QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

OECD INITIATIVE FOR SAFE INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC (INCLUDING BLUEPRINT)

Questions and answers

Why is the OECD launching this initiative?

The COVID-19 situation varies considerably across OECD countries. Some countries have high rates of infection and are unable to consider opening their borders to travellers. However, a growing number of OECD countries have falling infection rates and, crucially, high vaccination coverage. These conditions mean countries are considering different modalities for reopening international travel. In the absence of an international framework for travel policies, the result will be a patchwork of national and regional rules, inconsistent with each other, involving different proofs of vaccination or test results to be presented when people cross borders at the country of origin and/or destination. This will be confusing and costly for travellers and transport and tourism companies, and complex for authorities to manage. It can also increase the incidence of use of fraudulent certificates thereby undermining the ability of authorities to mitigate public health risks.

The OECD initiative is intended to help to address these issues and encourage greater consistency in policies on international travel. It does not seek to replace other international initiatives, but rather to support and complement them, by either accelerating them or helping to enable their adoption by a broader range of countries.

What were the origins of the OECD initiative?

On the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the signing of the OECD Convention, 14 December 2020, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez of Spain called on the OECD to work on an international framework to enable COVID-19-free international mobility. Following discussions at the OECD Council, country experts worked with the OECD Secretariat through the OECD Committee structure to develop the initiative. Countries were consulted throughout the process, and a Bureau chaired by Spain and with Iceland, Israel and Korea as vice-chairs guided the work.

Why the OECD and who else is involved?

The OECD is in a unique position to help countries coordinate international action in the context of reopening international trade. The organisation works with experts and national civil servants covering virtually every sector of the economic and social life, including those relating to transport, health, tourism, public governance, trade, migration, science and technology, and economic policy, all of which are relevant for managing international travel at the time of a pandemic. Its Member countries share common values and approaches to governance. The OECD initiative has been prepared in close co-operation with the EU, as well as with international organisations including ICAO, WHO, the UNWTO, and with private sector organisations. It draws on the initiatives of these Organisations and advocates their adoption by countries.

What is the OECD initiative?

The Initiative has two components:

- A temporary **international cross-sectoral forum for knowledge sharing** about safe international travel; and
- a **blueprint for safe international travel**, to be used on a voluntary basis, to promote greater certainty, safety and security in travel as re-opening takes place and consistent (and complementary) with the most recent certificate initiatives. The blueprint establishes common modalities for travel according to level of risk for those vaccinated and unvaccinated. It offers policy guidance to countries that is voluntary, flexible, and temporary, intended to accelerate the return to greater international mobility while protecting public health.

Is the blueprint a legally binding document?

No, the blueprint is not a legal agreement or a binding document. It is to be used on a voluntary basis, and it is flexible, so countries may adjust its elements to their needs and national context. It provides guidance so that the approaches taken are co-ordinated.

Will the blueprint be used immediately?

The decision to use the blueprint is to be taken by each country. Several aspects of the guidance included in the blueprint are differentiated to reflect the different circumstances that countries are in. These include specifications for what diagnostic tests could be used to ensure safe travel, time frames for when these tests should be conducted, elements associated with vaccines, and many others. In particular, the blueprint has two stages: the first is for when the primary objective of a country is to reduce the risk of importing new cases of COVID-19 from other countries to be as low as is practical; the second is intended for when countries have vaccinated a large part of the population and so the consequences of importing new cases of COVID-19 are less serious.

Is the blueprint a final and definitive plan?

While the blueprint offers policy guidance to countries to accelerate the return to greater international mobility, policy needs to be responsive to the new developments. This is why a knowledge forum is also included in the initiative to allow the continuation of exchanges between experts, stakeholders and policymakers, for the duration of the pandemic as needed.

Will the blueprint be used globally?

The blueprint provides policy guidance for countries to consider when they are designing their national approaches. However, one of the objectives of the blueprint is to build on other initiatives that may have global reach, such as those of ICAO, IATA, and others, and those that have regional reach, such as that of the EU and expand their reach and use by others. The WHO is also working on vaccine certificates, and the blueprint is closely aligned with these.

