



EDF report on user experiences with the Disability Card pilot project 2016 - 2019

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About EDF

The European Disability Forum is an EU umbrella organization that represents the interests of 80 million Europeans with disabilities. EDF is a unique platform which brings together representative organisations 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.

Executive summary

Introduction

Since the Disability Card pilot project started in 2016 (and even before), EDF has been receiving questions and testimonies about the Disability Card or the lack of it. We have collected those stories to illustrate first of all why the Card is important, but also where the shortcomings are.

In addition to the anecdotal evidence we collected over the years, we also launched a short survey on the Card to evaluate the project and to ask about the user experiences. We give some insights in how the Card has been received in the participating Member States as well as what the perception is for persons who do not have the Card yet.

Based on the testimonies and the results of the survey, we formulate recommendations for the continuation and extension of the Disability Card project.

EDF survey on the Disability Card

Methodology

EDF launched this short survey in October 2010, primarily aimed at EDF members but also open to other persons with disabilities who are users of the Card or could be potentially interested in the Card project. We shared the survey via our internal newsletter, Members' Mailing, as well as our social media channels.



We designed the questionnaire to target on the one hand persons who are already users of the Card to hear about their concrete experiences with the application for the Card, the issuing process on national level, as well as their experience with using the Card in participating venues for culture, leisure, sport, and in some cases transport. On the other hand we also wanted to find out if there is a general interest from the disability movement to widen the scope of the Card, both geographically and in terms of content. Therefore we also asked if persons from Member States that are currently not among the 8 participating ones would be interested in having such a Card.

It should also be mentioned that even though the Disability Card project was launched in 8 Member States, not all of them have currently introduced the Card to be provided to persons with disabilities. As we clarified in our [previous report](#), Estonia and Italy have up to now only set up the database and the website. Nevertheless, we included answers also from persons in those Member States that do not have physically introduced the Card yet, to show the wide reach that this project has had.

Survey results – basic findings

Over a period of 3 months, we received 255 responses in total. Considering that we did not extensively advertise this survey this is a lot compared to other EDF consultations that have been launched on other topics.

Respondents were from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. Some of the respondents also came from non-EU countries but since it was not clear if they are resident in the EU we did not exclude them from the survey. Also, we are aware that not all Member States are represented but we tried to compensate the missing Member State with targeted consultations via our members.

Out of the total 255, 65 respondents (25.5 %) stated that they are already Card holders. 182 respondents said that they would like to have the Card. If you exclude from this number of responses the ones that came from Member States such as Belgium, where the Card is already available (but maybe the respondents have not applied for it yet or were not aware of the Card), there are still 136 respondents from other Member States that are interested in getting the Card.

That means that 97 % of respondents would like to have the Disability Card or have it already.



Testimony: Frank, a Card holder from Belgium

“The application for the European Disability Card was very easy. I just had to send an email to the disability service with my name and national registry number and the card was sent to my home address.

Shortly after receiving my EDC, I got a message from my home region that I had to renew my regional pass for reductions to cultural activities. So, I called the regional service to ask if I could use the EDC from now on, instead of the regional pass, as this would simplify things for me and reduce the number of cards I have to keep in my wallet.

Unfortunately, they recommended to keep both cards, as the regional pass grants free entrance for a PA, but does not give any reductions for me personally, while the EDC could potentially provide other reductions for me, but will not apply to my PA.

After this first set back, I decided to try it the other way around. I looked through the list of partners on the Belgian EDC website and saw that a theatre where I sometimes go to watch plays was listed as a partner. I called the theatre and asked if I could get the same reduction I usually get for me and my PA with the European Disability Card. The person on the phone was not aware of the EDC and the colleague who usually dealt with questions in the area recently retired. So, once again, the advice was to keep my regional disability pass.

After establishing that the EDC wouldn't be of great use to me yet in Belgium, I thought let's try to use it for travel. I went to the Estonian EDC website and browsed through the different possible reductions for hotels. I noticed to my surprise that I could indicate if I was looking for EDC benefits for Estonians or foreigners. In the end, I randomly called one of the listed hotels and I was not really surprised to find out that, while their hotel was accessible to wheelchairs, they had never heard of a European Disability Card.”

Survey results - What are the positive aspects of the Card?

