

European disability card

Call for evidence for an impact assessment

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Introduction

Pearle*-Live Performance Europe is the European federation regrouping through its members over 10,000 organisations and companies in the music, performing arts and live event sector.

Pearle* has taken note of the Commission's invitation to a call for evidence on an initiative for a European Disability Card.

As a general principal members of Pearle* welcome the Commission's initiative as an expression of support to equal access by all people in society to culture. Indeed the European Pillar of Social Rights underlines the principles of equal opportunities, inclusion of people with disabilities, and access to essential services. One could also refer to the UN's declaration of human rights, whereby it promotes the right of all to participate in the cultural life of their choice and to freely express a diversity of world visions, values and ways of life, through the cultural rights initiative.

Comments to the objectives and policy options

The aim of the initiative is to support access to certain preferential conditions or discounts for people with a disability when moving or travelling to another country.

A pilot project has studied how a European disability card could be automatically applied and used in other countries. The impact assessment shows an overview of the eight countries involved and a list of service providers, including performing arts organisations. From the study it seems that sometimes a reduction on the ticket price is provided, a free ticket, and/or eventually for the accompanying person. Such a facility may depend on the policy of local authorities and how the reduced income from tickets is matched with funding.

The study focuses on the impact of the use of the card and not on the impact such card would have on the respective sectors (service providers). An indication of the possible impact and consequences it may lead to as described in the key finding 12, as follows:

“The majority of participating service providers perceive that the Card contributed to increasing their awareness about the needs of persons with disabilities, leading them to improve the accessibility of their services. However, most Cardholders state that additional accessibility improvements should be made in order to make using Card more effective (EQ 11).”

The challenges for live performance organisations to ensure full access for people with a disability are manifold, as it concerns investments into infrastructure, technologies, people and skills, depending on the type of disability. It requires also specific organisation and planning to take good care of people with specific needs.

A European disability card could be considered as a tool to encourage a faster implementation of measures to ensure access to venues and cultural performances, but it requires an overall commitment and policy of governments to allow cultural organisations to deploy the variety of services needed. In other words cheaper or free tickets are not a relevant factor if the organisations cannot provide the support needed for the different types of disabilities.

Although there are still some difficulties of access with wheelchairs to specific buildings such as historic theatres, this has improved on a constant basis over the past decades. In this regard Pearle* is of the opinion that a European disability card could function well, but it remains a challenge for people who are visually or hearing impaired, are on the autism spectrum, or have other forms of disabilities.

For instance, Pearle’s member in the UK has been a forerunner providing a guide of accessible theatre performances in London¹. Some good practices are observed by larger theatres or performing organisations in various countries across the EU. It concerns the following services:

- Audio described performances
- Captioned performances
- BSL blind sign language performances
- Relaxed performances
- Socially distanced performances

Pearle* underlines that the provision of a tool such as a disability card is a complicated matter. It also depends under which conditions the disability card will be made accessible and which services it will provide. It is a triangular relationship between different government departments and funding bodies, the service providers and the organisations representing people with a disability.

It requires careful consideration, especially with regard to unrealistic expectations that may result from the creation of a European disability card.

The Commission mentions the EU parking card as an option that could become a binding instrument. The advantage of this initiative is that the scope and the application is clear and could be implemented in a relatively short time span.

¹ See <https://officiallondontheatre.com/access/access-performances/>

As described above, we would see more difficulties with the implementation should the European disability card have a wide application.

For the live performance, regardless of the fact that as a general principle we acknowledge the importance for all people to be able to access culture, this can only be realised when it is accompanied by a targeted policy and related funding to deploy a wide range of services for people with disabilities.

Conclusion

As a general principle Pearle* supports for all people to have access to culture, but underlines the need to be realistic about achieving those goals.

A European disability card could be a replacement of the EU parking card, with the same function, possibly extended to access of venues, whilst other non-binding EU legislative instruments could help to increase awareness and encourage member states to develop focused policies and investments in the area of culture.

If the EU considers a European disability card with a wide scope, then there should be first priority given to a policy framework and related investment and funding. It requires careful consultation with the live performance sector to deal with the challenges to provide access to performances for people with disabilities.