

# A Voice for Tourism

## Working together to save summer

Tourism continues to be among the hardest hit sectors during this pandemic. If it is true that recent developments have allowed the sector to slowly restart for summer, economic pressure is still felt by all stakeholders involved, making it indeed ever more complex for businesses in tourism to develop, debate and implement a vision for the future. When survival is the priority, short-term gains risk damaging a more sustainable long-term vision and, thus, adequate support in favour of regenerative tourism needs to be provided both locally and at an EU level.

Over a year after the Covid-19 outbreak, we are finally seeing some coordination among Member States, which prior had mostly dealt in their own terms with COVID-19 and its economic and social consequences. Undoubtedly, this led to a fragmented EU in terms of travel restrictions and Covid safety protocols. The aforementioned fragmentation has greatly damaged the travel and tourism sector and is posed to damage the success of the upcoming summer season if the EU and its governments do not coordinate further and effectively.

Today, the sector welcomes the EU Digital Covid Certificate agreement and the ongoing discussions and plans for re-opening to international tourism as well as the possibility of upscaling the EU Digital certificates to third countries. Whilst these proposals are mostly welcome to move ahead in achieving greater travel coordination, we cannot lose sight of further actions that need to be taken including when it comes to ensuring adequate connectivity and affordable travel options, among others.

At an initial stage, the Commission, issued guidelines on border management, oversaw the development of the ECDC colour coded map, and presented a proposal for a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement. Unfortunately, in the situation we are living in, these measures were not enough. The certificates are now being seen as the silver bullet. We cannot however stop there. Further coordination and cross-border cooperation, including plans to ensure that we avoid shutting down our economies in case of future similar events will be key to not only save the summer season, but also to relaunch EU tourism on which so many businesses, workers and families depend.

The coordinated restart of tourism must continue to be rooted in the following four pillars: Vaccinating, Testing, Tracking, and Safety and Hygiene Measures.

Common criteria and minimum requirements regarding travel and the relaxation of restrictions across Europe, as well as their clear and timely communication, are essential to offer at least some visibility to operators in the sector, allowing them to plan ahead. While the certificates will help with this, each Member State holds the right to apply the restrictions it believes necessary. Further coordination and harmonisation is key, including for example when it comes to the strengthening of the ECDC colour coded map, which should be developed at further regional level.

National governments have supported the industry through funding and deficiency guarantees and businesses have created operational concepts to ensure safety for both travellers and personnel alike. The whole industry from tour and cruise operators to airlines, railway, and other transport and hospitality operators must continue contributing by working closely together.

Against this background, we are sharing a number of key priorities and demands from the industry, some that the Commission has indeed already started addressing.

The demands and /or priorities include:

- A European steering group to coordinate Europe wide efforts to contain Covid-19 and its variants and to manage the recovery of the sector at EU level and pre-emptively avoid a return to fragmented travel.
- Rapidly develop and implement the infrastructure for the deployment of the EU Digital Covid certificates and reopen, where safe, to international tourism according to the recent criteria agreed upon by Council.
- Increase coordination when it comes to vaccination and testing programs and rules, the uptake of the EU digital Passenger Locator Form, the timely pre-announcement of new travel restrictions by Member States, while making available accessible and free testing for travellers.
- Ease travel restrictions for forms of travel and accommodation proven to be at low risk of contact.
- Devise an EU protocol based on lessons learned from the current pandemic with a long-term view, intended to avoid the interruption of travel in the eventuality of other similar diseases or threats in the future.
- Continue to support the industry financially both at EU and national level to weather the extended business dry-spell and decrease in demand. Financial support must be extended for the time necessary for tourism businesses to recover from the pandemic, including a continued flexibility of State Aid rules.

- Promote the application of the CEN developed EU hygiene certification seal, which will allow businesses to certify minimum Covid-19 virus prevention and control standards to help restore consumer trust in tourism and travel, as requested by the European Parliament.
- Conduct a post-summer study, prepared by consulting with tourism stakeholders, on how the different segments of the tourism ecosystem performed during Summer 2021, where they succeeded and what problems they faced, collecting lessons learned, allowing for a timely intervention in case of eventual need.

Controlled release should now replace fearful lockdowns, especially as we look beyond summer. A holistic approach is possible: together we need to continue ensuring that Europe returns to free movement, applying the Covid-19 certificate and safety standards, and boosting tourism recovery. The global pandemic can be the opportunity to develop and implement a worldwide network for safe travels, a network based on the equal treatment of passengers as well as uniform and transparent hygiene conditions and regulations.

We thank the Commission for the work conducted thus far to help tourism reopen. However, the difficulties faced over the course of the pandemic will not be solved by a successful summer season. Recovery will take time. We ask the Commission to continue to push for coordinated and safe travel, while supporting the industry on a financial and operational level, allowing it to successfully recover.



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