



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Ursula von der Leyen
The President

Brussels, 5 March 2021

Dear colleagues,

In our videoconference of 24 February 2021, we focused a substantial part of our discussion on vaccination certificates. We agreed to take work forward based on a common approach to facilitate the right to free movement of persons within the European Union.

We discussed establishing, at EU level, standardised and interoperable certificates attesting people's COVID-19 status: covering the fact that the holder has been fully vaccinated, has tested negative, or has recovered from COVID-19, provided the scientific evidence is clear. Reflecting on our discussion, I have concluded that this should be framed in a legislative proposal for a 'Digital Green Certificate', an initiative that the Commission plans to adopt on 17 March 2021.

This proposal will build on the considerable preparatory work, which we have already undertaken together over recent months. Guidelines on proof of vaccination for medical purposes, which also feature a minimum data set, were agreed upon by all Member States in the e-Health Network on 27 January 2021. In addition, on 19 February, the Health Security Committee agreed on a common and standardised data set for proof of test results, along with a list of Rapid Antigen Tests mutually recognised as effective. We now need to complete this work by urgently finalising and agreeing on the equivalent data set for proof of recovery from COVID-19.

To establish an EU-wide interoperable system, we not only need a legal framework, but we must also complete the technical work at EU and national level, on issuance of certificates by national competent bodies and on verification through an EU trust framework.

For the system to start functioning once the EU level work on a trust framework is completed, national action is needed already now. This starts with the implementation in national health records systems of the Guidelines on proof of vaccination and of the agreed data set for proof of test results. The data sets that have already been agreed upon for test results and vaccinations, including the coding systems, need to be used by your organisations carrying out tests and vaccinations. It is crucial that Member States set up systems for issuing such certificates.

At EU level, the Commission is working with Member States to establish a trust framework and a digital infrastructure that would facilitate the authentication of the vaccination, testing and COVID-19 recovery certificates. As I mentioned in our videoconference, this work could be completed within the next three months, with your cooperation.

The foundation of such a common approach is trust. Authorities in one Member State need assurances that the information included in a certificate issued in another Member State is trustworthy, that the certificate is genuine, and that it belongs to the holder. Anyone verifying this information should have access only to the minimum amount of information necessary. To this end, national lists of authorised issuers and national registers of verifiers of certificates should be established and made public. Member States should also establish the necessary infrastructure by setting up online verification systems for both issuers and verifiers of certificates, consistent with the trust framework. Such concrete measures would ensure that all Member States are ready to use the interoperable system as soon as the framework is in place. In addition, communication plans on these actions must support a smooth implementation and uptake by citizens.

The “Digital Green Certificate” will be designed to facilitate free movement and to ensure that while certain restrictions of free movement may remain in place, these will only be used where justified and to the extent necessary. The key objective of having an interoperable certificate attesting COVID-19 status is to ensure that where people can enjoy free movement without a risk to public health, they should be able to do so. At the same time, we need to make sure that we prevent discrimination against those unable to be vaccinated, for example for medical reasons or because they are not part of the target group for which the vaccine is currently recommended, but who for other reasons (e.g. recent negative test results) do not present material public health risks.

An EU system can only work if the respective national systems are in place on time. This requires the decisions already taken to be swiftly implemented, the remaining elements to be quickly agreed, and the speedy adoption of the legal framework.

I count on you to work together to deliver as a matter of priority on this powerful boost to our citizens and their free movement.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ursula von der Leyen', written in a cursive style.

Ursula von der Leyen