

HEARING LOSS: THE SILENT BURDEN ON EUROPEAN ECONOMIES AND SOCIETIES

In Europe, more than 11% of the population report having hearing loss: that's around 59 million people. This represents a significant and growing public health concern. It affects quality of life, limits participation in society, and poses a serious challenge to public health and social inclusion.¹

When left untreated, hearing loss not only reduces a person's ability to communicate but also impacts speech and language development, educational outcomes, quality of life, employment, relationships, and cognition.²

Hearing technologies such as hearing aids and cochlear implants have revolutionised the lives of adults and children living with hearing loss. These solutions are proven to be both beneficial and cost-effective across different economic contexts. An estimated 42.2 million people in Europe would benefit from hearing aids, yet only 23% currently have access to them.² The utilization rate of cochlear implants is even lower. The EuroTrak survey outlines an even more striking situation regarding cochlear implants: across all EuroTrak regions, less than 10% of individuals with severe to profound hearing loss have received an implant.³

The yearly costs of untreated hearing loss in terms of lost productivity value and lost quality of life amount to \$224.5 billion in the EU.² To put this into perspective, this figure represents nearly 20% of the total public spending on health in the EU in 2023, which amounted to \$1.455 billion.⁴



Untreated hearing loss has a profound impact on the lives of European citizens. Although hearing technologies verifiably improve the situation and are cost-effective, up to 90% don't have access to them.^{2,3}



- \$74.5 billion in health-care costs are linked to untreated hearing loss each year.
- \$3.2 billion are spent annually on educational support for affected children.
- \$21.1 billion are lost due to reduced productivity.
- \$125.6 billion in societal costs arising from isolation, stigma, and reduced quality of life.²

The sense of hearing is a key aspect of functioning at all stages of life: its loss, unless appropriately addressed, impacts society as a whole.²

More precisely, investing in effective ear and hearing care could be one of the most powerful solutions, with a great return both for individuals and society as a whole.

UNTREATED HEARING LOSS NEGATIVELY IMPACTS THE EU'S PRODUCTIVITY

Untreated hearing loss has a profound impact on individuals' working lives. It is strongly linked to underemployment, lower wages, and higher rates of premature retirement, often resulting in increased reliance on state benefits.² Working-age adults with untreated hearing loss face unemployment rates that are twice as high as those of their peers with normal hearing.⁶ Additionally, their annual income growth is expected to be 13.2% lower, further widening the economic gap over time.⁷ Based on Kochkin's (2010) research, people with untreated hearing loss can lose up to \$30,000 in income annually.⁸ Studies have shown that improving access to hearing aids and cochlear implants can not only significantly reduce unemployment rates, as such devices have been demonstrated to increase individuals' employability and earning potential.

Kochkin (2010) estimates that hearing aids can mitigate between 90% and 100% of the income loss associated with mild hearing loss and 65% to 77% for moderate to severe hearing loss.⁸ In numbers, the financial impact of hearing technology becomes even clearer: Clinkard et al. (2015) found that, on average, 6.6 years after receiving a cochlear implant, 31% of recipients reported a significant income increase, enough to move them into a higher income bracket, with an average rise of \$10,021.⁹

YOUNG HEARING-IMPAIRED HAVE DIFFICULTIES INTEGRATING INTO THE EU LABOUR MARKET

Whilst untreated hearing loss has a significant impact on the EU's labour market, it is equally important to recognise its effects on infants and children. When access to hearing care and education is limited, it can hinder speech and language development, which are crucial foundations for learning, communication, and social integration. Language is not only essential for expressing thoughts, but also plays a vital role in cognitive development, academic success, and building relationships. As a result, children and adolescents with moderate to severe hearing loss have a lower likelihood to attain higher education compared to their peers without hearing loss. This can lead to lower job prospects, reduced lifetime earnings, and greater dependence on public support.²

Research has proven that children who receive cochlear implants at an early age are significantly more likely to develop successful listening, language, reading, participation and engagement skills resulting in attendance at mainstream schools and educational attainments in line with normal hearing peers²; the longer-term impact of this being a levelling of opportunities to become productive citizens within the EU's labour market.

