



EUROPEAN
MOBILITY
GROUP

National Policies on Support for Disabled Drivers May 2023



Introduction

At present cars are not accessible to people with disabilities. This is true both for those who wish to travel in their wheelchair or those who require adaptations to the vehicle controls. To be accessible, vehicles need to be altered, often in very significant ways, to allow people with mobility problems to drive or to travel as a passenger. These adaptations are often expensive and not easily afforded by many people with disabilities. Consequently, the extent to which people with disabilities can obtain access to cars is heavily dependent on the support, financial or otherwise, provided by national and regional Governments. This support is a crucial determinant of the volume of work of the members of the European Mobility Group (EMG).

This report was compiled to provide an overview of the systems in different countries where the EMG has members. It was compiled from information provided by the members and thanks are due to those who provided responses to the questionnaire. Sincere thanks are also due to Ann Frye for her help in bringing the findings together in this report.

From the information obtained, it became clear that EMG members did not have full availability of data or information on these schemes, which are often complex, and often have differing rules and conditions regionally. Thus, this report should be seen as a first step in trying to understand the situation in the different countries.

The report does show however, in a striking way, how different the national schemes are, in their underlying policy aims, in their eligibility criteria, in the application of the rules nationally and regionally, in the amounts and methods of providing financial aid and in the information and other supports provided for these systems.

While harmonisation of these schemes might appear ambitious, it would be valuable to have a dialogue on their aims and on the limitations that apply to see whether some principles could be established. For example, many of the schemes provide aid to those with a job, without considering that the access a car provides can be very helpful in getting a job in the first place. Another example is the somewhat arbitrary age restrictions that seem to apply.

EMG calls on national authorities, representatives of people with disabilities and others with further information to help supplement the data provided here. The aim should be to develop a deeper and broader understanding of the support systems to providing mobility for people with disabilities and to draw up some guidelines for the more effective functioning of these schemes.



Dr Jack Short

President, EMG



National policies on funding support for disabled drivers

Context

Many people with disabilities rely on a car or other adapted vehicle to enable them to live independent lives. For some the cost of adapting a vehicle to meet their needs may be relatively cheap and simple – an automatic gearbox or lighter steering for example. For others – and in particular those with the most severe disabilities - the cost of converting the base vehicle – for example to allow it to be driven from a wheelchair – or of adapting the controls to allow for limited upper body movement – may be very costly.

Many countries in Europe provide Government support to help meet these additional costs. However, as a recent EMG survey of its members has shown, there is a very wide variation in what support is given, to whom and on what basis.

This brief report summarises the results of that survey to date. Note that the data provided comes from a limited cross-section of EMG members (see Annex 1) and has not been independently verified or checked against Government data.

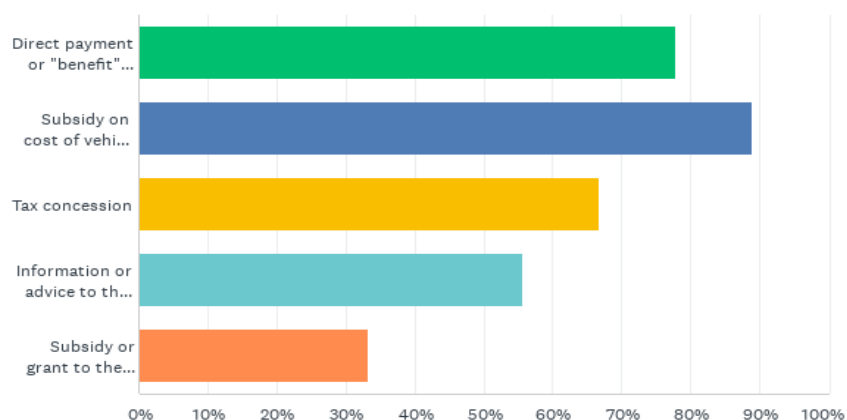
What form does support take?

All the companies which responded indicated that Government support is available to enable people with disabilities to gain or retain independent mobility.

The Department of Government responsible varies from Transport Ministries to those responsible for Health or Welfare and in some instances, support is from a regional level rather than national.

The type of support covers a range of areas summarised in the chart below:

Q7 What form does support take? Please tick all that apply



Who is eligible?

Eligibility varies considerably with some countries requiring a medical authorisation and others specifying, for example, that eligibility ceases at age 60 or at retirement age if that is later.

In some cases, support is also limited to those most severely disabled people in receipt of state benefits while in others, it is open to anyone who needs an adaptation to "sustain a decent life".

In a number of cases, only people with disabilities who are in employment are eligible.

Is support a "one off" or can it be repeated?

