European Union

Framework for interoperable digital certificates of vaccination, testing and recovery to take effect on 1 July 2021

Executive summary

Earlier this week, the European Parliament approved the EU Regulation on a framework for interoperable Digital Certificates of Vaccination, Testing and Recovery (EU Digital COVID Certificates) or (Certificates), to facilitate the safe and free movement of individuals within the EU and associated Member States during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Regulation will come into force in all EU Member States on 1 July 2021, and it will include the possibility for Schengen Member States Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland to join the framework and issue their own digital certificates. The EU is also discussing the possibility of collaborating with "third countries" (i.e., countries outside of the EU and the Schengen Area), such as the United Kingdom and the United States, to set up a system whereby EU Member States would recognize digital certificates issued by participating third countries, and vice versa. The EU Digital COVID Certificate will comply in full with the EU General Data Protection Regulation.

Background

The EU Digital COVID Certificate is a digital proof that the certificate holder has: (1) been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, (2) received a negative COVID-19 test result, and/or (3) recovered from COVID-19. It will facilitate the free movement of citizens and lawful residents of EU Member States within the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Certificates will be free and include certificate holders' personal information and digital signatures to confirm the Certificates' authenticity. EU Member States can start issuing Certificates on 1 July 2021. They are required to make Certificates available to citizens and lawful residents who request one no later than 12 August 2021. The Certificates will not be a pre-condition to free movement within the EU. EU citizens and residents who do not possess a Certificate will still be able to travel within the EU, albeit potentially subject to heightened admission criteria, including mandatory COVID-19 testing (pre-travel and/or post-arrival) and quarantine/isolation requirements. The EU Digital Certificate system will be in place for 12 months initially.

Information contained in the EU Digital COVID Certificate

The Certificate will contain the following information:
- The certificate holder's full name and date of birth
- The date of issuance of the Certificate
- Information pertaining to certificate holder's COVID-19 tests, vaccination status and/or recovery certificates
- A unique identifier (i.e., digital signature)

How to obtain an EU Digital COVID Certificate

National authorities within the EU are responsible for issuing the Certificates, via test centers, health authorities, or directly through an eHealth portal. Eligible applicants can also request a paper version of the Certificate. Digital and paper versions of the Certificate will contain a QR code that contains the traveler's information and their unique digital signature. The European Commission has built a gateway through which all certificate signatures can be verified across the EU.

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The Certificate must be issued to EU citizens and residents who request one and who: (1) have been fully vaccinated with a vaccine recognized by the European Medicines Agency (i.e., Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson and Oxford/AstraZeneca), (2) tested negative for a nucleic acid amplification (NAAT) COVID-19 test, such as a reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) test or a rapid antigen test, prior to intra-EU travel, and/or (3) have a certificate of recovery, confirming that they tested positive for a NAAT COVID-19 test at least 11 days prior to travel and have recovered fully. Additionally, each EU Member State can decide whether to issue Certificates to EU citizens and residents who received vaccines that are not recognized by the European Medicines Agency (e.g., Sputnik, Sinopharm).

Next steps

As of the time of this writing, twelve EU Member States have already connected their national systems for issuing Certificates to the EU gateway that will go live on 1 July 2021. Additional member states are expected to follow suit shortly.

EY will continue to monitor these developments. Should you have any questions, we encourage you to contact one of our immigration professionals.

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