Improving access to hearing aids and cochlear implants can help children enrol in mainstream educational settings, offer them better opportunities to participate in the labour market in adult life, and significantly reduce unemployment rates of people with hearing loss.²

The EU Green Paper on Ageing highlights the importance of enabling people to live longer, healthier, and more independent lives. This not only extends their participation in the workforce but also encourages engagement in voluntary activities. Volunteering, in turn, generates both social cohesion and economic value—benefiting individuals and society alike.⁵



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The impact of untreated hearing loss on individuals extends beyond economics, diminishing quality of life and increasing dependency on others. People with good access to hearing treatment demonstrate fewer interactions with healthcare services, yielding benefits both for the individual and the economy:



Increased access to integrated hearing care can deliver a return of \$30 for each \$1 invested in 10 years.²

HEARING LOSS ALSO INDUCES HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE BURDENS

For individuals living with untreated hearing loss, the impact extends beyond economics. Untreated hearing loss is the number one cause of years lost to disability among the elderly in Western Europe, and the main modifiable risk factors for dementia¹⁰.

Universally, it is associated with an increased hospitalization, diminished quality of life and growing risks of co-morbidities, such as²:

- Cognitive decline, including dementia
- Mental ill-health, including depression and anxiety
- Falls
- Fatigue
- Social isolation and loneliness

Studies show that individuals living with mild to severe hearing loss are up to 80% more likely to be dependent on others compared to those without the condition. Furthermore, adults with untreated hearing loss are twice as likely to rely on formal community support service.¹¹

The prevalence of hearing impairment among the EU population will increase 2.1-fold throughout the next decades. Now is the time to act to offer hearing care and treatments for all citizens experiencing hearing loss.

AN URGENT SOLUTION IS NEEDED: INVESTMENT

A solution is urgently needed, as the number of people requiring hearing rehabilitation is projected to more than double by 2050, rising from 333.5 million today to 700 million globally. This represents an approximate 2.1-fold increase.¹³ Europe has the highest share of older people in the world, and this number is growing.¹⁴ Already, half of all public spending in the EU goes toward age-related needs. Since ageing is the main cause of hearing loss, these costs will continue to rise unless hearing health is addressed. Investing in hearing care now can help reduce future financial pressure on healthcare and social services.

Many reports have recognised the financial and societal gains that can be achieved through investment in cost-effective interventions for people living with hearing loss: according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), increased access to integrated hearing care can deliver a return of \$30 for each \$1 invested in 10 years. The same could be done in the European Union, especially since the cost-effectiveness of hearing interventions, including hearing aids or cochlear implants for severe to profound hearing loss in children and adults, is well documented across different economic states.

Cochlear implants offer substantial economic benefits across all age groups. For children with early bilateral implantation, the lifetime net benefit exceeds \$500.00. For adults it's around \$320.000, and for seniors about \$88.500 - thanks to improved health, reduced support costs, and increased productivity.¹²



WE CALL FOR A EUROPEAN HEARING HEALTH STRATEGY

Our members and partners urge the European Union to launch a patient-centred European Hearing Health Strategy, affirming its commitment to a Health Union that includes all citizens, especially those living with hearing loss.

We encourage the Strategy to focus on **HEAR** pillars:



Hearing Loss Awareness

Raise awareness of hearing loss and educate populations to reduce stigma and promote social inclusion.



Early Detection and Prevention

Ensure effective strategies are put in place at the national level to ensure prevention and detection of hearing loss.



Access and Care

Increase and facilitate access to hearing healthcare, interventions, treatment options and rehabilitation for persons living with hearing loss.



Research and Data

Further support research and the collection of data to facilitate evidence-based policymaking for persons living with hearing loss.



Join our call for a European Hearing Health Strategy and endorse the [Manifesto on Hearing Health](#)

Contact us for questions:
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