



Co-funded by
the European Union

Post-Event Report

From Policy to Practice:

Advancing Hard of Hearing Inclusion Across Europe

EFHOH's Conference and AGM 2026
17-19 April 2026
Brussels, Belgium



Event Overview

Event overview: On 17-19 April 2026, the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People (EFHOH), in collaboration with the Hoornetwerk Vlaanderen (Belgium), organised its Annual Conference, titled "From Policy to Practice: Advancing Hard of Hearing Inclusion Across Europe" in Brussels, Belgium, at the Maison des Associations Internationales.

The conference was held in the heart of European decision-making, bringing together Hard of Hearing community leaders, the European Commission, the European Parliament, civil society, academia and the tech industry. The programme also featured a demonstration of assistive listening systems, offering insights into innovative and potentially transformative listening experiences to participants.



Programme

Friday, 17 April 2026

Time	Programme
12h - 14h	Event Registration and Welcome Lunch
14h - 14h30	Keynote Speech Inmaculada Placencia Porrero (Senior Expert in Disability and Inclusion, Directorate-General on Justice, European Commission) Lidia Best (President, EFHOH)
14h30 - 16h	Panel 1: Implementing the Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities How the European Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is being put into action, through concrete examples that show progress, challenges, and lessons learned in advancing inclusion. Moderation: Lidia Best (President, EFHOH) Dragos-Lucian Ciobanu (Head of Speech Processing and Language Accessibility, European Parliament) Julia Stewart-David (Climate Change and Resilience Adviser, DG ECHO, European Commission) Elisabetta Degiampietro (Head of Conference Services Unit, DG Interpretation, European Commission) Alejandro Moledo (Deputy Director & Head of Policy, European Disability Forum)
16h - 16h30	Coffee Break
16h30 - 17h30	Panel 2: The European Accessibility Act and Hard of Hearing People How the EAA is improving access for hard of hearing people across key services and technologies, as communication, media, and digital environments become more inclusive through innovation. Moderation: Alf Lindberg (EFHOH) Inmaculada Placencia Porrero (Senior Expert in Disability and Inclusion, Directorate-General on Justice, European Commission) Daniel Casas Ballester (Senior Accessibility Policy Officer, European Disability Forum) Shadi Abou-Zahra (Principal Accessibility Standards and Policy Manager, Amazon) Sam Burkinshaw (Head of Global Business Development - Ampetronic) Mitchell Rutledge (Technology and Security Policy Manager, CCIAnet)
17h30 - 18h30	Panel 3: Inclusive Education and Employment How inclusive education and employment practices create equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in building accessible learning environments and inclusive workplaces. Moderation: Claire Landesmann (General Secretary, EFHOH) Marta Chomicz (Lecturer, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin) Adriana Zekveld (Assistant Professor, Otolaryngology, Amsterdam UMC) Maria Skoczyńska (Accessibility Expert, Stowarzyszenie "Twoje Nowe Możliwości") Gavin Phelan (Founder, ALRM)
19h - 21h	Welcome Reception Venue: Maison des Associations Internationales Rue Washington 40, Ixelles, Brussels, BE The Welcome Reception is sponsored by Apple.

