

EU divided over 'vaccine passports'

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EU countries are increasingly looking at using proof of COVID-19 inoculation as a "vaccine passport" but the idea is divisive.

Summer destinations in favour

Sunny southern EU countries that rely on tourism are most in favour.

Last month Greece, hoping to save its tourist industry, called for the European Commission to allow "vaccine certificates" to be used for [travel](#) in the EU.

Separately, on Monday, Greece signed a deal with Israel to allow travel between the countries for those who have been vaccinated.

But discussions are still taking place between the 27 EU member states on common rules and on the patient data to be shared for a mutual recognition of vaccine certificates.

There is so far no common position on what rights such certificates might confer.

Spain, also keen to welcome back tourists, has not yet launched a vaccine passport but Foreign

Minister Arancha Gonzalez Laya sees that as "a very important element to guarantee a [safe return](#) to mobility".

Italy too believes such a document could pave the way back to "normal activity" quicker, in the words of its official in charge of managing the [health emergency](#), Domenico Arcuri.

Nordics almost there

Sweden and Denmark have already announced electronic certificates that could allow bearers to travel abroad, attend sporting or cultural venues or, in Denmark's case, dine in restaurants.

Iceland, not a member of the EU but linked to it as part of the Schengen zone, in January started issuing digital certificates with a view to easing travel between countries.

In Estonia, arrivals who can show they have been vaccinated or hold a negative COVID test are exempt from quarantine.

A local firm, Guardtime, has started a pilot certification scheme and the country is working with the World Health Organization to develop that internationally.

In principle, the WHO supports vaccine certificates to better monitor inoculation, but it is critical of the idea of them being used as a requisite for travel.

Too soon for others

France has expressed reservations on vaccine certificates being used as a sign of safety for activities enjoyed pre-pandemic.

"Not everyone has access to vaccines. And we don't know if they prevent transmission," Health Minister Olivier Veran said in January.

The debate should only be broached "in a few months' time", he said.

Germany is also opposed to a vaccinated minority enjoying privileges denied the rest of the population.

But it doesn't rule out the private sector imposing such a requirement.

"If a restaurateur wants to open only to vaccinated people, it would be difficult to forbid that under current laws," Justice Minister Christine Lambrecht said.

Poland is not considering a "[vaccine](#) passport" for the moment, although it has a smartphone app showing the status of those vaccinated which allows the bearer to skip quarantine on arrival in the country.

Belgium's government is likewise baulking at having activities contingent on vaccination "passports". For travel, it is looking for recommendations made at the EU level and by the WHO.

Across the EU, as of Wednesday, at least 5.5 million people have been fully vaccinated with two doses, amounting to 1.2 of the population, according to official national figures compiled and collated by AFP.

At least 12.8 million people—2.9 percent of the bloc's population—have received at least one dose, which provides partial immunity to COVID-19.

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