



Post-Event Report

Rights in Focus

Addressing Inclusion of Hard of Hearing Europeans

02 October 2025

European Parliament

Brussels, Belgium



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Executive Summary

Event overview: On 02 October 2025, the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People (EFHOH), in collaboration with the European Association of Hearing Aid Professionals (AEA) and hosted by MEP Katrin Langensiepen, organised the event “Rights in Focus: Addressing Inclusion of Hard of Hearing Europeans” at the European Parliament in Brussels.

Evidence and impact: New findings from the EFHOH survey covering 18 European countries reveal that access to reasonable accommodation for hard of hearing employees remains limited and inconsistent. Most of respondents reported insufficient accommodation, communication fatigue, isolation, and underemployment driven by stigma and low awareness among employers. Clinical experts also presented new findings on fatigue and productivity loss linked to hearing loss, while personal testimonies illustrated barriers and solutions in everyday work environments.

Policy dialogue: The European Commission and the European Disability Forum (EDF) emphasised that accessibility is a precondition for all rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and urged the EU to make accessibility and assistive technology affordability central to the next Disability Strategy and EU budget (2028–2034).

Call to action: Participants urged the European Commission and Member States to adopt an EU Hearing Loss Strategy, enforce accessibility laws, ensure affordable access to hearing care and assistive technology, and support quality employment and early screening for hearing loss across Europe.



Insights

The event gathered policymakers, professionals, and advocates to explore the inclusion of hard of hearing people in Europe, focusing on communication accessibility, employment, and recognition. Discussions emphasised the need for stronger enforcement of rights, cross-sector cooperation, and a shift from individual responsibility to systemic inclusion.



MEP Katrin Langensiepen

MEP Langensiepen underlined that accessibility measures such as real-time captioning, hearing loops, and assistive technologies are not optional but a precondition for participation. The opening remarks also highlighted persistent inequalities in education, employment, and healthcare and called for stronger enforcement of EU instruments such as the European Accessibility Act (EAA) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

"We have the right to connect and to communicate, and that right must be recognised and implemented"
Lidia Best

Lidia Best, EFHOH

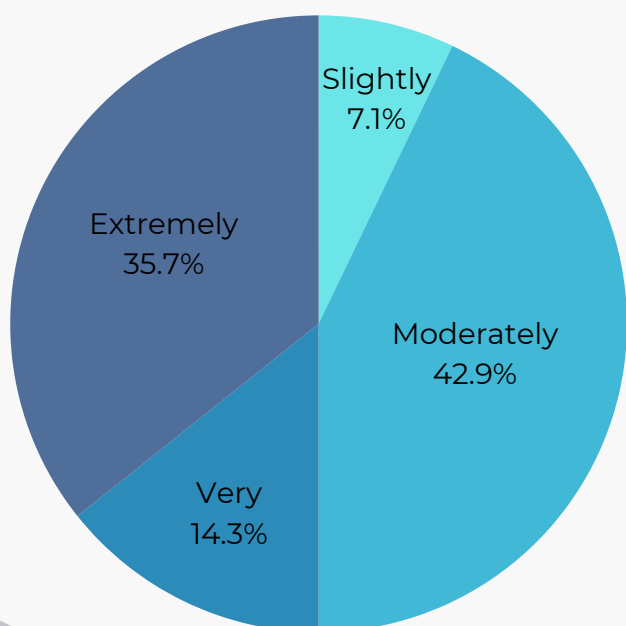
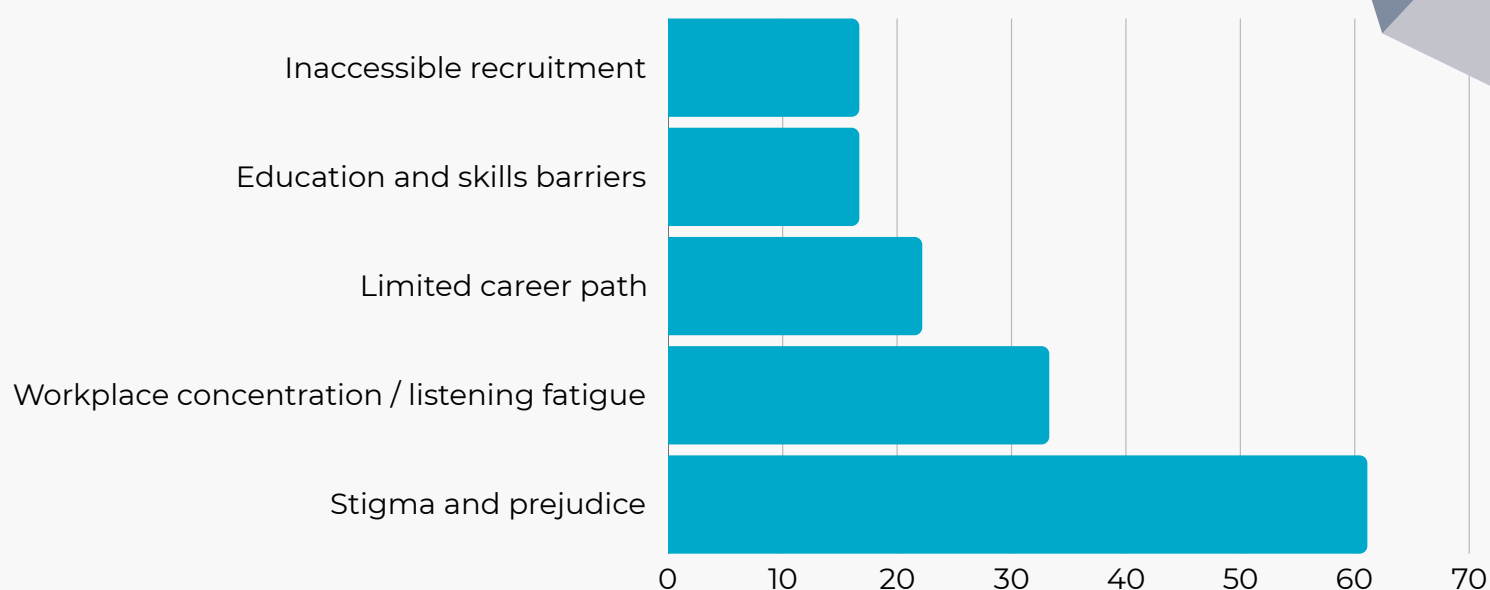
Ms. Best reported that 59 million Europeans have self-reported hearing loss. Despite this scale, hard of hearing people are still rarely included in national disability and employment strategies. Survey findings revealed that reasonable accommodation often depends on disability certification, with only a few countries applying a proactive approach.



