

Digital Green Certificate: Euroconsumers calls for travel restrictions to be non-discriminatory, coordinated and proportionate

Euroconsumers welcomes the proposals for a Digital Green Certificate made by the European Commission on 17th March 2021. The Certificate is an important tool to give everyone the much needed perspective of being able to travel again and reactivates the fundamental EU citizens' right to move freely across the Union's territory. Euroconsumers calls on the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Member States to strive for the full effectiveness of the Certificate by ensuring truly non-discriminatory conditions and guaranteeing all Member States make good and correct use of it.

The Digital Green Certificate is an important step forward to regaining our EU right to free movement

Euroconsumers commends the fact that the proposed Certificate is not only based on proof of vaccination, but also includes the alternative options of a negative test or having recovered from COVID-19. This is particularly important given the current low level of vaccination in the different EU countries and the lack of perspective that every EU citizen will indeed have the opportunity to be vaccinated in the very near future.

Euroconsumers also salutes the commitment to strictly respect data protection rules and to ensure a high level of security against the hacking of what is sensitive personal data. Also the option to provide the Certificate digitally or on paper is much appreciated as a crucial inclusive measure.

Real non-discrimination requires free of charge testing

Getting a test in order to obtain a Digital Green Certificate and be able to travel is not necessarily free of charge. This creates a situation where some citizens can travel 'for free' being vaccinated, while others have to pay several hundreds of euros for tests just to be allowed to take a family trip. To avoid this additional layer of discrimination, Euroconsumers insists all necessary tests are offered at no cost. At the very least this should be the case as long as not everyone has been granted the opportunity to get vaccinated. This would otherwise create unequal rights to travel between citizens who got vaccinated on public expense and citizens who had to pay for their test.

No additional unilateral requirements on top of the Certificate

While with the Digital Green Certificate the European Commission has proposed a facilitating tool, it depends largely on the willingness of the European Member States to turn it into an effective and non-discriminatory way to travel again across Europe.

That's why Euroconsumers calls on Member States to make good use of the Digital Green Certificate despite its voluntary character and ensure citizens benefit from the same conditions to enter Member States all over Europe, regardless of whether the Certificate was issued on the basis of vaccination, a negative test, or proof of COVID-19 recovery.

This also implies Member States should absolutely refrain from adding unilateral requirements, such as extra quarantines or extra tests, on top of the Digital Green Certificate as this would weaken its effectiveness. The limited cases in which such extra requirements might be considered should be on the basis of strong scientific advice and in any case without any discrimination against citizens who have not been vaccinated (yet).

It is therefore paramount that the European Commission and Member States strive to reopen borders together in the most aligned and effective way possible, avoiding situations in which citizens travelling across several Member States need to comply with different measures.

Euroconsumers would also like to call on Member States to pave the way for a smooth implementation of the Certificate. To that regard Member States should be ready to face the administrative bottlenecks that citizens might encounter when requesting a Certificate so as to ensure the success of the measure.

Travel restrictions can only be temporary and should be constantly reevaluated

Last but not least, Euroconsumers would like to recall that restrictions to free movement can only be tolerated as far as they are necessary, effective, proportionate and temporary. It is therefore of outmost importance that the requirement to show a Digital Green Certificate in order to cross a border is constantly reevaluated against the evolution of the sanitary situation.

Gathering five national consumer organisations and giving voice to a total of more than 1.5 million people, Euroconsumers is the world's leading consumer cluster in innovative information, personalised services and defense of consumer's rights. We work closely together with Consumers International to ensure consumers are safe, that markets are fair and benefit from honest relations with businesses and authorities. Our European member groups are also part of the umbrella network of BEUC, the European Consumer Organisation. Together we advocate for EU policies that benefit consumers in their daily lives.