Coronavirus: Commission proposes a Digital Green Certificate

Brussels, 17 March 2021

Today the European Commission is proposing to create a Digital Green Certificate to facilitate safe free movement inside the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Digital Green Certificate will be a proof that a person has been vaccinated against COVID-19, received a negative test result or recovered from COVID-19. It will be available, free of charge, in digital or paper format. It will include a QR code to ensure security and authenticity of the certificate. The Commission will build a gateway to ensure all certificates can be verified across the EU, and support Member States in the technical implementation of certificates. Member States remain responsible to decide which public health restrictions can be waived for travellers but will have to apply such waivers in the same way to travellers holding a Digital Green Certificate.

Vice-President for Values and Transparency, Věra **Jourová** said: *"The Digital Green Certificate offers an EU-wide solution to ensure that EU citizens benefit from a harmonised digital tool to support free movement in the EU. This is a good message in support of recovery. Our key objectives are to offer an easy to use, non-discriminatory and secure tool that fully respects data protection. And we continue working towards international convergence with other partners."*

Commissioner for Justice, Didier **Reynders**, said: *"With the Digital Green Certificate, we are taking a European approach to ensure EU citizens and their family members can travel safely and with minimum restrictions this summer. The Digital Green Certificate will not be a pre-condition to free movement and it will not discriminate in any way. A common EU-approach will not only help us to gradually restore free movement within the EU and avoid fragmentation. It is also a chance to influence global standards and lead by example based on our European values like data protection."*

Key elements of the regulation proposed by the Commission today:

1. **Accessible and secure certificates for all EU citizens:**

- **The Digital Green Certificate will cover three types of certificates** –vaccination certificates, test certificates (NAAT/RT-PCR test or a rapid antigen test), and certificates for persons who have recovered from COVID-19.
- **The certificates will be issued in a digital form or on paper.** Both will have a QR code that contains necessary key information as well as a digital signature to make sure the certificate is authentic.
- **The Commission will build a gateway** and support Member States to develop software that authorities can use to verify all certificate signatures across the EU. No personal data of the certificate holders passes through the gateway, or is retained by the verifying Member State.
- **The certificates will be available free of charg**e and in the official language or languages of the issuing Member State and English.

2. **Non-discrimination:**

- **All people – vaccinated and non-vaccinated – should benefit from a Digital Green Certificate** when travelling in the EU. To prevent discrimination against individuals who are not vaccinated, the Commission proposes to create not only an interoperable vaccination certificate, but also COVID-19 test certificates and certificates for persons who have recovered from COVID-19.
- **Same right for travellers with the Digital Green Certificate** –where Member States accept proof of vaccination to waive certain public health restrictions such as testing or quarantine, they would be required to accept, under the same conditions, vaccination certificates issued under the Digital Green Certificate system. This obligation would be limited to vaccines that have received EU-wide marketing authorisation, but Member States can decide to accept other vaccines in addition.
- **Notification of other measures** – if a Member State continues to require holders of a Digital

Green Certificate to quarantine or test, it must notify the Commission and all other Member States and explain the reasons for such measures.

3. **Only essential information and secure personal data:**

- **The certificates will include a limited set of information** such as name, date of birth, date of issuance, relevant information about vaccine/test/recovery and a unique identifier of the certificate. This data can be checked only to confirm and verify the authenticity and validity of certificates.

The Digital Green Certificate will be valid in all EU Member States and open for Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway as well as Switzerland. The Digital Green Certificate should be issued to EU citizens and their family members, regardless of their nationality. It should also be issued to non-EU nationals who reside in the EU and to visitors who have the right to travel to other Member States.

The Digital Green Certificate system is a temporary measure. It will be suspended once the World Health Organization (WHO) declares the end of the COVID-19 international health emergency.

Next Steps

To be ready before the summer, this proposal needs a swift adoption by the European Parliament and the Council.

In parallel, Member States must implement the trust framework and technical standards, agreed in the eHealth network, to ensure timely implementation of the Digital Green Certificate, their interoperability and full compliance with personal data protection. The aim is to have the technical work and the proposal completed in the coming months.

Background

To comply with the measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus, travellers in the EU have been asked to provide various documents, such as medical certificates, test results, or declarations. The absence of standardised formats has resulted in travellers experiencing problems when moving within the EU. There have also been reports of fraudulent or forged documents.

