

UNJUST GREEN: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON VACCINE PASSPORTS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Europe, European Union (EU) and India

The [European Union's decision to enforce a "Green Pass"](#) to allow travel within the EU from July 1, and linked to specified vaccines, has set off a storm of protest from several quarters including India. According to the European Medicines Agency (EMA) that sets the guidelines, the vaccines given "conditional marketing authorisation" were Comirnaty (Pfizer/BioNTech), Vaccine Janssen (Johnson & Johnson), Spikevax (Moderna) and Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca), which makes it clear that neither of India's vaccines, Covishield and Covaxin, as well as Russia's and China's, would be eligible for the EU Digital COVID Certificate (EUDCC), as the Green Pass is formally called. External Affairs Minister [S. Jaishankar took up the exclusion strongly with EU authorities](#) this week, particularly the case of Covishield, which is made under licensing and certification from AstraZeneca, and [cleared by WHO](#). India has argued that the entire idea of "vaccine passports" would leave developing nations and the global south at a disadvantage, as they have restricted vaccine access. An unspoken but valid criticism is that there is a hint of racism in the action — the EMA list only includes vaccines already used by Europe and North America. A letter of protest on the EMA's decision was also issued by the African Union and the Africa CDC this week, which called Covishield the "backbone" of the COVAX alliance's programme, that has been administered in many African countries. The EMA list is not binding however, and countries can choose to include others individually. After India's vocal protests, and its subtle threat to impose reciprocal measures, at least a third of the EU has said they would recognise Covishield (Estonia has accepted Covishield and Covaxin).

While the news that Austria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland (not an EU member) have [accommodated India's concerns](#) is welcome, there are still some hurdles before Indian travellers. Most of these countries are not at present accepting Indian travellers at all, as no non-essential travel is allowed to EU countries, and the spread of the Delta variant, first identified in India, has meant further travel restrictions. In addition, Indians who have taken doses of Covaxin will need to wait even longer, until this vaccine receives WHO clearance. Finally, as more nations complete their vaccine programmes, they will seek to tighten their border controls with "vaccine passports" and longer quarantines in order to curtail the spread of new variants. While it is necessary for the Government to keep up with these actions worldwide, and battle discriminatory practices, the real imperative remains to vaccinate as many Indians as possible, given that more than six months after the Indian inoculation programme began, only 4.4% of those eligible have been fully vaccinated.

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