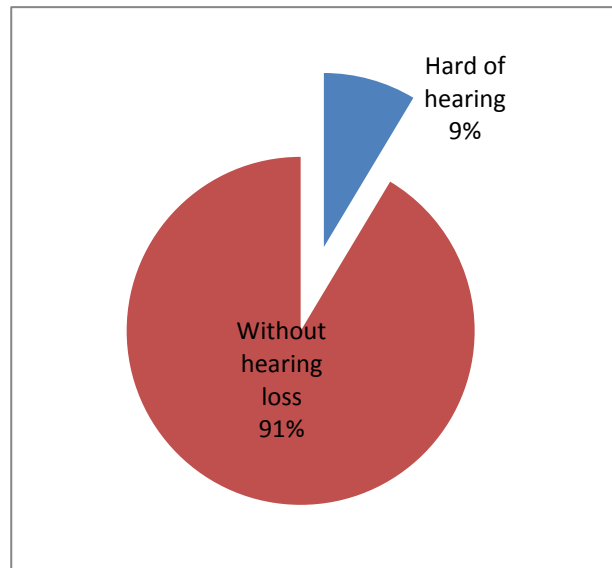
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## Netherlands

It is currently estimated that there are 1.6 million hard of hearing people in Netherlands.

This is around 9% of the population, or close to 1 in 10.

**Dutch Population: 17 million**  
**Est. Hearing Loss: 1.6 million**

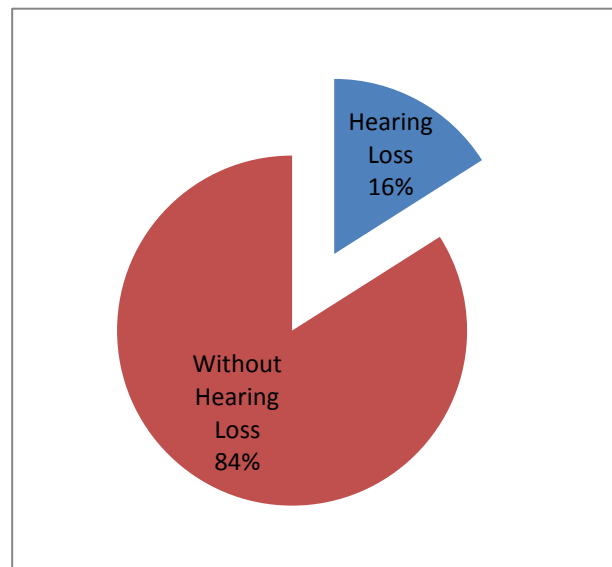


## Denmark

It is currently estimated that there are 800,000 hard of hearing people in Denmark.

This is around 16% of the population, or close to 1 in 6.

**Danish Population: 5 million**  
**Est. Hearing Loss: 800,000**

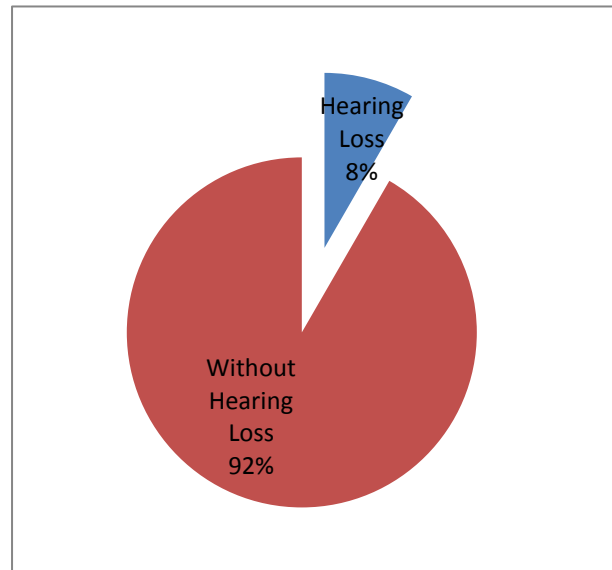


## France

In France there are an estimated 6 million hard of hearing people out of a population of around 66 million.

This is 8% of the population, or 1 in 12 people.

