

GREEN PASS: ISRAEL OFFERS A VACCINE PASSPORT TO ITS CITIZENS



While the European Union debates about the implementation of a digital COVID-19 vaccine passport or 'green pass' to be able to travel freely, countries such as Israel are already offering it to their citizens.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed last week that Israel was largely done with coronavirus, saying that it was the first country in the world to put the pandemic behind it, thanks to its quick and efficient vaccination campaign. Netanyahu said that he hoped to vaccinate the entire Israeli adult population by late March and fully reopen the country by April.

The country has already vaccinated half of its 9 million inhabitants. A week earlier, Israel launched a mobile app that shows whether people have had the COVID-19 vaccine administered or are immune due to having contracted the disease.

Following the mass vaccination campaigns, the situation in the country is beginning to normalize. Israel has reopened its shopping centers and museums, although green pass holders have a preference in gyms, hotels, theaters and concerts. Citizens will even have the right to dine inside bars and restaurants, a measure that was to take effect on March 7, but maybe delayed based on some outbreaks that have appeared in the country.

Reservations Grow

Although life in Israel has not returned to normal yet, the country is the closest one to achieve it. Hotels are registering more and more reservations, shops are opening again and live concerts are returning to theaters and venues. While face masks remain mandatory, those vaccinated, especially older people, can walk on the street without one.

Armin Grunewald, director of the Hagoshrim Hotel and Nature, near the Sea of Galilee, said that "nearly all rooms were filled with green pass holders. People are looking happy and liberated". Even so, "It is not like pre-pandemic days," he added, "some Covid rules remain in place."

For example, the capacity in indoor spaces continues to be limited, so breakfast is offered outside or in the rooms. Meanwhile, those under 16, who are not eligible for the vaccine, must provide a negative COVID-19 test.

However, not everyone agrees. Some European governments are beginning to question whether it is ethical to limit citizens from having the health passport or not. In fact, more and more groups are reacting against the implementation of such passport.

Even in Israel, there are doubts about this situation, as people wonder if those who are not vaccinated will be left behind. The first protests against the green pass are also taking place, claiming that it creates a new social hierarchy.

Traveling without Quarantine

Despite the growing discussions and international pressure, Israel continues to negotiate with several countries over new conditions for tourists, particularly not needing to be put into quarantine upon arrival. For many travelers, the vaccine is worth it if they can enjoy this privilege.

For the moment, the country has signed interim agreements with Cyprus and Greece for pilot tests this spring. In addition, they are in talks to launch a similar plan with the EU and the UK.

But more doubts arise. Faced with such unequal vaccination campaigns, the rights granted by the green pass would allow travelers from the richest countries to travel freely at the expense of those poorer, who would be left behind and lose this right of freedom of travel.

Critics point at the case of Palestine. Thousands of Palestinians go to the occupied areas to work, which is why Israel has been forced to launch a vaccination campaign for them. However, several millions of Palestinians will have to wait for the vaccine.

The disparity between the two regions will continue to grow more and more, especially at a time when Israelis can travel freely while Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank are under strict travel restrictions.

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