



Position Paper, 19.10.2021

Travel and tourism stakeholders' position on lifting unnecessary travel restrictions

With the summer now behind us, Europe is entering a different stage in its fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. 74% of EU adults are now fully vaccinated and vaccination efforts are ongoing throughout Europe¹. Despite the continued spread of the virus at community level, the impact of the pandemic on public health has been brought under control within the EU.

In this context, travel and tourism associations welcome the discussions which are currently taking place between Member States about the revision of Council Recommendations on travel restrictions. Amongst others, the Council is considering updating the criteria behind the colour-coded EU travel restrictions map, to include vaccination and hospitalisation rates and not only the incidence rate.

However, considering that the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC):

- is now acknowledging that EU travel restrictions have not had a significant impact on reducing virus transmission, hospitalisations, or deaths; – and
- is proposing to *discontinue the use of the combined indicators and the colour-coded system due to limited public health value, to focus on promoting vaccination amongst travellers;*

we are hereby **calling for the elimination of this colour-coded system altogether and discontinuation of travel restrictions for all Digital COVID Certificate (DCC) holders, irrespective of their country/area of origin**. EU countries should thus **move towards a traveller risk-based approach**, rather than the country-to-country approach that is currently used.

With a focus on the individual traveller, there is no justification to treat international travel any differently than intra-EU travel. While several Member States have already opened non-EU travel outside of the EU under similar conditions as intra-EU, some continue to discourage non-essential travel to any country that is not on the very limited list of safe countries (Annex I of the Council Recommendation, so-called “White List”). **International travel should be made possible with the same conditions as for intra-EU travel:** based on vaccination, recovery or a negative COVID-19 test; with quarantine requirements and recommendations against non-essential travel strictly limited to very high incidence or variant areas of concern. On this basis, we also **call on Member States to abandon the use of the EU White List**.

¹ ECDC vaccine tracker, 15.10.2021

<https://vaccinetracker.ecdc.europa.eu/public/extensions/COVID-19/vaccine-tracker.html#uptake-tab>

EU leaders must focus on restoring international air travel as quickly as possible, building on the success of the Digital COVID Certificate (DCC). Since its launch in June 2021, the DCC has quickly become the *de facto* global standard, with over half a billion certificates downloaded². We call on the EU to use its influence and the DCC's success to accelerate execution on the commitments made during the G7 Summit³, whereby members agreed to “a set of common standards for travel including interoperability and mutual recognition of digital applications, testing requirements, recognition of vaccination status and comparable criteria for when responsive measures may be required”.

As travel and tourism stakeholders, we are keen to support the safe restart of our industry and help boost Europe's economies as soon as possible. In this context, we would like to stress the importance of the following elements:

- **Member States should further update and align their travel rules and restrictions.** In particular, harmonisation is required on the list of recognised vaccines, on the duration of the validity of tests and vaccinations, on requirements for children (who should be allowed to follow the same applicable rules as adults *in loco parentis* regardless of their own vaccination status) as well as on the recognition of mixed vaccinations and booster shots.
- Together with the European Commission, Member States need to work on a coordinated **EU COVID Exit Plan for Travel and Tourism. This would include:**
 - A harmonised approach to fully re-establish freedom of movement, recognising the endemic nature of COVID-19 and replacing complex traffic light systems;
 - Common criteria on when to discontinue the use of passenger locator forms (PLFs) as well as hygiene standards at a later stage (face masks, social distancing, etc);
 - Simple and clear rules that are the same throughout Europe – in order to avoid a patchwork of exit measures, similar to the ones we saw at the beginning of the crisis.
- **All Member States should recognise the seven WHO approved vaccines** for international travel, as the US just did⁴. This option is already included in the DCC Regulation itself and could be a basis for a more harmonised approach. Vaccine certification accepted at the border should also be accepted to enter facilities in destination where required. This measure would bring back coherence within the Schengen area and simplify travel rules for non-EU travellers.
- **DCC equivalence decisions:** to facilitate the recovery of international travel, we strongly support the ongoing work of the European Commission in seeking agreements with third countries on mutual recognition of COVID-19 certificates. We support the DCC to become the basis for a global standard in digital certificates.
- **Digitalisation of verification procedures:** Manual DCC and PLF checks by crew continue to cause complexity and long queues at airports and ports. The situation might become extremely difficult to manage as traffic volumes keeps recovering. We therefore call on national government to support the digitalisation of the verification process by providing a simple “okay to travel” message as part of the online check-in process.
- **Antigen tests should be systematically accepted** as an alternative to slower and more expensive PCR tests.

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/safe-covid-19-vaccines-europeans/eu-digital-covid-certificate_en#are-citizens-who-are-not-yet-vaccinated-able-to-travel-to-another-eu-country

³ 13.06.2021, G7 Summit Communiqué: <https://www.g7uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Carbis-Bay-G7-Summit-Communique-PDF-430KB-25-pages-3-1.pdf>

⁴ On 15.10.2021, the White House announced that would lift the travel ban for fully vaccinated travellers, recognising the WHO-list of approved vaccines
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-58929441>