**French Population: 66 million**  
**Est. Hearing Loss: 6 million**

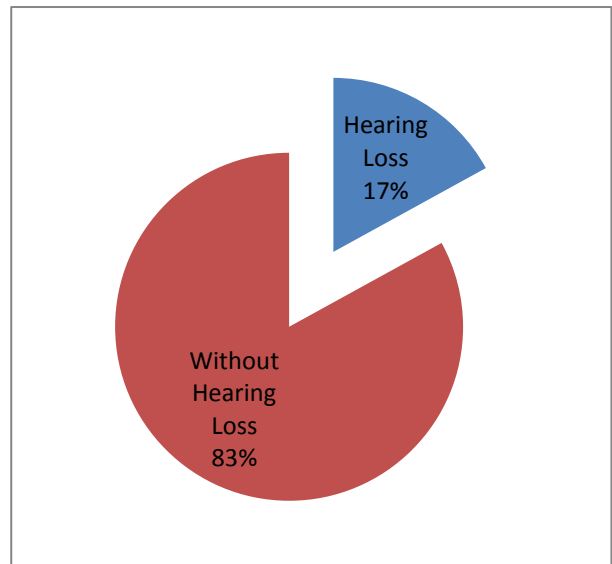


## Ireland

It is estimated that about 1 in 6 of the population of Ireland have a hearing loss.

This amounts to a little under 800,000 people.

**Irish Population: 4.595 million**  
**Est. Hearing Loss: 781,150 (estimated)**

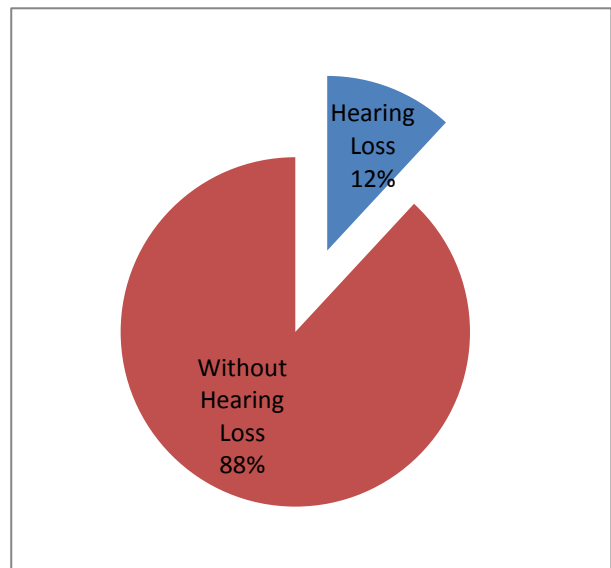


## Belgium

It is stated that 12% of the population of Belgium has some form of hearing loss.

This is across Wallonia and Flanders.

**Belgian Population: 11.2 million**  
**Est. Hearing Loss: 1.34 million**



These statistics indicate that, although different organisations might use different figures and measures when talking about hearing loss, there appears to be a degree of consistency from the global, to the European, and down to the individual state level when it comes to the numbers of people who experience hearing loss.

Developing such a general picture of the prevalence of hearing loss could be highly beneficial for identifying under-reporting in particular countries and which countries need to do more in terms of screening, diagnosis, and treatment.

## Spurious Hearing Loss Statistics

Unfortunately many states across the EU do not do a very good job of gathering data on the numbers of hard of hearing people in their nations. This is extremely problematic as it means that it is not possible for these states to provide appropriate treatment for these individuals, and it is extremely unlikely that these countries will be accessible to hard of hearing people.

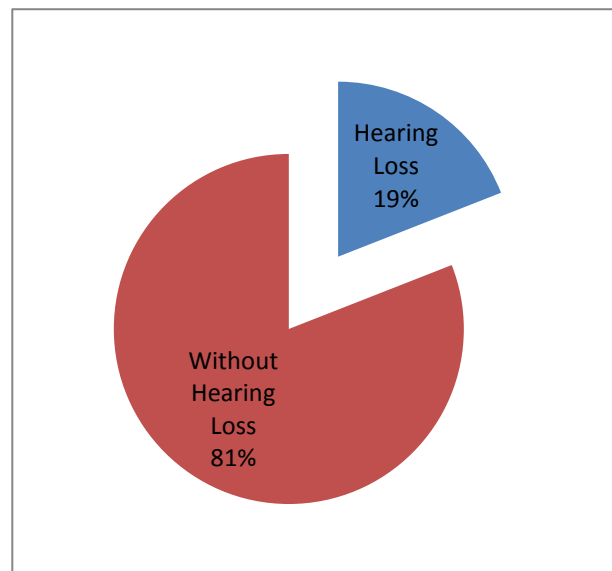
These are some of the worst cases.

### Austria

Official figures from the Austrian government state that there are only 200,000 hard of hearing people in the country.

However, it is estimated by hearing loss organisations that 19% of the population over the age of 14 has a hearing loss. This would amount to 1.6 million people, eight times the number reported by the government.

