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Vaccination certificates overview of the performed, ongoing and future work

1. What has the Commission proposed?

The December European Council has requested a coordinated approach on vaccination certificates¹. In its meeting on 21 January 2021², the European Council highlighted the importance of work on a standardised and interoperable form of proof of vaccination *for medical purposes*. At the same time, the Council indicated that leaders would determine at a later stage in what circumstances vaccination certificates could be used.

The Commission has been working with the Member States in the eHealth Network on building the interoperability of vaccination certificates. A set of **guidelines** supporting interoperability of proofs of vaccinations have been prepared, encompassing a **minimum data set** and a standard **unique identifier** for such proofs. The goal is to have the guidelines accepted in the eHealth Network meeting on 27.1.2021.

After the possible acceptance of the guidelines, work needs to continue in order to develop a **trust framework**, providing mechanisms and infrastructures needed for establishing the authenticity and integrity of information stated on certificates. The work is conducted also in collaboration with WHO, which has established an expert group working on smart vaccination certificates.

2. State of play

In November 2020, the Commission started preparatory work on vaccination certificates (proofs of vaccination). The work was launched in the eHealth Network (eHN) in collaboration with Member State authorities and the WHO. First elements were presented as draft guidelines at the end of 2020 - the more difficult aspect (a "trust framework" to ensure the mutual recognition of certificates) needed further work, including with WHO experts. The draft guidelines generated significant interest and comments were received from 17 Member States. These centred on questions about when the certificates would be used.

In order to further support the finalisation of the guidelines, a survey was run in the beginning of January 2021. 18 out of 27 Member States completed the survey. 67% of the Member States that answered the survey already now issue vaccination certificates, and 33 % plan to issue them in the future. 61 % of the Member States that answered the survey plan to issue digital certificates, but 22 % only plan to issue paper certificates.

In discussions on 13 and 15 January 2021, several Member States (DE, FR, NL and SE) opposed adoption of the guidelines, essentially because of the sensitive political

¹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/47296/1011-12-20-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>

² <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/01/21/oral-conclusions-by-president-charles-michel-following-the-video-conference-of-the-members-of-the-european-council-on-21-january-2021/pdf>

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debate over the use of vaccination certificates. No Member State objected to continuing technical work (and of course the draft guidelines can be used to guide work at national level). Work with WHO expert groups will also continue, but on a timeline leading into the summer.

The guidelines were revised on 26 January 2021 following the conclusions by the European Council meeting on 21 January. The purpose of use of vaccination certificates was aligned with the conclusions. The guidelines will be presented for adoption on 27 January in the eHealth Network meeting.

3. Latest developments

In its Communication "A united front to beat COVID-19" adopted on 19 January, the Commission underlines that it "will continue to work with Member States on vaccination certificates which can be recognised and used in health systems across the EU in full compliance with EU data protection law – and scaled up globally through the certification systems of the World Health Organisation. The eHealth Network will define the minimum dataset needed for such certificates at EU level, including a unique identifier and an appropriate trust framework ensuring privacy and security. This work should be completed by the end of January 2021 and presented in the WHO as a possible universal standard."

At their VTC call on 21 January, the "Leaders agreed to work on a standardised and inter-operable form of proof of vaccination for medical purposes [and] will determine at a later stage in what circumstances these certificates could be used" (Council Oral conclusions of 21/01).

The eHealth network will meet again on Wednesday 27 January 2021 to discuss revised guidelines taking into account the Leaders' conclusions to focus on the medical/health use case.

4. Vaccination certificates and free movement

Free movement restrictions need to be necessary, proportionate and non-discriminatory and unvaccinated citizens must be able to exercise their rights, even if subject to certain restrictions such as quarantine or testing. Being vaccinated should not become a pre-condition to exercise free movement. This is at the core of a divisive debate about a "two class" system where only vaccinated persons can travel and take part in public life.