

European Federation of Hard of Hearing People

April 16th, 2020.

Letter of Protest

To the organizing team of HeAL Conference 2020.

HeAL – Hearing across the Life Span – aims to be one of the leading conferences World Wide on topics around audiology spreading widely in themes from early diagnosis in children as well as adults to life with a hearing loss – now even for elderly people. Throughout the years the HeAL conference has also aimed to show and prove developments within this very area.

EFHOH – European Federation Hard of Hearing – Secretary, Ms Aida Regel Poulsen, submitted an abstract to speak at the conference. Also partners from the ERASMUS+ Project LiveTextAccess (www.ltaproject.eu) applied. On 7th February 2020 Aida Regel Poulsen received an e-mail from Dr. Ferdinando Grandori stating, that “the HeAL Conference **is not able to cope with persons with special needs** and therefore there shall be no Speech To Text (STT) nor Sign Language (SL) interpretation”, which Mr Grandori explains is how it has been done for about twenty years now.

In further correspondence between HeAL organising team and EFHOH president, Marcel Bobeldijk, the HeAL organising team confirms that the conference shall not be accessible for HoH people and it is also too late regarding the conference finances, when in fact EFHOH offers to help with contacts to companies who are professionals within assistive listening systems (ALS) in conferences, other professionals who are in the lead within speech to text (STT) – the hard of hearing populations general needs on top of our audiological treatment.

EFHOH represents 52+ mill people with hearing loss at a European Level and must draw to your attention the European Act of Accessibility as well as the UN Convention of Rights for Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and what it takes for Hard of Hearing People to be and become included at all levels in society, meaning also professionals within audiology who wear Hearing Aids/Cochlear Implants ourselves.

EFHOH has been offered to have an expo stand at the HeAL conference for free – only that we should advertise on www.efhoh.org about the HeAL conference.

It is completely out of the question that EFHOH shall advertise for a conference that is not accessible to our members.

Given the circumstances of no accessibility for HoH participants, EFHOH and LTA project

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partners shall not participate in the HeAL conference.

Both EFHOH and LTA project partners do not only disregard of the unaccessible HeAL conference but shall also use this as an example of unacceptable practice in our networks. Also EFHOH treasurer, Darja Pajk, shall withdraw her submitted abstract and presentation.

Audiological treatment is a great help for many of us, but for just as many it is not sufficient. We need accessibility such as:

- loop to be connected to each microphone during presentations at your conference when needed
- STT interpreting must be provided when needed
- SL interpreting must be provided when needed
(*when needed* is when ticked via registration for conference)

The ERASMUS+ LTA-project in partnership with EFHOH are creating EU guidelines on how to deal with situations exactly like this one and the LTA-project will propose:

The Italian 2004 "Stanca Law" and future implementations asking for accessibility to digital content for a better social inclusion of people with disabilities.

Over the last twenty years, which is the lifespan when HeAL has performed these conferences inaccessible to HoH and deafened population, there has been a huge movement within accessibility.

We, in EFHOH board and professionals with hearing loss, are experienced in planning and attending conferences that are accessible for us, when we already during registration for a conference tick the needs we have.

It is in fact appalling, that the HeAL conference will first of all argue lack of accessibility when STT and SL-interpreting shall not be performed.

The conference is sponsored highly by the hearing care industry, the manufacturers of hearing devices including also assistive listening systems, and this is not even mentioned as one of the means when target group of this industry is denied accessibility at the HeAL conference

To NOT offer accessibility to HoH and deafened/Deaf population in a conference on and about children and adults with hearing loss and deafness worldwide is **discriminating** the Hard of Hearing and deafened population, the overall target group among the professionals with hearing loss in the area of audiology itself.

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In EFHOH board we look forward to the respons from HeAL organising team for further cooperation to perform

better view on humanity
better implantation of UN CRPD – human rights
better practise and knowledge on accessibility
better inclusion
better marketing

And by better practise better knowledge regarding secondary diagnosis related hearing loss.

Kind regards,

Marcel Bobeldijk
EFHOH President



Aida Regel Poulsen
EFHOH General Secretary



Note: this is the view of LTA project partners and does not reflect the official opinion of the EU.

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