**Austrian Population: 11.2 million**  
**Official Hearing Loss: 200,000**  
**Est. Hearing Loss: 1.6 million**

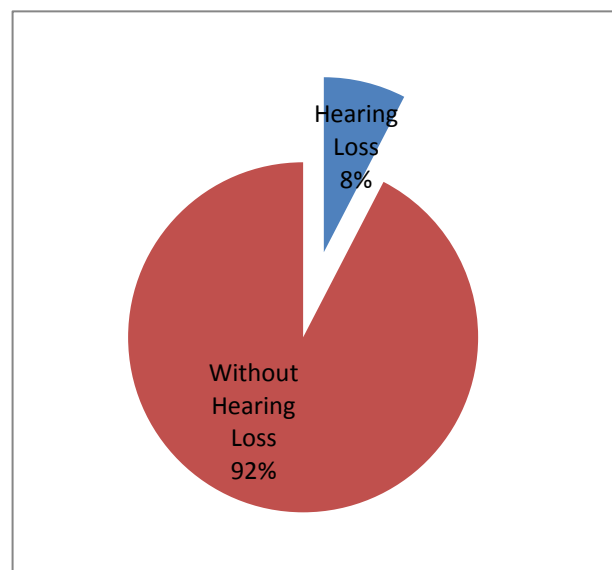


### Spain

In Spain official figures state that 1.064 million people over the age of 6 have a hearing loss.

However, unofficial estimations suggest that this number is closer to 3.5 million, over three times as high as the official statistic.

**Spanish Population: 47.27 million**  
**Official Hearing Loss: 1.064 million**  
**Est. Hearing Loss: 3.5 million**



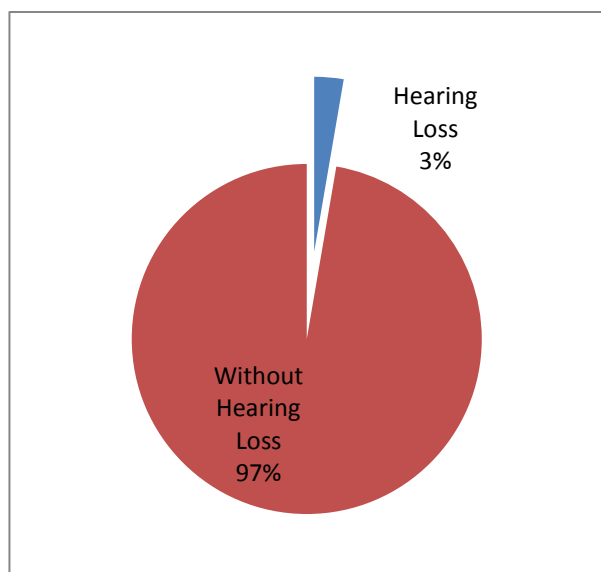


## Poland

In Poland there are 1 million people registered as “hearing impaired”. Out of a population of 37 million this amounts to just under 3% of the population.

Although we do not have an alternative statistic to offer, the gap between this figure and the numbers reported across the EU would suggest that Poland needs to do better at diagnosing hearing loss in its population, or simply better at gathering data.

**Polish Population: 37 million**  
**Registered Hearing Loss: 1 million**



Other countries do a similarly poor job when it comes to gathering data. **Italy** is not able to offer more than a general estimate of hearing loss numbers, whilst **Greece** does not even have a general estimate to offer.

It is essential that all nations are aware of the scale of hearing loss in their societies. Only then can appropriate measures be taken to ensure that all of these people received the treatment that they require and are not excluded from full participation in society.

## Getting an Accurate Picture

Gaining an accurate picture of just how many people experience hearing loss can be quite difficult, for a number of reasons.

- Different demographics
- Underreporting
- Different definitions
- Vested interest

The most straightforward reason as to why the reported numbers differ would be simply that the numbers are just different. Figures could vary simply due to the reason that the demographics in different countries vary. There may be a more ageing population in one than in another.

In the UK it takes people an average of 10 years to approach the issue of their hearing loss so a significant amount of hearing loss goes unreported for long periods of time.

