Chronic Pain, Employment and Economic Competitiveness

The hidden cost of pain

Tuesday 10th November 2026 – [10:30-12:30]

SPINELLI 3H1 - European Parliament – Brussels

Organised and hosted by MEP Romana Jerković

Concept Note

Join us for an in-depth discussion on the impact of chronic pain on labour markets, productivity, and economic growth. Chronic pain represents a structural challenge that imposes a significant economic burden on society through healthcare costs, productivity losses, and pressures on social security systems — yet it remains underrecognised in policy and underfunded in research. In every Member State, chronic pain drives early retirement, sickness absence, and reduced productivity—directly impacting national economies and public budgets. This event will bring together policymakers, the scientific community, and patients to examine the costs of inaction and identify how EU and national policy initiatives can better address this challenge. At a time of labour shortages and demographic pressure, addressing chronic pain is not only a health issue—but economic necessity.

Chronic pain is the most prevalent health condition in Europe, affecting approximately 150 million people. Its 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 probability of full-time employment by up to 20 percentage points. The combined direct and indirect costs — including absenteeism, presenteeism, sickness absence, and early retirement — are estimated at between 3% and 10% of GDP annually across EU Member States.

Despite this, chronic pain remains largely absent from EU employment and economic policy frameworks. As the European Commission advances its competitiveness agenda, and the Quality Jobs Act presents a new opportunity to address occupational health, the SIP Platform is calling for chronic pain to be recognised as both a public health priority and a fundamental employment issue.

This event, organised and hosted by MEP Romana Jerković in the context of European Pain Awareness Day, will disseminate SIP's Joint Statement on Employment and the Economic Considerations of Pain, theme of 2026, and explore how EU and national policymakers can take decisive action to support people living with pain to remain in or return to work.

This event is a call to action for EU and national policymakers to recognise chronic pain as a labour market and competitiveness challenge, and explore how EU action could better support people living with pain to remain active and participate fully in working life.

Event Details

In person: European Parliament– Brussels Room: *SPINELLI 3H1*

45 attendees:

- SIP Community and SIP Stakeholders
- EU stakeholders with an interest in employment and health policy
- EU policymakers with an interest in health, employment, and economic affairs
- Employer and business organisations [TBC]
- Occupational health and rehabilitation experts
- Patient representatives
- Researchers

Format: See agenda below

Desired outcomes:

- Dissemination of the SIP Position Paper on Employment and the Economic Considerations of Pain
- Raising awareness among MEPs and EU policymakers of the labour market impact of chronic pain
- Advancing chronic pain as a priority in the Quality Jobs Act and related EU employment frameworks
- Strengthening the case for integrating chronic pain into EU NCD strategies and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan
- Building a coalition of MEPs and stakeholders committed to action on chronic pain and employment
- Amplifying the patient voice in EU employment and social policy debates, ensuring that the lived experience of people with chronic pain is reflected in the design and implementation of workplace and labour market initiatives

SIP Calls Upon EU and National Policymakers to:

1. Integrate chronic pain into EU and 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 general public as the primary intervention to reduce the risk of high-impact chronic pain and its recurrence.
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 EU and 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 across the EU and Member States, in particular through the forthcoming Quality Jobs Act.

Agenda

"Labour shortages, reduced productivity, and the pressure on social security systems are among the defining economic challenges of our time. Chronic pain is a major — and largely invisible — driver of all three."

Moderator: Joanne O'Brien Kelly – EFIC Executive Board Member and Advocacy Committee Chair

Start	End	Item
10:20	**10:30**	**Assembly in the Room**
10:30	**10:35**	**Welcome from the Societal Impact of Pain (SIP)** • Patrice Forget — EFIC Advocacy Committee Vice-Chair & SIP Chair • Nadia Malliou — President, Pain Alliance Europe (PAE)
10:35	**10:45**	**Opening Address from the Host MEP** • MEP Romana Jerković (S&D)
10:45	**10:55**	**Political Perspectives on Chronic Pain, Employment and EU Action** • MEP Alex Agius Saliba (S&D) • MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen (EPP)
10:55	**11:05**	**The Patient Perspective** • Nadia Malliou — PAE President
11:05	**11:15**	**Living and Working Conditions** • Hans Dubois — Senior Research Manager, Unit C – Social Policies, Eurofound
11:15	**11:25**	**Reconciling Work and Care** • Holly Shorey — Eurocarers Representative
11:25	**11:35**	**Presentation of the SIP Joint Statement on Employment and the Economic Considerations of Pain**

		• Patrice Forget — EFIC Advocacy Committee Vice-Chair & SIP Chair
11:35	**11:45**	**Rheumatic Diseases as a Driver of Work Disability in Europe** • Margreet Kloppenburg — EULAR Representative
11:45	**11:55**	**The Economic Burden: Evidence from Across Europe** • Esther Pogatzki-Zahn — President, European Pain Federation EFIC
11:55	**12:20**	**Roundtable Discussion** • Moderator: Joanne O'Brien Kelly — EFIC Executive Board Member and Advocacy Committee Chair
12:20	**12:25**	**Closing Address from the Host MEP** • MEP Romana Jerković (S&D)
12:25	**12:30**	**Summary and Closure** • SIP Co-Chairs • EFIC & Pain Alliance Europe (PAE)