

Recommendations for strengthening the EU Parking Card

European Disability Forum Position Paper

**February 2021**

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| Résultat de recherche d'images pour "european union logo" | This publication has received financial support from the European Union. The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission. |

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# Preface

### The European Disability Forum

The European Disability Forum is an independent NGO that represents the interests of 100 million Europeans with disabilities. EDF is a unique platform which brings together representative organisation of persons with disabilities from across Europe. EDF is run by persons with disabilities and their families. We are a strong, united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who responded to the survey and all EDF members and partners who helped distribute and promote it.

## Executive Summary

This position paper describes the problems that persons with disabilities encounter with the Parking Card and parking in general, based on previous discussions with EDF members and our 2020 Independent Mobility Survey. Those problems are:

* Abuse and fraud of the Card
* The card is used differently and gives right to different benefits depending on the Member State, and even within Member States
* Eligibility for the Card differs between Member States
* Format of the Card
* Use of the Card as proof of disability if there is no Disability Card
* Lack of designated parking spaces for persons with disabilities and enforcement
* New entry restrictions in city center

This position paper also gives several suggestions on how mentioned problems could be solved. We recommend to:

* Further harmonize the rules on eligibility and the issuing procedure, in a form which is binding for Member States and clearly communicated to Card users
* Facilitate the exchange of good practices between the national authorities, by starting a Commission working group on the subject, allowing ideas to develop on an EU level
* Strengthen the controls on fraudulent use of the Card and illegal use of disabled parking spaces
* Allow access to restricted urban areas for holders of the Parking Card because public transport is often no alternative due to lack of accessibility
* Support other EU initiatives such as the EU Disability Card to keep the focus of the EU Parking Card on its original purpose for car parking, and not for use as a substitute proof of disability.

# Easy to Read

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | | This page is about a card that makes it easier for persons with disabilities to use parking spaces for their cars. |
|  | | |
|  |  | If you want more of this document in Easy to Read, |
| Phone, Telephone, Emergency, Line, Handset, Receiver  **+ 32 2 282 46 00** | Mail, Message, Email, Send Message, Contact, Envelope  [**info@edf-feph.org**](mailto:info@edf-feph.org) | You can phone us at  **+ 32 2 282 46 00**  Or email us at [**info@edf-feph.org**](mailto:info@edf-feph.org) |

# EDF recommendations for strengthening the EU Parking Card

## Introduction

The Disability Parking Card is one of the most visible EU initiatives for persons with disabilities, and it is also one of the oldest ones. It was created in 1998 following Council recommendations to establish the Card to facilitate free movement in the EU. Taking the form of a recommendation it is not binding and provides only for minimal harmonisation, mostly concerning the design.

Member States are responsible for designating the authorities that distribute the Cards, usually on local or regional level, and the Member States also decide who is eligible for the Card. Since each Member States can also decide what the rules are for when the Card is applied, this has led to some confusion.

In general, this system works and is one of the most practical and visible EU initiatives on disability issues. Persons with disabilities appreciate the fact that the Card is well received and recognized when going abroad. It is accepted in the whole EU and has made travelling abroad easier. The Card is even sometimes used instead of a Disability Card to give proof of disability in Member States where this doesn’t exist yet.

However, there are also some shortcomings which have first been discussed at an event with the Disability Intergroup of the Parliament on 18 March 2019[[1]](#footnote-1). A first list of recommendations was published shortly afterwards but we wanted to go more into detail. Therefore, we included the topic in our 2020 Independent Mobility Survey and we received many interesting replies. This has have led to this EDF initiative paper with recommendations for improvement which we will present below.

## Main findings

### Existing problems

Already before we launched our 2020 Independent Mobility Survey, some problems were evident, mainly linked to the fact that the Card was and still is a Council recommendation only, failing to harmonize the provisions. It is also now over 20 years old and has never been updated. This leads to the following issues:

* There is abuse, both on the issuing of the Card and on the enforcement side. National, regional, and local authorities do not have a common system of tackling fraud, especially when it is committed in a cross-border situation.
* Different criteria are applied in different Member States as to who receives the Card, which has led to confusion and frustration in some cases because it results in different treatment depending on your Member State
* Also, the ways in which the Card is issued and which authority is responsible differ which leads to further confusion
* Finally, in the absence of any other proof of disability, the Card is sometimes used as a replacement for an official Disability Card which leads to other problems, for example excluding other persons with disabilities from possible benefits or discounts.