Insights

What are the most common barriers people with hearing loss face in keeping or finding a job? (%)

EFHOH, 2025



How challenging is/was communication at work due to your hearing loss? (%)

EFHOH-AEA, 2025

Insights



Ricard López, EDbN

Mr. López highlighted that many professionals still misclassify deafblind individuals under other conditions, such as deafness, blindness, or autism, leaving them without the appropriate services and interventions from the outset. This lack of recognition, combined with low public awareness, leads to exclusion from education, training, and employment opportunities.

Monika Chaba, European Commission

Ms. Chaba outlined the EU's legal and policy framework, including the Employment Equality Directive, UN CRPD, and the European Disability Strategy 2021–2030. The presentation also introduced the Commission's new Disability Employment Package, which provides detailed guidance for employers, trade unions, and civil-society organisations on how to recruit, retain, and support employees with disabilities.



Mark Laureyns, AEA

Mr. Laureyns addressed the role of hearing care professionals in supporting workers with hearing loss and preventing the negative health and employment consequences of untreated hearing difficulties. Data from AEA indicate that people with disabling hearing loss are three times more likely to be unemployed and face significantly higher risks of fatigue and stress.

Insights



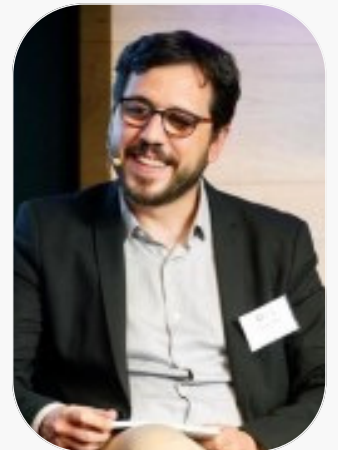
Laure Jacquemin, University of Antwerp

Ms. Jacquemin introduced the ongoing research project "Hear Again, Work Again", examining the relationship between severe hearing loss, work participation, and overall well-being. Findings highlight the substantial impact of untreated or insufficiently supported hearing loss on productivity and recovery. According to data presented, individuals with severe hearing loss demonstrate twice the need to recover after a working day compared to the general population.

