

Opportunities for Advancing Hearing Access during the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU 2026

On 1 July 2026, [Ireland assumed the Presidency of the Council of the European Union](#) under the guiding principle “**Strength with unity**”. We welcome Ireland’s commitment to “*champion the full participation of disabled people in Europe’s social and economic life*” through action on disability participation, employment, assistive technologies, equality, health and social inclusion.

As 2026 marks the twenty years since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and follows the EU’s renewed commitment with the [enhanced Disability Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities up to 2030](#), the Presidency has the opportunity to translate these commitments into concrete actions.

EFHOH urges Ireland to advance its [Presidency’s programme](#) to:

- include proposals for a universal, equitable and preventive model of hearing care as part of the ESRPD flagship action on assistive technology that guarantees access to hearing aids and cochlear implants for everyone with hearing loss, without age restrictions;
- advance the right to full access to communication and information, ensuring broadcasting and all media platforms provide subtitled content;
- ensure all public events during this presidency provide access to assistive listening systems and live captioning to remove barriers to participation for persons with hearing loss.

Access to assistive technologies and hearing care

We welcome Ireland’s focus on assistive technologies and urge it to address persistent inequalities in access to hearing aids and hearing care across Europe. The [2026 Assistive Technology Capacity Assessment for Ireland](#) found gaps in coordination, access across regions and population groups, and governance and financing of hearing aids. The report called for a more coherent system in Ireland that provides timely, affordable and appropriate assistive technology to everyone.

EFHOH’s *State of Provision of Hearing Aids in Europe* [2022](#) report shows that gaps in eligibility rules, including age, continue to restrict access to hearing aids. In line with the [WHO World Report on Hearing](#), hearing care should be integrated into universal health coverage and delivered through affordable and person-centred services across the life course.

EFHOH therefore recommends that the Presidency build support among Member States for EU action to:

- place hearing loss on the EU public health agenda through prevention, early identification, access to hearing care, and healthy ageing strategies;

- adopt a comprehensive definition of assistive technology covering hearing aids, cochlear implants, assistive listening devices and other communication tools and related services;
- integrate ear and hearing care into universal health coverage, supported by adequate public reimbursement and procurement systems, ensuring rehabilitation and support, without age restrictions.

Employment, skills and competitiveness

We welcome Irish Presidency's recognition of competitiveness which must support wellbeing and social inclusion, identifying the disability employment gap, quality jobs, skills and labour mobility as areas for action.

Eurostat data indicate an [employment rate](#) of approximately 40–44% among hard of hearing people, compared with 75% in the general population. These barriers begin in education and training and persist throughout working life, requiring accessible learning, vocational training and inclusive employment.

To advance the agenda, EFHOH recommends:

- recognise, through the [Quality Jobs agenda](#), accessibility and reasonable accommodation as essential elements of quality employment, including accessible recruitment and workplaces, for hard of hearing people;
- ensure that the Fair Labour Mobility Package guarantees continuity of reasonable accommodation and support when hard of hearing people move between Member States, including through mutual recognition of disability status.

EFHOH is ready to support Member States through its [Hearing Loss Inclusive Employment Toolkit](#), recently added to EU Commission Disability Employment Package resources, which provides practical guidance for employers, workers, public authorities and policymakers.

Digitalisation agenda

The Irish Presidency has placed digital transformation at the centre of its competitiveness agenda. We remind everyone that accessibility must be built into this work from the outset.

For the actions to be effective, EFHOH asks for:

- provisions in the Digital Networks Act for reliable, interoperable and cross-border text relay services;
- binding EU requirements on the availability and quality of subtitling across television, on-demand and online platforms during the 2026 review of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive;

Equality and participation

The Irish Presidency has placed equality, non-discrimination and civil society participation on its agenda. EFHOH welcomes its intention to seek Council agreement on the Equal Treatment Directive, which could strengthen inclusion of persons with hearing loss in education, healthcare, employment and access to services.

Public health, security and crisis preparedness

The Irish Presidency's security agenda should ensure that hard of hearing people can access healthcare, emergency information and essential services on an equal basis. Access must never depend solely on hearing a spoken announcement or making a telephone call.

EFHOH recommends that the Presidency:

- use discussions among health ministers to promote implementation of the [European Commission's 2026 EU guidelines on access to healthcare for persons with disabilities](#);
- integrate hearing access in the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, emergency preparedness guidelines and the proposed European Critical Communications System, including public warnings in text-based and visual formats and direct access to emergency services (112) via Real-Time Text and Total Conversation.

EU funding and implementation of UN CRPD

Negotiations on the [Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028–2034](#) will shape EU priorities well beyond the Irish Presidency. The next budget should support full implementation of the UN CRPD and the enhanced EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to advance true independent living of persons with hearing loss across Europe, in line with the objectives of the [EUFunds4IL Coalition](#) that EFHOH is part of.

"Strength with unity" must mean shared responsibility for upholding the rights of all persons with disabilities including hard of hearing people and securing their full participation and independent living.