### Results of the EDF survey on independent mobility 2020

This survey explored the very broad topic of obstacles to independent mobility of persons with disabilities in transport. It concerned both the transport infrastructure and thus also partly the urban environment, transport vehicles, but also services, practices, and attitudes that can create obstacles to mobility.

The focus was on the experience of persons with disabilities but others were also welcome to respond to reflect issues of usability and accessibility in general. The EU Parking Card was one of the areas that the survey focused on, including the general situation with disability parking spaces in the urban environment.

51 % of respondents to this specific question of the survey[[2]](#footnote-2) indicated that they are holders of an EU Parking Card. Many thought it was a very good and useful initiative, but that there were some shortcomings as we already pointed out in the 2019 event. The findings supported our initial recommendations and also attached more priority to certain ones (see full results of this question below):

* 75% of respondents stated that the card needed better control mechanisms to avoid abuse
* 69% of respondents stated that more benefits should be attached to the Card (for example being able to enter restricted traffic zones, unlimited parking duration, etc.)
* 54 % of respondents stated that they needed better information on how to use the Card, also abroad
* 54 % of respondents stated that there was a need for more harmonisation on EU level
* 32% of respondents stated that there was a need for a better issuing procedure at national, regional, or local level

They also pointed out additional problems and incoherence, such as:

* The Card holder is penalized for fraudulent use of their Card even though they may not even be aware of it[[3]](#footnote-3)
* The format and material used in some Member States is not practical (paper/cardboard, large format)
* Local authorities are not sufficiently penalizing the abuse of disabled parking spaces by those who do not have the Parking Card

#### Q45 In your opinion, what aspects would improve the European Parking Card scheme? (multiple answers possible)

35 Answers, 74 Skips

75% of respondents stated that the card needed better control mechanisms to avoid abuse. 69% of respondents stated that more benefits should be attached to the Card (for example being able to enter restricted traffic zones, unlimited parking duration, etc.). 54 % of respondents stated that they needed better information on how to use the Card, also abroad. 54 % of respondents stated that there was a need for more harmonisation on EU level. 32% of respondents stated that there was a need for a better issuing procedure at national, regional, or local level.

### New issues that emerged with the survey

The respondents touched upon a few issues which have not been included by EDF’s work before. For example, the increase of low emission zones in urban areas which restrict vehicle access to improve air quality and congestion. Persons with disabilities can be affected if they have to pay more to enter zones that would otherwise not be accessible to them, for example because of a lack of public transport or because public transport is not accessible.

Furthermore, parking in general, and the availability of parking spaces (see extract from survey below), are of concern to persons with disabilities. The lack of respect and understanding of non-disabled motorists that make fraudulent use of the disabled parking spaces seems to persist.

It is also a problem that even with the Card, parking times are sometimes limited and this is not clearly communicated. This goes hand in hand with our previous point about the wide variation of rules throughout the EU with every Member States, sometimes every municipality, making up their own rules.

#### Q47 How do you rate the availability and amount of disabled parking spaces in your local municipality or region?

35 Answers, 74 SkipsGraph of results. Very bad: 8.57%. Bad: 25.71%. Average: 51.43%. Good: 11.43%. Very good: 2.86%.

### EDF recommendations

The ultimate goal should be a strong policy initiative, led by the European Commission, to improve the shortcomings mentioned above, including but not limited to

* Further harmonize the rules on eligibility and the issuing procedure, in a form which is binding for Member States and clearly communicated to Card users
* Facilitate the exchange of good practices between the national authorities, by starting a Commission working group on the subject, allowing ideas to develop on an EU level
* Strengthen the controls on fraudulent use of the Card and illegal use of disabled parking spaces
* Allow access to restricted urban areas for holders of the Parking Card because public transport is often no alternative due to lack of accessibility
* Support other EU initiatives such as the EU Disability Card to keep the focus of the EU Parking Card on its original purpose for car parking, and not for use as a substitute proof of disability.

## Conclusion

The EDF survey supported our initial recommendations but changed the weighting of the recommendations. Fighting fraudulent use of the Card was the priority for respondents, as well as attaching more benefits related to parking, better information on how to get and use the Card, and better harmonization of the rules. A need for political action is thus evident to improve the use of the Parking Card for persons with disabilities.

# Document credits

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This publication has received financial support from the European Union. The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.



1. Disability Intergroup event on the Parking Card in the European Parliament on 18 March 2019 – “Do not take my spot – The European Disability Parking Card.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Total of 109 people responded to the survey, of which 35 responded to this question as it was not mandatory to answer all questions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For example if a family member is using the Card, or if the Card is stolen. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)