

## The European Disability Card - A tool for improved freedom of movement

### Presentation abstract

The project of the Belgian Disability Forum asbl (BDF) has become a European reality!

#### A real challenge

Being a person with disabilities, spending one's time explaining one's condition and going so far as to justify one's disability simply to ask for help, an adapted service or a reduced rate is a psychologically cumbersome process that does not encourage the participation of persons with disabilities in society.

It is also a challenge for tourism, leisure and sports professionals. How can disability be taken into account when no practical tool exists to demonstrate in a simple and effective way that the person really needs the assistance, service or preferential rate? Freedom of movement and inclusion

By ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the European Union has committed itself to intensify its policy of inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Freedom of movement for all European citizens is one of the fundamental pillars of European integration.

From the affirmation of these two principles to their implementation, there was a gap that the European Disability Card is beginning to fill.

#### Respect for fundamental rights

People with disabilities are not asking for additional rights. They demand to be able to exercise their rights like other citizens and to participate in society. If you are a student or senior, the presentation of the card attesting to this reality is sufficient to obtain the services provided for them.

Before 2017, a person with disabilities travelling within the EU had no practical tools to demonstrate the reality of their disability situation. This was all the more problematic when it was an invisible disability.

Even worse, since aid varies from one EU Member State to another, "non-nationals" are sometimes refused assistance from which

"nationals" benefit.

#### The proposed solution

In 2009, the BDF denounced this situation and proposed the creation of a recognition card, following very simple principles:

1. a clear and unambiguous tool, recognized by all
2. an indisputable proof of the reality of the disability
3. the recognition of the disability by the country issuing the card
4. the mutual recognition of the card between countries
5. an easy to use card, exclusively on a voluntary basis
6. a non-discriminatory solution : same compensation on the same territory for all persons with disabilities, regardless of their disability, age, nationality, ...;

The Belgian solution adopted at European level

The BDF defended its project which was gradually endorsed by the Belgian and European parliaments. Finally, in 2015, the European Commissioner for Social Affairs, Marianne Thyssen, launched the pilot project at European level. Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Malta, Slovenia and Romania joined the development of the European Disability Card on their territory. The development of the project has been the subject of remarkable participation by persons with disabilities themselves, through regular consultation with the BDF and the National Superior Council of People with Disabilities, who have been able to express the needs of those concerned, particularly in relation to information tools (brochures, website, etc.).

The European Disability Card exists !

The European Disability Card has existed since 2017. It is an essential link in the accessibility chain. Many providers in the sports, leisure and cultural sectors have expressed their interest in recognizing it and are resolutely committed to a process of promoting the accessibility of their activities and services.

The movement has started and it must now be fed. It represents development opportunities for people with disabilities but also economic development opportunities for many providers, whether or not they are already aware of the accessibility of their infrastructures and services to people with disabilities !

The European Disability Card, a plus for the tourism sector

Some operators have understood this reality well and their experience is conclusive. The tourism industry is proof of this!

They are gradually adapting their infrastructures and operating methods. They display the logo of the card, clearly showing that they accept it. Recognized experts can help them develop measures that promote the accessibility of their infrastructures that will produce a benefit far greater than the investment.

Reception is a criterion that makes more and more the difference. The European Disability Card and the information on the related websites are an undeniable plus.

In our society open to the world and travel, what is accessible to people with disabilities is accessible to everyone: parents with children, the elderly, people with temporary disabilities, people with comprehension difficulties due to age or origin...

**Lead speaker :** Pierre Gyselincx

**Organisation :** Belgian Disability Forum vzw (BDF)

**City (Country) :** Kruishoutem(Belgium)

**Biography :** Pierre GYSELINCK : Born in 1950, he completed his studies in Business accounting. He had a 38-year career in the national Bank of Belgium. As a disabled person, he is active for more than 30 years as a leading member within organisations of persons with disabilities at national and European level : President of the General Assembly of KVG-Vormingsbeweging, President of the umbrella organisation Katholieke Vereniging Gehandicaptten vzw, President of the Belgian Disability Forum asbl (BDF), Member of the Conseil Supérieur National des



Personnes Handicapées Member of the Board of Directors of the European Disability Forum (EDF), Member of the Board of Action Européenne des Handicapés (AEH)

**2nd speaker :** Gisèle Marlière

**Organisation :** Belgian Disability Forum asbl (BDF)

**City (Country) :** Court-Saint-Etienne (Belgium)

**Biography :** Gisèle MARLIERE : Born in 1947, she completed her studies as social worker. On basis of 20 years of field experience, she became General Secretary of ASPH asbl in 1996. Since 2012 she assumes the Presidency of this organisation bringing together 50.000 disabled people or parents of disabled people. Mastery of legislations plays a key role in her action and she fulfils the following functions: President of the Conseil Supérieur National des Personnes Handicapées (CSNPH), General Secretary of the Belgian Disability Forum asbl (BDF), Member of the Board of the European Disability Forum (EDF). She is guided by the necessity to create a link between the reality of life of the individual and measures needed at a general level.