Programme

Saturday, 18 April 2026

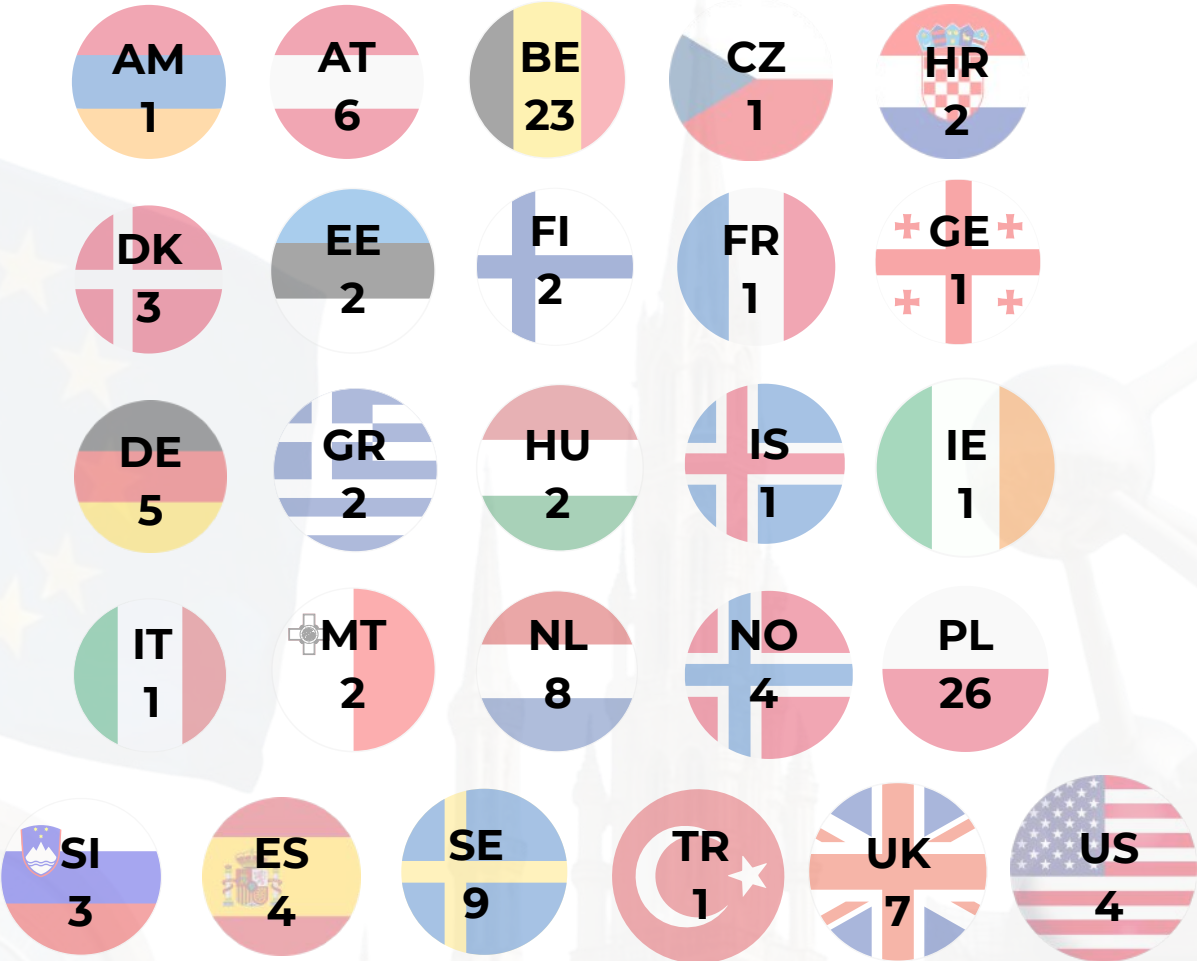
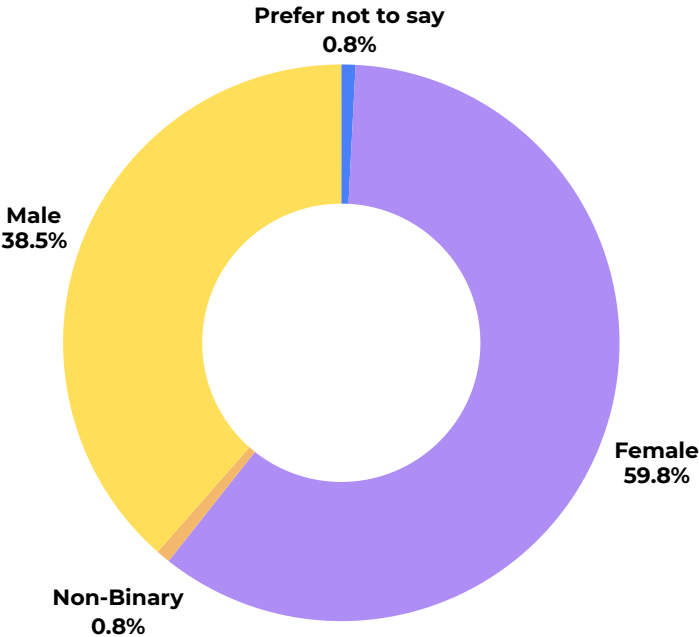
Time	Programme
08h - 09h	Event Registration and Coffee
09h - 10h	<p>Panel 4: Mainstreaming Inclusion and Participation for Hard of Hearing People How system structures across public services and institutions are essential for the equal participation of hard of hearing people, and the challenges faced when putting hearing accessibility into practice.</p> <p>Moderation: Morten Buan (Vice President EFHOH) Sabine Lobnig (Director Communications, Mobile & Wireless Forum - MWF/GARI) Peter Aksel Villadsen (Senior Vice President, Global Business Development, GN Hearing) Andrew Thomas (Chairman, International Association for Hearing Accessibility) Gina Welleman (Accessibility Advocate, Hoornetwerk Vlaanderen; Board Member, AHOSA vzw)</p>
10h - 10h30	Coffee Break
10h30 - 11h30	<p>Panel 5: Empowerment Through Leadership How inclusive environments and culture are enabled through the participation and representation of hard of hearing leadership.