

Concluding Statement of the Annual General Meeting 2026

Towards a European Strategy on Hearing Loss

The Brussels Declaration

The European Federation of Hard of Hearing People (EFHOH) and its members convened in Brussels on 18 April 2026 for the Annual General Meeting, reaffirming the need for a coordinated European response to hearing loss and the commitment to enabling hard of hearing individuals throughout Europe to participate fully and equally in every aspect of society without barriers.

Today, over 59 million people in Europe experience self-reported hearing loss¹. According to the World Report on Hearing by the World Health Organization², hearing loss is steadily increasing and it has implications for equitable participation for hard of hearing people across all levels of society. Access to information, rehabilitation and assistive technologies aimed at hard of hearing people remains uneven across Member States.

We recognise that hard of hearing people, who primarily use spoken language, captioning, speech-to-text interpretation and assistive listening systems, continue to face structural and behavioural barriers that limit equal participation across key areas of life.

With this in mind, there is a need for growing recognition and coordinated action from all relevant stakeholders at both the European and national levels, in close cooperation with civil society. Access to communication, information and support is a fundamental condition for the right to full participation in all levels of society, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

We adopt this Declaration as a common framework calling on the European Commission to adopt the European Strategy on Hearing Loss.

¹ EFHOH, AEA, EHIMA, (2024, March). *Getting the numbers right on hearing loss: Hearing care and hearing aid use in Europe.*

² World Health Organization, (2021). *World report on hearing.*

A Call for European Strategy on Hearing Loss

EFHOH calls for a coordinated European response to address structural gaps and inequalities across Europe, which should be complementary to the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Strategy should contain the following actions:

1. **Awareness-raising:** Targeted actions to combat stigma, raise awareness, and strengthen understanding of hearing loss as an invisible disability.
2. **Recognition of hearing loss as a disability:** Despite the EU's ratification of the UNCRPD, recognition of hearing loss and deafness as disability remains uneven across Member States, limiting hard of hearing people from exercising their fundamental rights such as access to information and freedom of movement.
3. **Enhanced European data collection on hearing loss:** The EU and its Member States should incorporate hearing loss in national and European population surveys and public statistics to provide the public sector with a better understanding of hearing loss and support the development of better and more responsive public services.
4. **Develop guidance for the EU Action Plan on Hearing Loss:** This includes prevention, intervention, rehabilitation, quality of hearing care services, affordability of hearing aids and access to cochlear implants, including lifelong support.
5. **Recognise the right to hearing access:** Hearing access is an essential enabler for the exercise of social, cultural, economic and political participation for hard of hearing citizens. By hearing access for hard of hearing people, we mean access to spoken language via captioning, speech-to-text interpretation, and assistive listening systems.
6. **Guidance on inclusive education and employment for hard of hearing people:** Through the publication of good practices among Member States of effective provision of reasonable accommodation as a necessary enabler to close the employment gap, including supported transition from education to employment.
7. **Incorporate hearing loss in the European and national Healthy Ageing actions and programmes:** Hearing access is essential for the healthy ageing of hard of hearing people, maintaining communication with others, full participation, independence, and quality of life. Hearing loss is often associated with social isolation and reduced mental well-being, when appropriate support and rehabilitation are not provided.

The European Strategy on Hearing Loss should be supported through dedicated EU funding instruments, research programmes and social inclusion initiatives.

It is now essential to transition from policy commitments to effective implementation to truly advance the rights and inclusion of hard of hearing people across Europe.

The time has come for the European Union and its Member States to recognise hearing access as a key enabler for equal opportunities, independent living and full participation.

EFHOH AGM 2026

Brussels, Belgium



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