What are the criteria in the blueprint for assessing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in each country?

The blueprint has adopted the "traffic light" system, similar to that used by the European Union, which considers three elements: the number of infections per population in the past 14 days, the percentage of positive tests among all tests for COVID-19 infection conducted in the previous week, and the number of tests per population conducted during the previous week. The WHO has a dashboard which lists these indicators for countries across the globe.

Taken together, these elements indicate the degree of recent viral spreading each country and the reliability of the numbers of infections, and establish four colour-coded categories, in growing order of risk: green, orange, red, and dark red. A grey category is also listed when there is insufficient information. In order to provide greater predictability, the blueprint also establishes thresholds for when warnings should be indicated that a change of risk category is imminent or likely.

Will people who have not received a vaccine be allowed to travel?

One of the principles proposed by the blueprint is that of equal treatment of travellers. If a country is allowing travellers to enter at all, then unvaccinated travellers should be allowed to travel through tests demonstrating that they are not infectious, and quarantine, where appropriate.

Will people who have already received a vaccine need to be tested before each trip?

The blueprint recognises that people who have already received a vaccine may be exempted from testing and quarantine requirements, depending on a country's preferences. However, it provides flexibility for countries to continue to require tests from vaccinated travellers, if they wish to. For example, countries may continue to conduct tests on travellers, even if they are vaccinated, for epidemiological studies and to detect the spread of new variants.

Which vaccines are acceptable under the guidance of the blueprint?

The blueprint suggests that vaccines to be recognised for travel purposes should be those recommended by the WHO for Emergency Use Listing (EUL), or the ones approved by a Stringent Regulatory Authority according to WHO's interim definition which includes the following countries: Australia; Austria; Belgium; Bulgaria; Canada; Cyprus; Czech Republic; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Iceland; Ireland; Italy; Japan; Latvia; Liechtenstein; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Malta; Netherlands; Norway; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; United Kingdom; United States of America.

As of 1 June 2021, the list of vaccines includes Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, Oxford-Astra Zeneca, Johnson & Johnson, Covishield, Sinopharm, Sputnik V-Gamaleya, and Sinovac-CoronaVac.

Why are there two travel modalities with different sets of measures in the blueprint?

The blueprint provides flexibility for countries to consider their own assessments of health system capacity, immunisation rates, global and regional trends of viral circulation, and other criteria. For this reason, it established two travel modalities, one that suggests, for unvaccinated travellers, the use of pre-travel testing, post-travel testing, and quarantine in some cases; and another modality that relies mostly on pre-travel tests for unvaccinated travellers. As indicated above, the blueprint suggests that vaccinated travellers do not need to be tested or comply with quarantines, but this is also a decision by countries.

Is the blueprint consistent with the EU Digital COVID-19 Certificate (previously EU Digital Green Certificate)?

The blueprint is specifically designed to be consistent and supportive of different international initiatives. For example, the minimum data requirements for certificates are drawn from the EU Digital COVID-19 Certificate. Indeed, one of the key principles (3.vi) is simplicity and reliance on existing systems. This is complemented with principle (3.vii) which is interoperability, security and privacy by design.

As of 26 May, the traffic light system for assessing the risk of COVID-19 infection proposed by the blueprint is identical to the one used by the EU. It combines the 14-day notification rate, testing rate, and positivity rate into a combined indicator categorised into four colours: green, orange, red, and dark red. A grey category is also used when there is insufficient information. The thresholds for each category used in the blueprint are also the same as the ones used by the EU as of 26 May. The regulations of the EU Digital COVID-19 Certificate do not specify the testing requirements associated with each colour category, but it encourages countries to use testing certificates in the same manner proposed by the OECD blueprint.

Are the testing and colour codes of the blueprint consistent with the UK "traffic light" system?

The policy guidance of the blueprint is similar to that use by the UK. As of 26 May, the UK uses three colour codes to indicate levels of risk (green, amber, and red) while the blueprint used the four colours

explained in the previous answer. Furthermore, similarly to the UK system, the OECD blueprint also proposes the use of a warning system for countries that may change category soon.

