

The Hidden Cost of Pain: Why It Matters for Your Country's Economy and Workplace

European Day on Pain Awareness 2026: 'The Hidden Cost of Pain'

The Socio-economic Challenge

Chronic pain can take complete hold of a person's life, disrupting their ability to work, sleep, concentrate, and maintain daily routines. It affects **20% of the adult European population** (approximately 150 million individuals), placing substantial pressure on labour markets, healthcare systems, and national economies.

When millions of people are affected, the consequences extend far beyond individual suffering. The combined direct and indirect costs of chronic pain, including absenteeism (being absent from work), presenteeism (being present at work but performing at a reduced capacity), and early retirement, are estimated at **between 3% and 10% of GDP annually** across EU Member States. Despite this substantial burden, chronic pain remains largely absent from employment and economic policy frameworks and is critically underfunded in research.

The consequences for labour markets are profound. **Around half** of people living with chronic pain report that it interferes with their ability to work, and severe chronic pain has been shown to reduce the likelihood of full-time employment by **up to 20 percentage points**. As Europe faces workforce shortages and ageing populations, addressing chronic pain is essential to maintaining labour market participation and economic resilience.

Core Policy Recommendations

To protect European economies and support workers living with chronic pain, EFIC calls on national governments to:

1. Integrate chronic pain into national NCD strategies, health funding frameworks, and social policy initiatives to reduce its direct and indirect impacts on individuals, employers, and society.
2. Develop public health campaigns to promote physical activity among healthcare professionals, patients, and the public, as a primary intervention to reduce the prevalence of musculoskeletal pain, and to prevent conditions with high risk of developing secondary chronic pain (e.g. stroke, diabetes).
3. Improve access to timely, multidisciplinary, and patient-centred services for the effective management of both acute and chronic pain.

4. Ensure early access to biopsychosocial rehabilitation for individuals with acute pain, with particular attention to those at high risk of poor outcomes (e.g. depression, low recovery expectations, socio-economic disadvantage).
5. Expand dedicated funding streams for chronic pain research under the national research frameworks, covering both prevention and treatment.
6. Develop inclusive employment policies and support workplace-based interventions that enable job retention and, where appropriate, return to work for individuals with or at risk of chronic pain.
7. Establish mechanisms for financial and rehabilitation support for workers with chronic pain.
8. Strengthen the prevention of chronic pain within occupational health and safety policies.

Call to Action

The economic and workforce costs of chronic pain are hidden, but the solutions do not have to be. Let us raise awareness of the impact of chronic pain on employment and productivity, advocate for policies that support prevention and timely care, and promote workplace adaptations that help people remain in or safely return to work. By taking coordinated action today, we can reduce healthcare costs, strengthen workforce participation, and improve quality of life for millions of Europeans.



Learn more: <https://europeanpainfederation.eu/european-day-on-pain-awareness/>



Campaign hashtags: #EPAD2026



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