In their statement adopted following the informal video conferences on 25 and 26 February 2021, the members of the European Council called for work to continue on a common approach to vaccination certificates. The Commission has been working with the Member States in the eHealth Network, a voluntary network connecting national authorities responsible for eHealth, on preparing the interoperability of vaccination certificates. Guidelines were adopted on 27 January and updated on 12 March, and the trust framework outline was agreed on 12 March 2021.

Today the Commission adopted a legislative proposal establishing a common framework for a Digital Green Certificate. The Commission also adopted a complementary proposal to ensure that the Digital Green Certificate is also issued to non-EU nationals who reside in Member States or Schengen Associated States and to visitors who have the right to travel to other Member States. Separate proposals to cover citizens and non-EU citizens are necessary for legal reasons; there is no difference in treatment of citizens and eligible non-EU citizens for the purpose of the certificates.

The latest information on coronavirus measures as well as travel restrictions provided to us by Member States are available on the Re-open EU platform.

More information

Questions and Answers – Digital Green Certificate

Digital Green Certificate – Factsheet

Digital Green Certificate – video clip

Proposal for a Regulation on Digital Green Certificate to facilitate free movement in the EU

Proposal for a Regulation on Digital Green Certificates for third-country nationals legally staying or residing in Member States

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Questions and Answers – Digital Green Certificate

Brussels, 17 March 2021

The "Digital Green Certificate" will facilitate safe and free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic within the EU. A Digital Green Certificate will be a proof that a person has been vaccinated against COVID-19, has received a negative test result or has recovered from COVID-19 that can be used across all EU Member States. It can also be introduced in Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway as well as Switzerland. The Digital Green Certificate will also be open to initiatives being developed globally.

1. **General**

What are the main elements of the proposal?

- **The Digital Green Certificate** system covers three different types of COVID-19 certificates: a vaccination certificate, a test certificate, and a certificate of recovery.
- They can be issued and used **in all EU Member States to facilitate free movement.** All EU citizens and their family members as well as non-EU nationals staying or residing in the Member States and who have the right to travel to other Member States, would be eligible to receive them free of charge.
- The certificates should only include **a minimum set of information** necessary to confirm and verify the holder's vaccination, testing or recovery status.
- Being vaccinated will **not be a pre-condition to travel**. All EU citizens have a fundamental right to free movement in the EU and this applies regardless of whether they are vaccinated or not. The same principle applies to the rights of non-EU nationals staying or residing in the EU Member States and who have the right to travel to other Member States. The Digital Green Certificate will **make it easier to exercise that right,** also through testing and recovery certificates.

How will it help to facilitate safe free movement?

The Digital Green Certificate can serve as proof of vaccination, testing and recovery in order to waive restrictions to free movement put in place in a Member State on public health grounds, such as testing or quarantine requirements.

If a Member State accepts proof of vaccination to waive restrictions to free movement, it will have to accept proof of vaccination issued by another Member State in relation to vaccines which have received EU market authorisation.

Member States will have the option to extend this to travellers who receive other vaccines.

When travelling, every Digital Green Certificate holder will have the same rights as citizens of the visited Member State who have been vaccinated, tested or recovered.

If a Member State continues to require holders of a digital green certificate to quarantine or test, it must notify the Commission and all other Member States and provide reasons for such measures.

How do you ensure that non-vaccinated people are not discriminated when exercising their free movement right?

To ensure that the right to free movement in the EU is respected and that there is no discrimination against individuals who are not vaccinated, the Commission proposes to create not only an interoperable vaccination certificate, but also COVID-19 test certificates and certificates for persons who have recovered from COVID-19. In this way, as many persons as possible should be able to benefit from a Digital Green Certificate when travelling.

The proposal is clear that the Digital Green Certificate is to facilitate free movement inside the EU. It will not be a pre-condition to free movement. Persons who are not vaccinated must be able to continue to exercise their free movement rights, where necessary subject to limitations such as testing or quarantine/self-isolation.

The same applies to the rights of non-EU nationals staying or residing in the Member States and who have the right to travel to other Member States.

Does the introduction of the Digital Green Certificate mean Member States will need to reintroduce controls at internal borders to check certificates?