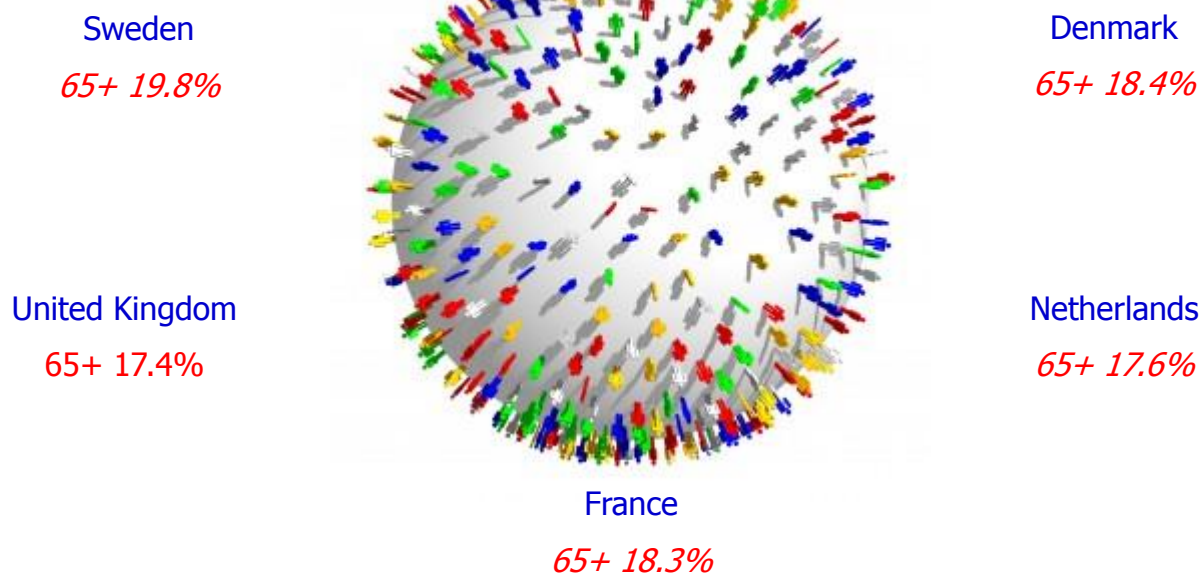
Different countries may have different clinical definitions of what constitutes a hearing loss. Depending on the threshold, this may lead to lower or higher reported rates of hearing loss.

When considering statistics it is always essential to give a thought to the vested interests that might be at stake in the gathering of information. For example, it could be said to be in the interest of a national government to downplay the issue of hearing loss so that it is not compelled to provide care and services and the like. On the other hand, it could be said to be in the interest of hearing loss lobby groups to overstate the numbers so as to strengthen their political position.

## Demographics

Due to the increased prevalence of hearing loss amongst the elderly and the association between our ageing populations and rising levels of hearing loss in society, you might expect that those countries that report higher rates of hearing loss simply have older populations than other countries.

Consider the five countries below. Sweden has the highest percentage of people aged 65 and over. Followed by Denmark. Followed by France, the Netherlands and with the UK in last place. However, of these countries Sweden, Denmark and the UK report the highest levels of hearing loss, with Netherlands and France around 4 – 5% lower.



Clearly we cannot use this as an explanation therefore. So we may have to give consideration to one of the other explanations outlined before. It is possible that some countries are significantly underreporting or underdiagnosing hearing loss. This might mean that countries need to introduce better screening programmes so as to better reach those people who are probably experiencing hearing loss but not currently being represented in the statistics.

One area that is need of more research is that of environmentally induced hearing loss, especially amongst younger people. In our societies many people are exposed to continued loud noise that can cause hearing loss. However, young people are increasingly exposing themselves to loud music through earphones and at events.

This particular demographic could have a large influence on reported levels of hearing loss across different nations.

## Hearing Loss to Come

Europe, as with many other parts of the world, has an ageing population. Combined with increasing rates of environmentally induced hearing loss through loud music and other common environmental noise hazards this means that the number of people and proportion of the European population that experience hearing loss is only going to rise in the coming years.

Of course, estimates as to the rate of ageing and the influence of the environment on hearing loss, and the effects this will have on demographics of society, vary. However, if we use figures presented by Action on Hearing Loss in the UK then it is possible to make some predications for the EU, Europe, and the wider world.

Action on Hearing Loss estimates that the number of people in the UK that experience hearing loss will rise to 14.5 million by 2031. There are currently around 10 million people with a hearing loss in the UK, so that is an increase of almost 50% in the space of 15 years.

Not all countries are ageing at the same rate so we cannot say for sure if this prediction will also be true in other nations. However, it would be fair to say that we could expect a similar trend to be seen across Europe in the coming years. The EU could see it's hard of hearing population rise to something like 75 million, whilst the wider European area could host something like 180 million.

This can only put more pressure on services that are already under a great deal of strain. The necessity for action, therefore, shall only get greater.