

COVID-19: Coreper endorses political agreement on the EU digital COVID certificate to facilitate free movement

The Council's Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper) today gave its unanimous support to the political agreement reached with the European Parliament on 20 May on the EU digital COVID certificate.

The aim is to facilitate safe and free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing proof that a person has either been vaccinated against COVID-19, received a negative test result or recovered from COVID-19. The certificate, which will be in use by 1 July, will be available in digital and paper format, contain a QR code and be issued free of charge. It is not a precondition for exercising free movement rights and it is not a travel document.

The certificate is an important step towards a more normal, freer and safer life during the pandemic. It will facilitate the free movement of all Europeans, starting this summer. And it shows once again that the EU delivers. Member states will need to remain vigilant with regard to the epidemiological situation so that movement in the EU is safe, but at the same time our societies and economies can gradually recover.

António Costa – Prime Minister of Portugal

Affordable and accessible tests

- Member states are encouraged to ensure that tests are affordable and widely available.
- 100 million euro will be available for the purchase of tests under the Emergency Support Instrument.
- Additional funding above 100 million euro could be mobilised, subject to approval by the budgetary authorities.

Travel restrictions

- It remains up to national governments to decide whether travellers with a certificate have to quarantine or get tested.
- Member states should refrain from imposing additional travel restrictions, such as testing or quarantine, unless they are proportionate and necessary to safeguard public health.
- If they decide to introduce travel restrictions, member states must inform the other member states and the Commission, if possible 48 hours in advance.
- They must clarify the reasons for such restrictions, their scope and the start date and duration.
- This information should be published 24 hours before the measures come into effect.

Phasing-in period

- For a period of six weeks, citizens whose certificates were issued before 1 July will be able to travel within the EU using those certificates.
- If a member state is not ready to issue certificates in the new format by 1 July, it will have six weeks from that date to introduce the new EU digital COVID certificate format. National certificates in other formats will be accepted during the phasing-in period.

Types of vaccine

- When a person presents a vaccination certificate for one of the vaccines approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA), member states will be obliged to accept it for the purpose of facilitating freedom of movement. The proposed legislation gives member states the option to accept vaccination certificates issued for vaccines which have been authorised nationally or have completed the WHO (World Health Organisation) emergency listing process.

Types of test

- Only PCR and rapid antigen tests will be accepted as proof of a negative test result.
- Only PCR tests will be accepted as proof of recovery. Rapid antigen tests, serological tests or other validated methods might be accepted at a later stage if scientific evidence becomes available.

Data protection

- There will be no centralised EU database.
- Member states must implement robust safeguards in line with EU data protection rules.

Background

The legal framework for the certificate consists of two legislative proposals that were tabled by the European Commission on 17 March.

The first proposal concerns EU citizens and their family members and the second concerns third-country nationals staying or residing legally in the Schengen area.

Under the proposals it will be possible to use the certificate across all EU member states, as well as in Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. The certificate will also be open to initiatives being developed globally.

The Council adopted its negotiation position on 14 April, while the European Parliament adopted its position on 29 April. After four trilogues and several technical meetings, the interinstitutional political agreement was reached on 20 May.

Next steps

The Council will now send a letter to the European Parliament to officially communicate that the member states' permanent representatives have endorsed the political agreement.

The European Parliament is then expected to vote its first reading position at its plenary session on 7-10 June. Afterwards the Council will officially adopt the regulations which will have to be signed by the Council and the European Parliament. Once the signature of the legislation has taken place, the regulations shall be published in the Official Journal of the EU and apply from 1 July.

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