Not at all. The Digital Green Certificate aims to facilitate free movement within the EU and the easing of the current restrictions, not to restrict the rights to free movement and the right to travel.

The verification of the certificates cannot as such justify the temporary reintroduction of border controls at internal borders, and such controls are not necessary for Member States to implement the Digital Green Certificate.

As the experience of the first months of the pandemic demonstrated, the uncoordinated and hasty reintroduction of internal border controls does not stop the virus, but instead causes societal and economic disruption, which we have a responsibility to avoid to the greatest extent possible. Such controls must remain a measure of last resort, in line with EU law.

2. Digital Green Certificate - details

Which information will the Digital Green Certificate include?

The Digital Green Certificate will contain necessary key information such as name, date of birth, the issuing Member State and a unique identifier of the certificate. In addition:

- For a vaccination certificate: vaccine product and manufacturer, number of doses, date of vaccination;
- For a test certificate: type of test, date and time of test, test centre and result;
- For a recovery certificate: date of positive test result, issuer of certificate, date of issuance, validity date.

How will the format of the Digital Green Certificate look like?

The certificates will be issued in digital format, so they can be shown on a smartphone, or on paper, depending on the preference of its holder. The certificates will contain an interoperable, machine-readable QR code containing necessary key data as well as a digital signature. The QR code is used to securely verify the authenticity, integrity and validity of the certificate. To improve cross-border acceptance, the information on the certificate should be written in the language(s) of the issuing Member State and English.

How does the Digital Green Certificate work across the EU?

The Digital Green Certificate contains a QR code with a digital signature to protect it against falsification. When the certificate is checked, the QR code is scanned and the signature verified.

Each issuing body (e.g. a hospital, a test centre, a health authority) has its own digital signature key. All of these are stored in a secure database in each country.

The European Commission will build a gateway. Through this gateway, all certificate signatures can be verified across the EU. The personal data of the certificate holder does not pass through the gateway, as this is not necessary to verify the digital signature.

The European Commission will also provide open source reference implementations to support Member States to develop software that authorities can use to scan and check the QR codes.

Which vaccines will be accepted?

Member States should issue vaccination certificates regardless of the type of COVID-19 vaccine.

Where Member States accept proof of vaccination to waive certain public health restrictions such as testing or quarantine, they would be required to accept, under the same conditions, vaccination certificates issued under the Digital Green Certificate system. However, this obligation would be limited to vaccines that have received EU-wide marketing authorisation. Member States have the option to accept vaccination certificates issued in relation to other vaccines.

Which COVID-19 tests will be accepted?

To ensure the reliability of the test result, only the results of so-called NAAT tests (including RT-PCR tests) and rapid antigen tests, featured in the list established on the basis of Council Recommendation 2021/C 24/01, should be eligible for a test certificate issued on the basis of the proposed Regulation.

Why will self-tests not be included?

Self-tests are not performed in controlled conditions and, for the time being, are considered to be less reliable. Certificates should be issued by health authorities, which cannot however be in control for tests that are performed for example at home, and cannot therefore issue reliable certificates for them.

Will there be a minimum validity of the certificates?

The period of relevance of certificates depends on scientific evidence and will be determined by the verifiers following their national rules. As new scientific evidence is emerging, the periods for which certificates are relevant for waiver of applicable public health requirements could be adjusted.

The proposed regulation ensures that certificates issued by other Member States are accepted following the same rules as the ones applied to nationally issued certificates. The regulation also introduces some basic principles, for example, setting the maximum validity period of the certificate of recovery at 180 days.

These principles could be adjusted by the Commission through delegated acts to align with new scientific evidence once it is available.

What will happen for those people who have already been vaccinated?

People who have been vaccinated before the Digital Green Certificate is put in place should also have the possibility to obtain the necessary vaccination certificate. If they received a vaccination certificate that did not meet the interoperable standards required under the Regulation, they may request a new one.

At the same time, Member States may continue to issue proofs of vaccination in other formats for other purposes, in particular for medical purposes.

For how long will the Digital Green Certificate be in place?

The certificates are linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Digital Green Certificate system will be suspended once the World Health Organization (WHO) declares the end of the international public health emergency caused by COVID-19. Similarly, if the WHO declares a new international public health emergency caused by COVID-19, a variant of it, or a similar infectious disease, the system could be reactivated.

What will be the cost of the Digital Green Certificates?

