

Statement on Covishield and the European Union (EU) Digital COVID Certificate “Green Pass”

The African Union Commission and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) noted with concern recent communications regarding the applicability of the EU Digital COVID Certificate “Green Pass” to different COVID-19 vaccines. The availability of such a Certificate, with its potential to significantly facilitate free safe movement across all EU Member States and certain associated countries, is a significant step forward. However, the current applicability guidelines put at risk the equitable treatment of persons having received their vaccines in countries profiting from the EU-supported COVAX Facility, including the majority of the African Union (AU) Member States.

According to official information (see sources below), while the goal is for EU Member States to issue vaccination certificates regardless of the COVID-19 vaccine type used, the granting of a “green pass” applies, only to vaccines that have received EU-wide marketing authorisation. Thus, while the AstraZeneca vaccine (ChAdOx1_nCoV-19) produced and authorized in Europe (Vaxzervria) is included, the same formation of the vaccine (Covishield) produced under license by the Serum Institute of India (SII), is excluded. Under such regulations, persons who received Covishield, despite being able to demonstrate proof of vaccination, would continue to be subject to public health restrictions, including limitations of movement and testing requirements, with considerable administrative and financial implications.

These developments are concerning given that the Covidshield vaccine has been the backbone of the EU-supported COVAX contributions to the AU Member States’ vaccination programmes. Furthermore, given that the expressed goal for the Serum Institute of India production is to serve India and lower-income countries, the SII may not apply for EU-wide market authorisation, meaning that the inequalities in access to “Green Passes” created by this approach would persist indefinitely.

The Covidshield vaccine, alongside the versions of the AstraZeneca/Oxford COVID-19 vaccine produced by AstraZeneca-SKBio (Republic of Korea), was one of the first available candidates considered safe and efficacious through the World Health Organisation’s Emergency Use Listing (EUL) process. Both candidates received approval as early as 15 February 2021 with the explicit goal of rolling it out through the COVAX Facility, providing access to lower-income countries, and making the global population safe from COVID-19.

The African Union and Africa CDC, therefore, urge the EU Commission to consider increasing mandatory access to those vaccines deemed suitable for global rollout through the EU-supported COVAX Facility.

Sources:

1. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_21_2781
2. <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/all-details-on-eu-covid-19-passport-revealed-heres-what-you-need-to-know/>