

Green vaccination certificates

The Commission announced in March plans for an EU-wide green certificate system to allow people to travel again more freely if:

- they have been vaccinated,
- recently tested negative or
- can prove that they have had COVID and still retain sufficient antibodies.

The Commission will create a gateway to allow Member States to check the validity of certificates issued in another member state. It will not guarantee an EU-wide set of freedoms beyond travel, and member states which public health restrictions can be waived for travellers, nor affect national or local decisions on what access a vaccinated person will have to public spaces. But anyone with a valid certificate will have to be treated in the same way.

The Parliament and Council [political agreement](#) on 20 May, which will shortly be formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council. The Regulation will enter into force on 1 July, with a phasing-in period of six weeks for the issuance of certificates for those Member States that need additional time. In parallel, the Commission will continue to provide technical and financial support to Member States to provide their citizens with access to the gateway.

The tourism industry, and countries, regions and towns which rely on tourism for a significant proportion of their revenue, are understandably anxious to have the increasing roll-out of vaccinations to be reflected by relaxation of rules governing tourism and business travel. Our sector was badly affected by piecemeal and rushed closures of borders even to freight movements at the start of the pandemic, and would be again if such restrictions were reimposed in the event of a resurgence of the disease. Non-food retailers and wholesalers serving the hospitality sector have suffered catastrophic losses of turnover due to repeated lockdowns and even where open, a drop in footfall.

A number of member states have been discussing national vaccination certification schemes with varying ideas of the use to which they could be put – most have seen a certificate as a means of allowing those vaccinated to travel and attend venues such as sports events, concerts, theatre which have hitherto been closed. Others have considered extending this further to allow those vaccinated to visit shops, hairdressers and other services hitherto closed, but perhaps also making visits to all shops, even essential ones, conditional on a certificate of this sort. The EU regulation will, as mentioned above, not change the ability of member states to decide how to manage such conditional waivers.

EuroCommerce position

We have consistently said that we fully support health measures to stop the disastrous spread of the virus and its increasing number of variants, but also questioned whether the distinction between ‘essential’ and ‘non-essential’ shops has ever made sense – if one category can ensure a good level of safety, so can another. We have therefore adopted the following position on how the measures should be implemented:

- Support for an EU green certificate, rather than a patchwork of mutually incompatible national schemes.
- Support for them being used to allow a reopening of travel, both for tourism and business purposes, and for mass events such as sports or theatre/concerts etc. Also, could be useful for cross-border deliveries of goods where drivers are required to have proof of a negative test or take a new test.
- Its introduction should aim to reduce, rather than create new restrictions on top of, those in place at present.
- Entry to shops and shopping centres should therefore not be conditional on possession of a certificate. Care should be taken not to create discrimination or a breach of basic rights.
- The system underpinning the certificates needs to be robust against fraud and time limited: if most people have been vaccinated, it is questionable whether the certificate would continue to be necessary.