



## **Coronavirus: Commission proposes to ease restrictions on non-essential travel to the EU while addressing variants through new 'emergency brake' mechanism**

Brussels, 3 May 2021

Today, the Commission is [proposing](#) that Member States ease the current restrictions on non-essential travel into the EU to take into account the progress of vaccination campaigns and developments in the epidemiological situation worldwide.

The Commission proposes to allow entry to the EU for non-essential reasons not only for all persons coming from countries with a good epidemiological situation but also all people who have received the last recommended dose of an EU-authorized vaccine. This could be extended to vaccines having completed the WHO emergency use listing process. In addition, the Commission proposes to raise, in line with the evolution of the epidemiological situation in the EU, the threshold related to the number of new COVID-19 cases used to determine a list of countries from which all travel should be permitted. This should allow the Council to expand this list.

At the same time, the emergence of coronavirus variants of concern calls for continued vigilance. Therefore as counter-balance, the Commission proposes a new 'emergency brake' mechanism, to be coordinated at EU level and which would limit the risk of such variants entering the EU. This will allow Member States to act quickly and temporarily limit to a strict minimum all travel from affected countries for the time needed to put in place appropriate sanitary measures.

### **Non-essential travel for vaccinated travellers**

The Commission proposes that Member States lift restrictions on non-essential travel for vaccinated persons travelling to the EU. This reflects the latest scientific advice showing that vaccination considerably helps to break the transmission chain.

Member States should allow travel into the EU of those people who have received, at least 14 days before arrival, the last recommended dose of a vaccine having received marketing authorisation in the EU. Member States could also extend this to those vaccinated with a vaccine having completed the [WHO emergency use listing process](#). In addition, if Member States decide to waive the requirements to present a negative PCR test and/or to undergo quarantine for vaccinated persons on their territory, they should also waive such requirements for vaccinated travellers from outside the EU.

This should be facilitated once the Digital Green Certificate becomes operational, in line with the rules the Commission proposed on 17 March. In particular, travellers should be able to prove their vaccination status with a Digital Green Certificate issued by Member States' authorities on an individual basis, or with another certificate recognised as equivalent by virtue of a Commission adequacy decision.

Until the Digital Green Certificate is operational, Member States should be able to accept certificates from non-EU countries based on national law, taking into account the ability to verify the authenticity, validity and integrity of the certificate and whether it contains all relevant data.

Member States could consider setting up a portal allowing travellers to ask for the recognition of a vaccination certificate issued by a non-EU country as reliable proof of vaccination and/or for the issuance of a Digital Green Certificate.

Children who are excluded from vaccination should be able to travel with their vaccinated parents if they have a negative PCR COVID-19 test taken at the earliest 72 hours before arrival area. In these cases, Member States could require additional testing after arrival.

### **Full lifting of non-essential travel restriction from more countries**

Non-essential travel regardless of individual vaccination status is currently permitted from 7 countries with a good epidemiological situation. This list is decided by the Council on the basis of epidemiological criteria contained in the current recommendation.

The Commission is proposing to amend the criteria to take into account the mounting evidence of the positive impact of vaccination campaigns. The proposal is to increase the threshold of 14-day cumulative COVID-19 case notification rate from 25 to 100. This remains considerably below the current EU average, which is over 420.

The adapted threshold should allow the Council to expand the list of countries from which non-essential travel is permitted regardless of vaccination status, subject to health-related measures such as testing and/or quarantine. As now, the Council should review this list at least every 2 weeks.

### **Essential travel to remain permitted**

Those travelling for essential reasons, including notably healthcare professionals, cross-border workers, seasonal agricultural workers, transport staff and seafarers, passengers in transit, those travelling for imperative family reasons or those coming to study should continue to be allowed to enter the EU, regardless of whether they are vaccinated or which country they come from. The same applies to EU citizens and long-term residents as well as their family members. Such travel should continue to be subject to health-related measures, such as testing and quarantine as decided by Member States.

### **'Emergency brake' to counter the spread of variants**

When the epidemiological situation of a non-EU country worsens quickly and in particular if a variant of concern or interest is detected, a Member State can urgently and temporarily suspend all inbound travel by non-EU citizens resident in such a country. The only exceptions in this case would be healthcare professionals, transport personnel, diplomats, transit passengers, those travelling for imperative family reasons, seafarers, and persons in need of international protection or for other humanitarian reasons. Such travellers should be subject to strict testing and quarantine arrangements even if they have been vaccinated.

When a Member State applies such restrictions, the Member States meeting within the Council structures should review the situation together in a coordinated manner and in close cooperation with the Commission, and they should continue doing so at least every 2 weeks.

### **Next steps**

It is now for the Council to consider this proposal. A first discussion is scheduled at technical level in the Council's integrated political crisis response (IPCR) meeting taking place on 4 May, followed by a discussion at the meeting of EU Ambassadors (Coreper) on 5 May.

Once the proposal is adopted by the Council, it will be for Member States to implement the measures set out in the recommendation. The Council should review the list of non-EU countries exempted from the travel restriction in light of the updated criteria and continue doing so every 2 weeks.

### **Background**

A temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU is currently in place from many non-EU countries, based on a recommendation agreed by the Council. The Council regularly reviews, and where relevant updates, the list of countries from where travel is possible, based on the evaluation of the health situation.

This restriction covers non-essential travel only. Those who have an essential reason to come to Europe should continue to be able to do so. The categories of travellers with an essential function or need are listed in Annex II of the [Council Recommendation](#). EU citizens and long-term residents as well as their family members should also be allowed to enter the EU.

Following a proposal by the Commission, the Council [agreed](#) on 2 February 2021 additional safeguards and restrictions for international travellers into the EU, aimed at ensuring that essential travel to the EU continues safely in the context of the emergence of new coronavirus variants and the volatile health situation worldwide. These continue to apply.

On 17 March 2021, in a [Communication](#) on a common path to Europe's safe re-opening, the Commission committed to keeping the operation of the Council Recommendation on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU under close review, and propose amendments in line with relevant developments. Today's proposal updates the Council recommendation.

In parallel to preparing for the resumption of international travel for vaccinated travellers, the Commission proposed on 17 March 2021 to create a [Digital Green Certificate](#), showing proof that a person has been vaccinated against COVID-19, received a negative test result or recovered from COVID-19, to help facilitate safe and free movement inside the EU. This proposal also provides the basis for recognising non-EU countries' vaccination certificates.

The Council Recommendation on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU relates to entry into the EU. When deciding whether restrictions on non-essential travel can be lifted for a specific non-EU country, Member States should take account of the reciprocity granted to EU countries. This is a separate issue from that of the recognition of certificates issued by non-EU countries under the Digital Green Certificate.

The Council recommendation covers all Member States (except Ireland), as well as the 4 non-EU states that have joined the Schengen area: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. For the purpose of the travel restriction, these countries are covered in a similar way as the Member States.

The latest information on the rules applying to entry from non-EU countries as communicated by Member States are available on the [Re-open EU website](#).

### **For More Information**

[Proposal](#) for a Council Recommendation on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU and the possible lifting of such restriction, 3 May 2021

[Travel during the coronavirus pandemic](#)

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