</p> <p>Moderation: Ida Hansson (Chairwoman, Unga Hörselskadade) Jonathan Elebjörk Wahlström (Co-Chair, EDF Youth Committee; General Secretary, Unga Hörselskadade) Karina Chupina (EFHOH's Representative at the EDF Women's Committee) Paulina Lewandowska (Vice-President, SUITA) Tania Galián Martín (Secretary, IFHOHYP) Olivia Lori Iglesias Ucendo (Content Creator and PhD Candidate)</p>
11h30 - 12h30	<p>Panel 6: Do we need EU Strategy on Hearing Loss? How to advance hearing access and inclusion in policies, services, and society through an EU Strategy on Hearing Loss that strengthens rights and coordination across the EU.</p> <p>Moderation: Darja Pajk (Treasurer, EFHOH) Lidia Best (President, EFHOH) Mark Laureyns (President, AEA) Patrick D'Haese (Member of the European Hearing Health Forum EU) Frank Lin (Apple Health, Apple) Jonas Sahlberg (President, HRF)</p>
12h30 - 14h	Lunch
14h - 15h	<p>Workshop: Future of Strategy for the Persons with Hearing Loss in Europe Moderation: Lavinia Rotundi (Advocacy Officer, EFHOH) and Henrique Raskin (Project Manager, EFHOH)</p>
15h30 - 18h30	<p>EFHOH Annual General Meeting EFHOH Members Only Venue: Main Conference Room (Brussels Room), at Maison des Associations Internationales</p>
19h30 - 23h	<p>Gala Dinner Venue: Cocina Chatelain Rue Washington 149, 1050, Ixelles, Brussels, BE Opt-in Participation (Individual Payment)</p>

