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Common - COVID-19 response and transport: Reviving tourism in the EU under COVID-19 pandemic conditions: The European Commission proposes introduction of common "Digital Green Certificate" to facilitate free movement within the EU

Andrea Antolini Former Researcher JTTRI

【概要：Summary】

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely hit the tourism and transport sectors at local, regional, national and global level. In the EU, the tourism sector is still severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic impacts on the free movement of people, due to the total or partial suspension of flights and or other restrictive measures like quarantine or self-isolation for travellers.

In the EU, the tourism industry has suffered severe economic damages due to the lockdowns and due to the travel restrictions in 2020. In 2021, the continuation of the pandemic and the lack of a sufficient quantity of vaccines are still having a negative impact on the free movement of people in the EU and consequently on the EU's tourism sector. In fact, the tourism sector in Europe is on the verge to lose the second consecutive summer season to the pandemic, as new waves of COVID-19 infections are impeding the reopening of European tourism destinations in 2021. However, the EU Member States and the European Commission are considering the further way forward with the increased availability of vaccinations. The European Commission is considering measures to enable the free movement of vaccinated travellers in the EU without compulsory quarantine and testing. However, also people tested negative on SARS-CoV-2 as well as people that have recovered from COVID-19 infections should be free to travel. Therefore, on 17 March 2021, the European Commission proposed a Regulation on a "Digital Green Certificate" on Vaccination, Testing, and Recovery in order to facilitate the free movement of vaccinated, tested or recovered people in the EU. The introduction of a single EU-wide standardised certificate is expected to allow the EU's tourism industry to partially recover, starting in summer 2021.

【記事：Article】

1. The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the EU's tourism sector

In pre-pandemic times, Europe was one of the major global tourist destinations. According to World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), there are four EU Member States, including France, Spain, Italy and Germany in the list of the top 10 world travel destinations. Tourism is an essential sector in the EU's economy and directly contributed 3.9% to the EU's GDP in 2018. It also accounted for 5.1% of the EU's total labour force with about 13 million employees being related to tourism.

The summer season is a crucial time for the EU's tourism sector and during an average summer season (June-August), residents of the EU Member States make 385 million tourism trips and spend €190 billion on their holidays.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 in China in late 2019 and the subsequent pandemic has shown an unprecedented negative impact on transport and tourism worldwide, and also in the EU.

In the first wave of the pandemic in spring 2020, most EU Member States temporarily closed not only external borders to third countries but also their EU-internal borders. The partial or complete lockdowns to confining the SARA-CoV-2 virus spread included a ban of touristic travels until mid-May or end of June 2020, depending on the EU Member State. Airlines suspended almost their entire flights and grounded almost their entire fleets in spring 2020.

In the EU's tourism sector, more than half of the businesses are located in the Member States Italy, Spain and France, and those were and still are also hit worst by the COVID-19 pandemic and the related lowdown measures. After temporary opening for intra-EU tourism in summer 2020, the lowdown measures were reintroduced due to a second pandemic wave in the second half of 2020. At European level, in 2020, revenue losses due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have reached 85% for hotels and restaurants, 85% for tour operators and travel agencies, 85% for long-distance rail and 90% for cruises and airlines. Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the EU's transport and tourism sectors in 2020, both directly influencing the industries' income and indirectly by changing mobility and tourism patterns. The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the income of countries and regions reliant on tourism has led to significant job losses.

Meanwhile, a third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has hit European countries in the first months of 2021, which was partially triggered by the arrival of new variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

This new situation has led to a reintroduction of restrictions of the free movement of people and new lowdown measures.

At the same time, it is still not clear, if the vaccination campaigns will be able to confine the COVID-19 pandemic on time for the summer vacation time 2021. With a drop of 70% in revenues during 2020 and up to 11 million jobs at risk, the European tourism sector is continuously facing severe economic problems and is now already looking at a continued pandemic-imposed suspension of travels in spring 2021. It will entirely depend on the further spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and on the speed of vaccination campaigns in all EU Member States, if the touristic activities can take place in the upcoming summer vacation season in the EU.