Support is available in some countries to renew vehicles or adaptations every three years while others require the vehicle to be kept for 5, 8 or even 11 years (in the case of a person who is not working).

What restrictions are there on types of vehicle or adaptation?

In many countries, there is, not surprisingly, emphasis on finding the most cost-effective solution to meet the individual's needs while in others, the person can choose the vehicle they wish but must make up any price differential themselves.

In some countries, the person with a disability is able to choose the company they wish to undertake the conversion/adaptation of the vehicle. In others, they must choose from an approved Government list or submit choices from which the funders will then select the cheapest and/or the one most local to them.

Is there any independent assessment of the suitability of adaptations for the individual?

Requirements vary between countries. Practices include a report from an occupational therapist or, if deemed necessary, a doctor.

Depending on the funding body, an independent assessment of ability and the best type of adaptation may also be required (and funded).

In some cases, the vehicle must be inspected after adaptation by the Government vehicle agency.

How many vehicles are supplied through this support annually?

Not all respondents had this information available. The data that was received indicated:

- Denmark: 600
- France: 1000
- Israel: Around 1,500-2,000 Vans that including Lift or Ramp, and many more cars with limit and few accessories like only Hand Control or Left foot Accelerator Pedal etc
- Norway: 500
- Sweden: approximately 800-1200 a year
- UK: Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs) - 9,000. Adaptations - 32,000

What is the annual Government expenditure?

Very few companies responding to the survey had this data, but Sweden and UK provided the following:

- Sweden: around 35 million Euros
- UK: £175.million (200 million Euros)

Observations

While there is clearly support across Europe for people with a disability to drive and finance a vehicle, there is a wide variation of approaches, eligibility, and other requirements.

Of particular note are:

- the emphasis in many countries on providing support only to those disabled people who are in employment – and yet surely having a vehicle and the means to move around independently is in many cases the pre-requisite of being able to get and keep a job?
- The focus on having to prove the nature and severity of disability in some countries seems at odds with the Europe-wide rights movement away from medically based assessment and towards functional solutions.

This report does not look into driver licensing requirements for people with disabilities, but the same intense level of medical intervention can be seen worldwide in deciding who may have a licence rather than enabling the person with a disability to demonstrate their ability to pass a standard driving test with whatever modifications they may need to control a vehicle safely and comfortably.

Next Steps

It would be helpful to get responses from more EMG members so that we can build up a better picture of key issues that may be relevant for EMG to bring forward for further discussion.

Annex 1

Data has been included from vehicle adaptation specialists or public data sources in the following countries. The data has not been provided or verified by Government sources:

Denmark

France

Germany

Ireland (from an Irish Government website)

Israel

Netherlands

Norway

Sweden

Switzerland

UK

Annex 2

Summary of individual member responses

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Country	Ministry	Regional Variations	Form of Subsidy	Eligibility	Age Limit	Renewal/Once off	Choice of vehicle	Independent Assessment	No of Vehicles	Total Cost
Norway	Welfare	No	Government purchase vehicle on basis of tender	Wide	70	After 11 years unless at work	No		500	
Netherlands	Welfare	National Law, Local implementation	Subsidy towards cost of vehicle, tax concessions, subsidy to coverter	Families with disabled member Disabled people who need car for work	No	After lengthy period	Made with company	Between UWV and adaptation company		
Switzerland	Health	No	Direct payment to user for adapted vehicle	Must have driving licence	Not for retired	Yes/costs compared to taxi	Yes	By adaptation co. and financing authority	5 Drive from wheelchair	
Israel	Health Defence Social Welfare	No	All forms	Wide	From 4 to retirement age	Every 5 years	Yes in consultation	Yes by company and authority	Maybe 1500	
France	Transport	No	Several / subsidy, tax, direct payment	On basis of doctor's assessment		€10,000 every ten years, or €5,000 every 5 years, but liable for surplus costs	Yes but has to submit offers from different companies		1000	
Germany	Welfare	No	Subsidy for vehicle purchase; 22 K max.	For work	While at work	Yes allowed but limits		By TUV or doctor; licence conditions Occupational therapist and adaptation company		
Denmark	Health	No	Several forms	No restrictions/life quality		Every 8 years	No restriction but financial limits		600	
UK	Work and Pensions	No Except Scotland	All forms	Very few	65 years	3 years for adaptations, 5 years for WAVs	Standards PAS2012 for WAVs		9000 WAVs 32,000 adaptations	
Sweden	Agency - Forsakringskassen	No	Subsidy for vehicle adaptation	Individual based, means related	65 years; must work or study	Every 9 years	Free to choose within budget limit		800-1200	

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