Sunday, 19 April 2026

Time	Cultural Programme
10h - 12h	<p>Visit to Parliamentarium Venue: European Parliament Place du Luxembourg 100, Brussels</p>

Participation overview

122
participants,
from 64
organisations



Opening Session

The conference opened with welcoming remarks from Lidia Best, President of EFHOH, and Inmaculada Placencia Porrero, Senior Expert in Disability and Inclusion at the European Commission and member of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



Inmaculada Placencia Porrero (EC)

The session reaffirmed that hearing accessibility and inclusion must move beyond policy commitments and be effectively implemented across European policies and services, while remarking the importance of stronger cooperation between European institutions, civil society, and the hard of hearing community to ensure equal participation across society.

Panel 1

Implementing the Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Moderated by Lidia Best (President of EFHOH), the panel featured contributions from Dragos-Lucian Ciobanu (European Parliament), Julia Stewart-David (DG ECHO, European Commission), Elisabetta Degiampietro (DG Interpretation, European Commission), and Alejandro Moledo (European Disability Forum).

Discussions focused on the effective implementation of the EU Disability Strategy across European institutions, including multilingual speech-to-text services, live captioning, induction loops and inclusive conference practices supporting participation for persons with hearing loss.



Panel 2

The European Accessibility Act and Hard of Hearing People

Moderated by Alf Lindberg (Board Member of EFHOH), the panel featured Inmaculada Placencia Porrero (European Commission), Daniel Casas (European Disability Forum), Shadi Abou-Zahra (Amazon), Sam Burkinshaw (Ampetronic), and Mitchell Rutledge (CCIANet).



The session explored the implementation of the EAA in relation to hearing accessibility, highlighting accessibility standards, assistive listening systems, hearing aid connectivity, captioning, and accessible consumer technologies supporting communication and participation across digital and public environments.

Panel 3

Inclusive Education and Employment

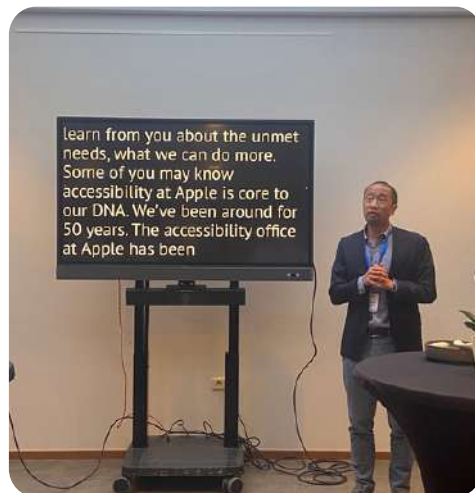
Moderated by Claire Landesmann (General Secretary of EFHOH), the panel featured Marta Chomicz (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin), Adriana Zekveld (Amsterdam UMC), Maria Skoczyńska (Stowarzyszenie “Twoje Nowe Możliwości”), and Gavin Phelan (ALRM).

Contributions focused on the experiences of hard of hearing people in education and employment, including listening fatigue, inclusive assessment practices, workplace accommodations and equal access to professional opportunities. The session also marked the launch of **EFHOH’s Hearing Loss Inclusive Employment Toolkit**, providing practical guidance for employers.



Welcome Reception

The first day of the conference concluded with a Welcome Reception, sponsored by Apple, providing participants, speakers, and partners with an opportunity to continue exchanges in an informal setting and strengthen connections across the hard of hearing community and broader accessibility and disability networks. Frank Lin (Apple Health) delivered opening remarks during the reception.



The reception created additional space for networking, collaboration, and peer exchange following the day's policy discussions and panel sessions.

Panel 4

Mainstreaming Inclusion and Participation for Hard of Hearing People

Moderated by Morten Buan (Vice-President of EFHOH), the panel featured Gina Welleman (Hoornetwerk Vlaanderen / AHOSA vzw), Sabine Lobnig (MWF/GARI), Peter Aksel Villadsen (GN Hearing), and Andrew Thomas (International Association for Hearing Accessibility).



Discussions focused on hearing loops and assistive listening systems in public spaces, accessibility standards and legislation, accessibility features in mobile and consumer technologies, and the implementation of the EAA, in supporting participation for hard of hearing people across public and digital environments.

Panel 5

Empowerment Through Leadership

Moderated by Ida Hansson (Chair of Unga Hörselskadade), the panel featured Jonathan Elebjörk Wahlström (EDF Youth Committee), Karina Chupina (EDF Women's Committee), Paulina Lewandowska (SUITA), Tania Galián Martín (IFHOHYP), and Olivia Lori (content creator and PhD candidate).