Due to the lack of a sufficient quantity of vaccination jabs for the EU's population, the freedom of movement will be further restricted, which could lead to a suspension of the 2021 summer season for many people. Instead, the safe reopening of travel and tourism could bring millions of Europeans back to their jobs and could help many EU touristic region to recovery faster. Therefore, the discussion on how to facilitate the travels for vaccinated citizens in the 2021 summer season has led to a proposal by the European Commission on how the free movement of citizens should be organised by EU Member States during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic era.

2. The Commission's tourism and transport package and common handling of restrictions of the free movement of people

On 13 May 2020, the European Commission presented its first overall strategy on the recovery of the tourism sector under pandemic and pandemic and post-pandemic conditions in its communication entitled "Communication on tourism and transport in 2020 and beyond" (COM (2020) 550 final). The package of guidelines and recommendations included measures to allow the transport and the

tourism sectors to recover after the COVID-19 pandemic related lockdowns.

The guidelines included a series of recommendations, such as the need to limit contact between passengers and transport workers and between passengers themselves. The aim was to set a common framework providing criteria to safely and gradually reopen passenger transport by air, rail, road and waterways and to restore tourism activities and developing health protocols for hotels and other forms of accommodation in order to protect the health of both guests and employees. The "Communication from the Commission. COVID-19: Towards a phased and coordinated approach for restoring freedom of movement and lifting internal border controls" (C(2020) 3250 final) intended to support the restoring of free movement and lifting restrictions at EU internal borders in a gradual and coordinated way. The "Communication for the Commission: COVID-19: EU Guidance for the progressive resumption of tourism services and for health protocols in hospitality establishments" (C (2020) 3251 final), gives guidance based on the advice of the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC) for gradually restoring the tourism and transport in EU Member States. The Commission intended to re-establish the free movement of people within EU Member States and across their intra-EU borders, while introducing all the safety and precautionary measures needed to stabilize a low rate of new COVID-19 infections. The blanket restrictions to free movement were replaced by more targeted measures. Restoring the freedom of movement and lifting internal border controls were considered perquisites to restore tourism.

3. The ECDC/EASA guidelines and the Commission's recommendation on the new SARS-CoV-2 variant B 1.1.7

Besides the common COVID-19 Aviation Health Safety Protocol (AHSP) at EU level, many EU Member States introduced different, non-harmonised sets of individual rules to contain the SARS-CoV-2 virus in air travel. An approach used by several countries is to combine quarantine with the testing of incoming travellers.

On 13 October 2020, the Council of the European Union adopted a Recommendation 2020/1475 on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It aims at avoiding fragmentation and disruption, and to increase harmonisation, transparency and predictability for citizens and businesses. The Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 sought to ensure increased coordination among Member States considering the adoption of measures restricting free movement on grounds of public health in the pandemic. The Council Recommendation established a coordinated approach on the application of common criteria and thresholds when deciding whether to introduce restrictions to free movement and a mapping of the risk of COVID-19 transmission, published by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

Furthermore, on 28 October 2020, the European Commission issued a Communication on additional COVID-19 response measures (COM(2020) 687 final), mandating EASA and ECDC to work on guidelines on testing in air travel. Until the beginning of December 2020, the majority of EU/EEA countries and the UK were experiencing a widespread transmission of COVID-19 within their population, and accordingly, the ECDC/EASA study came to the conclusion that the relative significance of air travel for the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus was considered minimal compared to ongoing transmission in local communities. The prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 infections in travellers was estimated <1 and therefore lower than the prevalence in the general population or among contacts of confirmed cases within an EU Member State. Therefore, ECDC/EASA concluded in their guidelines that air travellers should not be considered as a high-risk population nor treated