"To truly benefit from technological progress, persons with disabilities need accessibility, availability, and affordability. Without these three A's, participation remains out of reach"
Alejandro Moledo

Alejandro Moledo, EDF

Mr. Moledo reviewed key EU legislative frameworks, including the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) and the European Accessibility Act (EAA), which aim to ensure access to audiovisual content, electronic communications, and essential services such as banking, transport, and emergency communication (112). Mr. Moledo noted that implementation remains uneven, and that stronger enforcement and monitoring mechanisms are required to ensure real progress.



Audience interventions

The discussion following the panel reflected a strong consensus on the need to move from individual effort to systemic responsibility. Participants and speakers exchanged perspectives on enforcement, disability recognition, and affordability of hearing technologies.

Shared responsibility for inclusion

EFHOH Board Member Alf Lindberg raised the question of individual versus societal responsibility in ensuring accessibility. He noted that “the pressure is put on the individual” to secure reasonable accommodation, while public systems often fail to provide adequate support.

Panelists agreed that inclusion cannot depend on personal initiative. The discussion highlighted the importance of enforcement mechanisms and institutional accountability and called for national bodies to actively monitor implementation and support employers in compliance.



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Disability recognition and freedom of movement

A question from Olivia Lori, EU Influencer, drew attention to the absence of a common EU framework for mutual recognition of disability status, which forces individuals to reapply for certification when moving across Member States. She also questioned why quotas for trainees with disabilities in EU institutions are not extended to permanent employment positions.

In response, the European Commission representative Monika Chaba acknowledged that the issue has been raised within the EU Disability Platform. EDF added that while harmonisation poses legal challenges, the Commission could issue non-binding recommendations to encourage alignment and promote CRPD-compliant assessment models across Member States.

Affordability of hearing care and assistive technology

A contribution from Leonel Luis, representing the Portuguese hard of hearing association OUVIR, highlighted the high cost of hearing aids and cochlear implants, often unaffordable for individuals without state reimbursement.

EFHOH President Lidia Best and AEA President Mark Laureyns responded that reimbursement policies remain fragmented across Europe, with France, the Nordic countries, and the UK offering the most inclusive systems. Participants underlined that ensuring affordability and equal access to hearing care must become a priority at both national and EU levels, supported by consistent advocacy and data collection.

Concluding remarks: a call to action

As Europe works to strengthen social inclusion and equality, the rights of hard of hearing people must be recognised as a core component of the EU's disability and employment agenda. The following calls to action summarise the key recommendations that emerged from the event:

- 1. Develop an EU Hearing Loss Strategy:** establish a coherent policy framework ensuring access to professional hearing care, rehabilitation, and lifelong maintenance of hearing aids and cochlear implants.
- 2. Guarantee communication accessibility:** ensure that meetings, education, employment, and public services systematically provide real-time captioning, hearing loops, and accessible digital interfaces.
- 3. Strengthen enforcement of existing legislation:** implement and monitor compliance with the European Accessibility Act and the Employment Equality Directive.
- 4. Ensure affordability and availability of assistive technologies:** make the “three A’s” — accessibility, availability, and affordability — a guiding principle of EU and national policy.
- 5. Promote quality employment and workplace adaptation:** support employers in implementing reasonable accommodation through guidance, training, and funding.
- 6. Improve data and coordination:** strengthen the collection of comparable data on hearing loss, reasonable accommodation, and employment outcomes across Europe, through coordinated structure.

Acknowledgements

The European Federation of Hard of Hearing People (EFHOH) and the European Association of Hearing Aid Professionals (AEA) extend their sincere appreciation to MEP Katrin Langensiepen for hosting the event “Rights in Focus: Addressing Inclusion of Hard of Hearing Europeans” at the European Parliament, to the European Union, for co-funding the event, and to all speakers and participants for their valuable contributions.

Special thanks are given to Henrique Raskin, EFHOH, for moderating the session, the staff involved in the organisation of the event and to Be Live for providing real-time captioning throughout the event.

The organisers also wish to acknowledge the active participation of representatives from the European Commission, the European Disability Forum, the European Deafblind Network, the University of Antwerp, and all national associations whose continued advocacy strengthens the inclusion and visibility of hard of hearing people across Europe.



Resources

[Audiovisual Media Services Directive \(AVMSD\)](#).

[Disability Employment Package](#)

[European Accessibility Act \(EAA\)](#).

[European Association of Hearing Aid Professionals \(AEA\)](#).

[European Deafblind Network \(EDbN\)](#).

[European Disability Forum \(EDF\)](#).

[European Federation of Hard of Hearing People \(EFHOH\)](#).

[United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#).

Thank you!

efhoh.org

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