This was an open question to allow respondents to go into detail about what they perceive to be the biggest advantages provided by the Card. The replies varied but some of the most common responses were:

- To get free access to museums or other cultural events and leisure activities
- To be able to prove your disability discreetly, without hassle and long explanation, especially for “invisible” disabilities such as autism



- The Card was easy to apply for and there is no doubt about the validity (note: this is an issue that occurs for example with the EU Parking Card, which in some Member States has been used as a de-facto proof of disability due to lack of a real Disability Card)
- The multilingual aspect of the Card which makes it easy to use abroad
- Even in Member States that are not participating in the pilot project, the Card is informally recognized, e.g. in Germany
- Easier access and shorter waiting times for children with disabilities
- Can help even in informal settings, such as using a toilet in a restaurant or public place to get priority

Testimony: Marko, a Card holder from Slovenia

“I live in Slovenia and I was very happy to get the EU Disability Card. On the Slovenian web and facebook page, I found many addresses where people with disabilities are offered benefits and discounts in Slovenia. That's a very big advantage for us persons with disabilities.

Several other EU members joined this project too. There are no contacts, even not at our Ministry of Labour, [...], where we could get the addresses of the providers of benefits for the disabled, who are associated in the EU Disability Card.

I think that the Card would have a real meaning if we all have the information who are the suppliers in other Member States, as the purpose of the Card is to use these services in all member states.”

What could be improved?

Here is a selection of replies that respondents gave to the open questions on issues still to be improved:

- More Member States to participate in the Card scheme
- Clearer information of where the Card can be used and how: Some institutions are not even aware that the Card exists even in participating Member States. Between participating institutions, discounts and benefits vary widely (some give free access, others give only a 10% discount....)
- More publicity and awareness
- Extending the scope to daily activities such as grocery shopping, at the petrol station, etc.



- Including reductions for mobility and transport as a standard feature in all Member States
- Include the international disability symbol on the Card

What do you think the Card should include or give access to?

This question produced a very long list of varied answers but most of them can be categorized under one of the bullet points summarized below. However, there were also some responses that pointed out that for real equality, a Card should not be necessary to identify persons with disabilities as “different” or “special”. While this is certainly a valid point that we have also considered previously to campaigning for the Card, we are not including those arguments because we, EDF, have chosen to fully support the Card project which we think will bring more benefits to persons with disabilities in their daily lives.

- Reduced fares for mobility and transport
- Access to medication, assistive devices, therapies, and medical equipment (glasses were mentioned as an example)
- Priority access to busy attractions
- Discounts for an accompanying person
- Priority seating at music or theatre performances
- Healthcare, education, other social protection benefits
- The same benefits as the national card if they are more advantageous
- Allow you to bring your guide dog everywhere
- Parking spaces
- Toilets
- Renting mobility scooters
- Personal assistance at the same conditions as in the Member States of origin



Example: Children with invisible disabilities

A family with two children from Ireland was planning on travelling to Finland. Both children have hidden disabilities, autism and dyspraxia, which can make travelling more difficult. Every time they travel, they have to get a note from their doctor because the note cannot be older than 3 months. On top of that, the doctor's note has to be translated into the language of the country where they are travelling which is also at personal cost of the family. If they travel without the note, they are always uncertain if they will receive the reasonable accommodation they require, or they have to make lengthy explanations which can be tiring. A common European Disability Card would make travelling much easier for them.

EDF Recommendations

The internal survey that we conducted reinforced the recommendations we have already issued previously.

Therefore, we expect that the Commission's evaluation will come to the same conclusions and support a continuation of the project.

1. The Commission should propose a second round of funding to follow up on the preparatory action and to allow the remaining Member States to join the project
2. The Commission should create a permanent network for the exchange of good practices and experience among the Member States that are already participating. The network shall include user representative organisations.
3. The European Parliament should actively promote the use and expansion of the Disability Card to ensure its added value.
4. All decision-makers and stakeholders should urge Member States to include a wide range of services under the Card, especially a mandatory rule for including transport as part of the advantages under the Card.



Related documents

- [European Commission webpage on the Disability Card](#)
- [First EDF position paper on the European Disability Card \(2011\)](#)
- [EDF Analysis Report on the European Disability Card \(2012\)](#)
- [Second EDF position paper on the European Disability Card \(2014\)](#)
- [EDF report on the Disability Card \(2018\)](#)

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We would especially like to thank our members who forwarded the survey to their members and translated it into their national languages to reach a wider audience and make it more accessible.

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Should you have any problems in accessing the documentation, please contact the EDF Secretariat. (Email: info@edf-feph.org).



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