as contacts of COVID-19 cases. On 2 December 2020, the EASA and ECDC jointly published their "Guidelines for COVID-19 Testing and Quarantine of Air Travellers. Addendum to the COVID-19 Aviation Health Safety Protocol", which contained recommendations regarding the testing and quarantine for air travellers, aiming at supporting the EU Member States in determining a coordinated approach to reduce the risks related to the movement of people within the EU/EEA countries and the UK in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, this approach had to be reconsidered with the appearance of the new strains of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in the UK, Brazil and South Africa, which worsened again the overall pandemic situation also in Europe. In particular the variant B 1.1.7 from the UK changed the EU's situation fundamentally, as it is significantly more transmissible and deadlier. The spread of this new variant led again to the introduction of restrictions of the free movement of people within the EU and beyond. On 22 December 2020, the European Commission adopted a Recommendation on a coordinated approach to travel and transport in response to the SARS-CoV-2 variant observed in the UK (C(2020) 9607 final) in order to help to avoid any further disruption for essential travel and cargo flows, while non-essential travels for touristic activities had to be restricted.

4. The Digital Green Certificate

Considering the worsening of the spread of new and more infectious SARS-CoV-2 variants like B 1.1.7, which meanwhile has become the main variant circulating in the entire EU, the new travel restrictions for travels in Europe endanger again the tourism sector and the economies reliant on tourism in the major holiday and touristic destinations in Europe, also in 2021. The touristic destinations in Europe face the second consecutive year of restrictions with serious economic impacts for their tourism-reliant economies. In order to comply with the measures to limit the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, travellers in the EU have been asked to provide various documents, such as medical certificates, test results, or declarations. However, the number of vaccinated people in Europe are expected to increase over the next months and they need to have a document verifying their vaccination.

Therefore, certificates or a standard a vaccination document needs to be introduced to allow at least the vaccinated part of the citizens to travel seamlessly to the holiday destinations and thereby help the tourism related regions to recover from the pandemic's impacts. Therefore, at their informal video conferences on 25 and 26 February 2021, the European Council called for working on a common approach to vaccination certificates and the introduction of standardised formats for travellers within the EU. The Commission and the Member States are working together in the eHealth Network, a voluntary network connecting national authorities responsible for eHealth, on preparing the interoperability of vaccination certificates.

Many Member States have launched or plan to launch initiatives to issue vaccination certificates and also the Commission called on the EU Member States to prepare for a coordinated approach to a gradual lifting of COVID-19 restrictions when the epidemiological situation will allow.

In order to ensure interoperability between the different technical solutions being developed by the Member States, uniform conditions for the issuance, verification and acceptance of certificates on COVID-19 vaccination, tests and recovery are needed in a cross-border context when citizens exercise their free movement rights. The certificates need to be fully interoperable, secure and verifiable.

In its Communication entitled "A common path to safe and sustained re-opening" (COM(2021) 129 final) of 17 March 2021, the European Commission

invited the EU Member States to adopt a coordinated approach to safe re-opening and sets out steps and tools to achieve this common goal. In parallel, on 17 March 2021, the European Commission published also a proposal for a regulation to create a framework for an interoperable "Digital Green Certificate" (COM 2021/130 final) to facilitate the free movement of people within the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Digital Green Certificate should allow free movement to persons who do not pose a risk to public health, because they are immune to and cannot transmit SARS-CoV-2, or they are vaccinated, or they obtain a negative test result. A "Digital Green Certificate" can also be introduced in Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway as well as Switzerland.

However, the possession of a "Digital Green Certificate", in particular a vaccination certificate, should not be a pre-condition for the exercise of free movement. Persons who are not vaccinated, for example for medical reasons, because they are not part of the target group for which the vaccine is currently recommended, such as children, or because they have not yet had the opportunity or do not wish to be vaccinated, must still be able to exercise their fundamental right of free movement, as long as they obtain a negative test result.