The certificates will be free of charge.

Member States have to bear the cost for setting up the infrastructure at national level. The Commission will provide funding to support Member States in setting up the necessary infrastructure, if needed.

The Commission will pay for setting up the gateway at EU level, and will support Member State to develop software to be used by verifying persons that scan the QR code.

3. Interoperability – inside and outside the EU

How is interoperability of the Digital Green Certificates ensured?

Interoperability is achieved by making sure that the different types of digital green certificates (vaccination status; test results; recovery status) are standardised according to commonly agreed policies, rules and specifications. This means in practice that any certificate issued in one Member State can be verified in another Member State. Member States will retain flexibility in how they design their certificates so long as they meet these common standards.

Member States, with support by the Commission, agreed on a trust framework outline to ensure timely implementation of the Digital Green Certificates, their interoperability and full compliance with personal data protection. This is based on guidelines on basic interoperability elements that were adopted on 27 January and updated on 12 March.

In practical terms, the Commission will set up a gateway through which certificate signatures can be exchanged among national directories, so they can be verified across the EU. The Commission will also support Member States to develop software that authorities can use to scan and check the QR codes.

Will the Digital Green Certificate be compatible with other systems developed at international level?

The Commission is working to make sure that the certificates are compatible with systems in third countries outside the EU. The proposal is open to global initiatives and takes into account ongoing efforts of specialised agencies of the United Nations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), to establish specifications and guidance for using digital technologies for documenting vaccination status. Third countries should be encouraged to recognise the Digital Green Certificate when lifting restrictions on non-essential travel. The EU's Digital Green Certificates could serve as an example for other certificates currently being developed around the world.

The Regulation would be incorporated into the EEA Agreement, allowing EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) to apply the EU system of Digital Green Certificates. As regards Switzerland, the Commission will be able to decide to accept Swiss certificates issued in accordance with the Digital Green Certificate draft Regulation, based on reciprocity.

Today's proposal would allow the Commission to issue a decision recognising certificates issued by third countries to EU citizens and their family members, where such certificates meet quality standards and are interoperable with the EU trust framework.

4. **Personal data**

How will personal data be processed?

Given that the personal data contained in the certificates includes sensitive medical data, a very high level of data protection will be ensured.

The certificates will only include a limited set of information that is necessary. This cannot be retained by visited countries. For verification purposes, only the validity and authenticity of the certificate is checked, by verifying who issued and signed it. All health data remains with the Member State that issued a Digital Green Certificate.

The Digital Green Certificate system will not require the setting up and maintenance of a database of health certificates at EU level.

5. **Non-EU nationals**

Will the Digital Green Certificate include non-EU nationals in the EU?

Yes. The Digital Green Certificate should be issued to family members of EU citizens, regardless of their nationality. The Commission also adopted a complementary proposal to ensure that the Digital Green Certificate is also issued to non-EU nationals who reside in Member States or Schengen Associated States and to visitors who have the right to travel to other Member States. Separate proposals to cover citizens and non-EU citizens are necessary for legal reasons; there is no difference in treatment of citizens and eligible non-EU citizens for the purpose of the certificates.

The Digital Green Certificate could also be issued to nationals or residents of Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and the Vatican/Holy See, in particular where they are vaccinated by a Member State.

Could today's proposals also facilitate travelling to the EU from third countries?

At the moment, non-essential travel to the EU is restricted from third countries, except for a limited number of countries. A non-EU national who may travel to the EU can obtain a Digital Green Certificate. The non-EU national could request a Digital Green Certificate from a Member State he/she is travelling to, by providing all necessary information, including reliable proof of vaccination. The Member State would then have to assess if reliable proof has been provided and decide whether to issue a Digital Green Certificate.

In the medium-term, where the Commission is satisfied that a third country issues certificates in compliance with international standards and systems which are interoperable with the EU system, the Commission can issue an "adequacy decision" through an implementing act based on the regulation proposed today. Then, such third country certificates would be accepted under the same conditions as Digital Green Certificates.

In both cases, the rules for acceptance of proof of vaccination would be the same as for EU nationals: vaccines that have received EU-wide marketing authorisation have to be accepted, but Member States can decide to accept other vaccines in addition.

For More Information

Press release Digital Green Certificate

Digital Green Certificate – Factsheet