The panel focused on youth engagement and leadership within the hard of hearing community. Discussions focused on the barriers faced by women and young people with hearing loss in participation and decision-making roles, while emphasizing the importance of visibility and inclusive representation across public and institutional spaces.



Panel 6

Do We Need an EU Strategy on Hearing Loss?

Moderated by Darja Pajk (Treasurer of EFHOH), the panel featured Lidia Best (EFHOH), Mark Laureyns (European Association of Hearing Care Professionals), Patrick D'Haese (European Hearing Health Forum EU), Frank Lin (Apple Health), and Jonas Sahlberg (Hörselskadades Riksförbund).



The final session reinforced the call for a coordinated and horizontal European approach to hearing loss, highlighting the need for stronger action on awareness, prevention, hearing care and accessibility. Discussions concluded with the shared commitment among stakeholders to work together for an EU Strategy on Hearing Loss.

Workshop

Future of Strategy for Persons with Hearing Loss in Europe

Facilitated by EFHOH Advocacy Officer Lavinia Rotundi and Project Manager Henrique Raskin, the interactive workshop focused on the future development of a coordinated European approach to hearing loss.

Participants exchanged views on persistent barriers faced by hard of hearing people across Europe. Through participatory discussions, the workshop explored priorities for future action, including access to information and emergency communication, inclusive education and employment, assistive technologies, and stronger policy coordination.

From the discussion: *What is one change that would make the biggest difference in everyday life?*



Reflections from the hard of hearing community:

"My dream would be to walk into a room and everything is there. That I need."

"The technology is not perfect, but by small means you can improve your daily life."

"Not having to explain my needs every time I ask for accommodation."

EFHOH Annual General Meeting 2026

Following the conference, EFHOH held its Annual General Meeting, bringing together 25 delegates from members and 29 observers, to review its achievements, strategic priorities, and future direction.

The AGM confirmed EFHOH's continued growth. Members welcomed three new organisations: the National Association of the Deaf from Italy, the Gozo Association for the Deaf from Malta, and the Association of Children with Bionic Ears from Türkiye.

Another outcome of the AGM was the approval of the **Position Statement on Public Procurement of Hearing Devices and their Accessibility Features**, reaffirming the importance of preserving both telecoil and Auracast.

The AGM also welcomed Ida Hansson and Paulina Lewandowska as new Board Members and re-elected Morten Buan as Vice-President for the upcoming mandates of 2026-2028. Warm thanks were extended to Alf Lindberg for his long-standing contribution to the EFHOH Board and his continued commitment to advocate for hearing accessibility.

The meeting concluded with the presentation of the Brussels Declaration, setting out key priorities for EFHOH's future work and the development of a European Strategy on Hearing Loss.

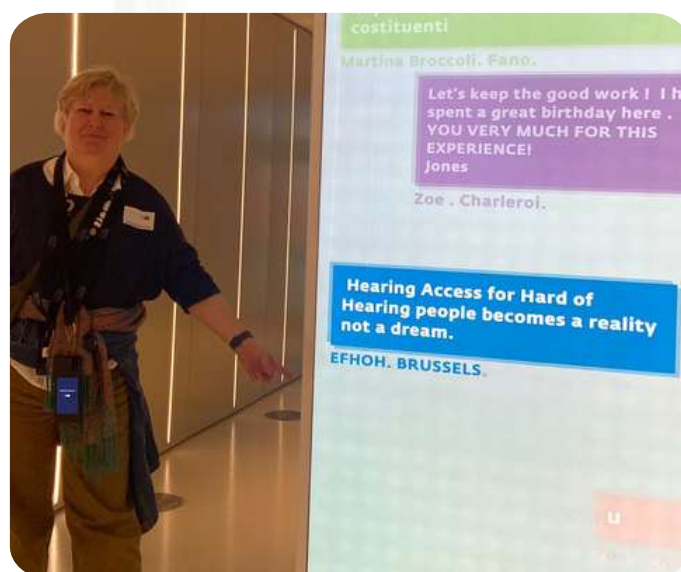


Visit to the Parlamentarium

As part of the cultural programme connected to the conference and AGM, a small group visited the Parlamentarium in Brussels, the European Parliament's visitors' centre.