One of the two travel modalities and requirements included in the blueprint is very similar to that of the UK, with a quarantine of 10 days for travellers coming from riskier destinations, and PCR tests before and after travel. The blueprint also includes an option that mostly relies on pre-travel test and no quarantine, to be considered by countries where the potential health impact of importation of cases is considered to be low to moderate, based for example, on higher available health system capacity and higher vaccination rates.

What measures are proposed to protect the privacy of travellers?

The blueprint relies on the principle of 'privacy by design'. It proposes to:
- limit the amount of information requested to what is strictly necessary;
- avoid collecting and storing personal or sensitive data, giving preference to decentralised mechanisms of proof;
- ensure that if any data is being collected, that:
  - it is protected and secured in accordance with relevant domestic regulations.
  - the contents, collection mode, purpose for collection, and length of storage for any or all data being collected is made clear to the data subject at the outset.
- Limit the transfers of personal or personally identifiable data across international borders.

Will vaccination status be made public?

The blueprint favours a decentralised approach. This implies that data remains with travellers and is offered by these in the form of a QR or bar code. Once scanned at a checkpoint, the QR or bar code will reveal to the controllers whether or not the traveller meets the criteria to be allowed travel by providing a simple binary 'yes' or 'no' response when scanned. This also implies that there is no need for vaccination status to be made public, safeguarding the privacy of travellers.

What measures are in place to prevent fraudulent certificates?

The blueprint (Point 7.v.) proposes the use of interoperable identifiers or similar mechanisms to enable verification of authenticity of certificates. It further stipulates that these should rely on, and be interoperable with, existing initiatives including the ICAO Visible Digital Seal and the the EU Digital COVID-19 Certificate. The measures proposed are also aligned with those under discussion by WHO's Smart Vaccination Certificate Working Group.

Is the blueprint compliant with domestic data protection rules (including with GDPR)?

The blueprint specifies that processes will need to be compliant with existing domestic privacy and data protection frameworks. It also draws on important principles in GDPR such as data protection by design and default and requires that the contents, collection mode, purpose for collection and length of storage for any or all data being collected is made clear to the data subject.

How does the blueprint interact with existing private sector tools?

A number of private sector tools have been developed to enable travel during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include the IATA Travel Pass, the ICC AOK Pass, the Common Trust/WEF Common Pass, the SICPA Certus myHealth Pass and the IBM Digital Health Pass (to name but a few). The blueprint is designed to be interoperable with these initiatives. It aims to provide common data elements and

frameworks for verification that can enable private sector initiatives to provide digital solutions to enable travel.

How will information collected be kept secure?

The blueprint favours a decentralised approach. This implies that data remains with travellers and is offered by these in the form of a QR or bar code. Once scanned at a checkpoint, the QR or bar code will reveal to the controllers whether or not the traveller meets the criteria to be allowed travel by providing a simple binary 'yes' or 'no' response when scanned. This implies that all the information will remain with the traveller. If governments choose to collect information, they may do so on the basis of applying existing, and rigorous, privacy and security principles.

How does the blueprint propose to deal with New Variants of Concern (NVoC)?

New variants of COVID-19 may be of concern if they have more severe effects on health; are more transmissible; or more resistant to vaccines or treatment than other variants. In all these cases, NVoCs change the balance of risks in travel across borders. The blueprint proposes that where there is high prevalence of new variants of concern, countries be listed as dark red category. In this case, only essential travel should be maintained. The blueprint also suggests close coordination with ongoing efforts (including the EU Early Warning and Response System) to identify better criteria for taking into account the prevalence and risk associated with SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern.

What are the types of molecular tests that the framework/blueprint envisions being used?

Molecular tests use various amplification technologies, those include reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR), but also include isothermal amplification technologies as well. All those different methods of amplification fall under the umbrella term of NAAT (Nucleic Acid Amplification Tests), which are all envisioned in this travel blueprint even though RT-PCRs are specifically the ones listed.