

Digital green pass: what is the vaccine passport launched by the European Commission?

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On **17 March**, the European Commission launched a **digital green pass**, which is valid within the European Union's borders, to make travelling around Europe safe over the coming months.

With the digital green pass, travellers will be able to demonstrate that they have been vaccinated against **Covid-19**, that they have undergone a swab test, and the result was negative, or that they have recovered from the virus. President **Ursula von der Leyen** already announced this plan at the beginning of March, and it has now been implemented.

What is the digital green pass?

The green certificate, which can be in either digital or paper format, consists of a **QR code** that protects the confidentiality and safety of travellers. The Commission will be working on a *gateway* and will help the Member states to develop software to verify all of the signatures of the certificates throughout the Union.

These certificates will be free of charge, and they will be written in English, and in the official language or languages of the member state that issued them.

The Commission is being very careful not to discriminate against citizens, so not only interoperable vaccine certificates will be accepted. Indeed, anyone that has not yet been vaccinated should have certificates that demonstrate they have **tested negative for Covid**, or that they have recovered from it.

The next steps for implementing the digital green pass scheme are: the approval of the European Council and of the European Parliament. Furthermore, all of the Member states will have to put into effect the framework of trust and the technical standards. As the newspaper **“Il Corriere della Sera”**, **wrote**, every State will be free to decide which vaccines are acceptable, although those approved by the EMA will automatically be accepted.

At a hearing at the European Parliament on 15 March, **Katherine O’Brien**, the Director of the Immunisation, Vaccines and Biologicals Department of the WHO, announced that the WHO is in favour of vaccine passports for individuals, but at the international level, “there are no conditions; **there is a lack of evidence on how much vaccines protect**. Problems arise for travel, but for the moment doses are administered only to vulnerable people.”

What are other countries doing?

Israel is adopting a similar strategy, to be able to encourage free movement within the borders. The green passport consists of the vaccination certificate (valid for six months) issued through a Ministry of Health app, one week after the second vaccine injection.

By showing this certification, people will be allowed to enter shops, cafes and restaurants.

In contrast, some Greek islands are increasing the rate of vaccination, in view of the summer period: the goal of Prime Minister **Kyriakos Mitsotakis** is to make **Greece** a safe place for tourists, and to relaunch the country’s economy. All of the inhabitants of **Meganisi**, **Kalamos** and **Kastos** (in the Ionian Sea) and **Ikaria** (in the Aegean) have been vaccinated.

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