As part of the European Parliament's "Democracy in Action" initiative, the Parlamentarium is intended to promote public engagement and understanding of EU policymaking.

The visit provided an opportunity for EFHOH members to learn more about EU policymaking processes and the accessibility measures for hard of hearing visitors within the Parlamentarium experience.



Concluding remarks: Key Takeaways and Impact

This year, a strong sense of momentum emerged throughout the conference and AGM, reflecting growing political engagement, increasing youth participation, and strengthened cooperation across the hard of hearing community and its partners at European level.

Key takeaways from the event included:

- **Strong participation of the European Commission and the European Parliament**, reflecting increasing recognition of hearing loss inclusion within the European policy agenda and an important milestone for EFHOH's advocacy work at the European level.
- **Growing political visibility and participation** of hard of hearing people across Europe, with EFHOH members contributing actively to discussions at local, national, European, and international level.
- **Increasing youth engagement and leadership** within the hard of hearing community and the EFHOH board, bringing new perspectives and strengthening future advocacy efforts.
- **A clear call for the development of a horizontal EU approach to hearing loss** through an EU Strategy on Hearing Loss capable of addressing hearing accessibility, inclusive employment, hearing care, participation, and equal access across all areas of society.

By bringing together policymakers, EFHOH members, civil society, manufacturers, academia and the tech industry in the same space, "From Policy to Action" marked an important step forward in strengthening dialogue and cooperation around the future development of an EU Strategy on Hearing Loss.

The event also reinforced a central message echoed throughout the conference: **advancing accessibility and inclusion for hard of hearing people is a shared responsibility of us all.**

Acknowledgements

The European Federation of Hard of Hearing People (EFHOH) extends its sincere appreciation to all speakers, moderators, participants, volunteers, interpreters, captioners, technical staff, and partners who contributed to the success of the EFHOH Conference and Annual General Meeting 2026 in Brussels.

EFHOH would also like to warmly thank the representatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament, civil society, academia, hearing care professionals, tech industry, manufacturers, service providers, and national member organisations whose active participation and engagement enriched the discussions throughout the event.

Special appreciation is extended to EFHOH members, board, staff and the hard of hearing community across Europe for their continued advocacy, expertise, lived experience, and commitment to advancing accessibility, inclusion, and equal participation.

EFHOH also wishes to thank Hoornetwerk Vlaanderen for the valuable collaboration provided in connection with the organisation of the event.

Finally, EFHOH thanks the European Union, for funding the Conference and Annual General Meeting, and Apple for sponsoring the Welcome Reception. We further appreciate the support of all partners, with particular thanks to Ampetronic for providing the Auri assistive listening system, contributing to making the conference accessible for all participants.



Resources

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

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

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

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

[European Disability Rights Strategy 2021–2030](#)

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

[European Hearing Instrument Manufacturers Association \(EHIMA\)](#).

[Hoornetwerk Vlaanderen](#)

[International Federation of Hard of Hearing Young People \(IFHOHYP\)](#).

[Hearing Health Forum EU](#)

[Hearing Loss Inclusive Employment Toolkit](#)

[Position Statement on Public Procurement of Hearing Devices and their Accessibility Features](#)

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

[World Hearing Forum](#)

[World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#).

[World Report on Hearing \(2021, WHO\)](#).

Author: Lavinia Rotundi, Advocacy Officer, EFHOH
Editor: Henrique Raskin, Head of Secretariat, EFHOH
Contributors: Thank you to the entire EFHOH team
Proofread by: Lidia Best, President, EFHOH

Views and opinions expressed are those of EFHOH and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Thank you!

efhoh.org