The key features of the Digital Green Certificate include that it is digital and/or paper format with QR code, free of charge, in national language and English, safe and secure and valid in all EU Member States and associated EEA states. Each issuing body (e.g., a hospital, a test centre, a health authority) has its own digital signature key, which are stored in a secure database in each country. When the certificate is checked, the QR code is scanned, and the signature verified. The European Commission will build a gateway, which allows a verification of all certificate signatures across the EU. The Commission will also help Member States to develop a software

that authorities can use to check the QR codes. The Commission adopted this legislative proposal for a Digital Green Certificate covering vaccination, testing and recovery in order to help holders to exercise their right to free movement within the EU, also for tourism reasons. The certificate should be accepted as sufficient to waive free movement restrictions.

In order to ensure the successful introduction of an "EU tourism health seal", based on the Communication COM 2021/129 final, in the tourism and hospitality sector, the Commission has also asked the Standardisation Organisation, CEN, to develop, in cooperation with industry and Member States, a voluntary sanitary seal to be used by establishments.

Since separate proposals to cover citizens and non-EU citizens are necessary for legal reasons, 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.

Regarding third country nationals, the European Commission presented a "Proposal for a Regulation…on a framework for the issuance, verification and acceptance of interoperable certificates on vaccination, testing and recovery to third-country nationals legally staying or legally residing in the territories of Member States during the COVID-19 pandemic (Digital Green Certificate)" (COM(2021) 140 final). Since tourism and other travel from outside the EU are important for the economies of many EU Member States, this regulation should target the same goal of safe opening as other activities. A framework is already in place with the Recommendation identifying countries whose epidemiological situation is such that non-essential travel to the EU is possible.

The Commission is working closely with international organisations including the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the UN World Tourism Organisation and the G20 Tourism Working Group on the restart and recovery of world tourism in a sustainable manner. When travelling, every EU citizen or third-country national legally staying or residing in the EU, who holds a Digital Green Certificate, should be exempted from free movement restrictions in the same way as citizens from the visited Member State.

The proposal will need the consideration and adoption by the European Parliament and the Council, but the implementation of the Digital Green Certificate legislation should be completed and the system in place by the middle of June 2021. The EU Member States will initiate preparations for the logistical roll-out of the certificates, including their issuance and verification. In summer 2021, the Commission will set up a digital infrastructure that would facilitate the authentication of the Digital Green Certificates, while the Member States will have to introduce the necessary changes in their national health records systems. At the same time, the Commission is working with the World Health Organization to ensure that the EU certificates can be recognised also elsewhere in the world.

5. Outlook

The EU tourism industry continues to suffer of strong disruptions of international, intra-EU and domestic travels due to the COVID-19 pandemic related lockdowns and travel restrictions.

While the tourism industry had already suffered severe economic damages during the lockdown in April and May 2020, with signs of recovery in summer 2020, the situation is continuously pessimistic since autumn 2020. Due to new waves of the pandemic and the arrival of new virus variants, the survival of many players in the tourism sector is dependent on the containment of the pandemic and the introduction of the right measures that allow a relaunch of travel and

tourism in the EU. However, currently, even the summer vacation 2021 is in danger due to the far too slow vaccination of the European population. At the same time, the free movement within Europe needs to be possible for vaccinated people, those tested negative and those recovered from COVID-19. The introduction of the EU-wide applicable Digital Green Certificates should help to reduce restrictions for those groups of vaccinated, tested and recovered people and thereby allow a revival of tourism in the summer season 2021.

However, if this entire initiative will be on time in order to make the free movement of people possible for reviving tourism in Europe in the summer season 2021 remains to be seen and will be decided in the next two months.

Beyond the introduction of the EU-wide applicable Digital Green Certificates to support the survival of the tourism sector in the short term, the sector's resilience and sustainability needs to be improved in the long-term.

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