

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH CERTIFICATE DIVIDES COUNTRIES



In the past couple of weeks, there have been numerous government-level discussions worldwide regarding the possibility of the introduction of an international health certificate proving that an individual has been vaccinated against Covid-19.

In the meantime, however, some countries have already introduced their own version of the health certificate. These countries are Iceland, Israel and Bahrain, while China has deployed its own “passport” last week.

In these countries, the vaccination certificate is conceptualized as a technological passport. The whole process involves various applications that intend to sophisticate the entire concept and slowly renew social interaction within society.

Scepticism Continues

Nevertheless, there has been a lot of scepticism with regards to the above-mentioned initiatives. In particular, in Israel, there have already been protests in the streets of Tel Aviv against the so-called “green passes”. Angry protesters insisted that such an initiative constitutes a discriminatory tool. They also stated that it is creating a new social hierarchy in the country.

Within the European Union there has been similar skepticism with regards to the international health certificate being discriminatory. Another concern is related to the handling of sensitive medical data and the possibility of their exposure. Nevertheless, the leaders of the EU hope that the 27 member states will adopt a proposal to create a European vaccine certificate during their meeting on March 17.

The United Kingdom has also considered launching a similar initiative, but not all cabinet members are in favor of such a solution. Meanwhile, the United States are still unsure about such a solution. President Biden has ordered specific governmental bodies to give their stance on its feasibility.

In this context, China’s Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, announced that the country is ready to discuss the possibility of mutual recognition of vaccination with other states around the world.

What does the WHO think?

What is the stance of the World Health Organization (WHO) on the matter? According to Mike Ryan, executive director of the Health Emergencies Programme, the international health certificate is not advisable at this moment.

His reasoning on the matter is that practical and ethical considerations should be made, as “vaccination is not available enough around the world and is not available certainly on an equitable basis”.

IATA Travel Pass

In this context, an interesting solution has emerged in the past couple of weeks - the IATA Travel Pass. This is an initiative launched by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) to restart air travel worldwide.

The IATA Travel Pass would enable travelers to quickly find out all the necessary travel requirements to specific countries, as well as find testing and vaccination centers and being able to receive test and vaccination certificates from authorized labs. Airlines trialing the IATA Travel Pass include Qatar Airways, Emirates or Etihad.

In a recent study conducted by IATA, it was revealed that 89 % of respondents want governments to standardize vaccine and testing certificates. 80 % of them are encouraged by the possibility of the IATA Travel Pass and would use it as soon as possible.

However, as mentioned above, one of the concerns is data management in such initiatives. This was also highlighted in the study. 78 % of respondents would only use such a platform if they had absolute control over their data.

All in all, it really remains to be seen what the future holds in the context of vaccine passports. There is a rather ambiguous perception of the entire matter worldwide. Certainly, it would be ideal for a universal platform like this to be introduced, but the final decision is, of course, up to the government officials.

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