

## European Disability Card

Mr Gottwald is a German national with paraplegia who found himself in a frustrating situation while travelling to Austria on holiday. Despite having a German disability card, which should entitle him to certain benefits, he was fined by Austrian authorities for failing to purchase a toll disc within the required timeframe.

This case highlights the challenges faced by people with disabilities when travelling between EU countries, due to the lack of recognition of their disability status. To address this issue, the EU is about to introduce a European Disability Card. The aim of the card is to facilitate the free movement of people with disabilities within the EU by providing them with recognised proof of their disability status.

In this podcast, we'll look into the introduction and potential impact of the European Disability Card and the European Parking Card.

Statistics collected by the European Commission show that approximately 1 in 4 adults in the EU have some form of disability. This remarkable statistic underscores the importance of addressing the challenges faced by people with disabilities.

The introduction of the European Disability Card and the European Parking Card marks a milestone in the development of EU disability law. Building upon the foundations laid by previous initiatives, these cards are designed to enhance accessibility and promote inclusion. Specifically, they draw on the experience gained from two existing initiatives: the EU Disability Card pilot project, which has been in operation in eight participating Member States since 2016, and the EU Parking Card for people with disabilities, established EU-wide in 1998. Unfortunately, the current EU Parking Card is not always recognised in other Member States due to differences in format between countries. With the help of experience gained from these initiatives, the European Disability Card and the European Parking Card seek to streamline the process of accessing disability-related benefits such as extended or free parking, reduced fees, and special privileges applicable to public transport, cultural events and museums, as well as leisure and sports centres while travelling within the EU.

Available in both digital and physical formats, the European Disability Card provides a convenient and universally recognised proof of disability status and allows EU countries to issue multilingual cards, featuring both English and national languages.

While the European Disability Card offers numerous advantages, it's important to acknowledge its limitations as well. For example, it primarily focuses on short-term stays and may not fully address the needs of individuals who relocate to another EU country for an extended period. Additionally, it doesn't cover social security and social assistance benefits, as these are controlled on a national basis by each EU country. So we should note that the European Disability Card would complement, rather than replace, national disability cards or certificates.

The development of the European Disability Card legislation involved extensive consultation with various stakeholders. Input from the European Economic and Social Committee and public consultations that included people with disabilities and their personal assistants played a crucial role in shaping the legislation, which aims to follow the principles outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. European Parliament President Roberta Metsola highlighted the pressing need for a European Disability Card during her opening statement at the May 2023 event 'Building an inclusive future for persons with disabilities in the EU':

Soundbite Metsola

'Here we believe that persons with disabilities have the right to live independently, and receive appropriate community-based services. And we will continue to deliver on this. We also want to abolish remaining administrative restrictions that hinder the rights of persons with disabilities. In this spirit, we are eagerly awaiting the Commission's proposal this year on an EU-wide European Disability Card. It is high time for mutual recognition of a disability status between Member States. Why are we still not in a situation where we have this?'

End of Soundbite

In September 2023, the European Commission proposed the introduction of a European Disability Card, and by February 2024, the Council and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement on the proposal. Once formally adopted by both institutions, EU countries will have 2.5 years to adapt their national legislation and 3.5 years to apply the Directive.

The launch of the European Disability Card will include national websites providing comprehensive information on the card and campaigns to raise awareness across the EU. This initiative represents an important step in the protection of disability rights, as it facilitates free movement across the EU and promotes equal rights and inclusion for all everyone, regardless of disability status.

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