



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 6 December 2021
(OR. en)

14645/21

TRANS 726

INFORMATION NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council
Subject: **Any other business**
Passenger Locator Forms and transport workers
– Information from the Commission

Delegations will find attached an information note prepared by the European Commission on the above-mentioned subject for consideration under "Any other business" at the meeting of the Council (Transport, Telecommunications and Energy) on 9 December 2021.

Passenger Locator Forms and transport workers

- *Information from the Commission*

Following the recent discovery of the new highly mutated COVID-19 variant Omicron, the resilience and ability of the EU to act rapidly and in a coordinated manner is being put to the test once again. The Member States have taken strong measures by applying restrictions on passengers arriving from the affected countries in order to limit the spread of the new variant.

Nevertheless, since the Omicron variant has reached the European continent, other integrated and coordinated measures are needed. This underlines the importance of an already central element in the fight against COVID-19, namely Passenger Locator Forms (PLFs). These play a key role in the identification of cases and close contacts to support effective contact tracing. Their use is essential and, today, no less than 21 Member States are collecting PLFs from passengers entering their territory.

The implementing acts of [May](#) and [July](#) 2021 have established a PLF exchange platform to enable the rapid exchange of cross-border passenger information between Member States and have also prescribed a list of minimum data to be collected through PLFs to ensure that all potentially exposed passengers are identified. Member States have been repeatedly invited to collect PLFs and to join the PLF exchange platform.

However, today we are still experiencing significant divergences between the approaches taken by different Member States in this area, which means that our contact tracing capability is weaker than it should be and should therefore be strengthened and made more robust without delay. Out of the 21 Member States using a PLF, only four are currently connected to the PLF exchange platform and only two of them have actually used it once. Several Member States continue to use the Early Warning and Response System (EWRS), but this is not designed to handle the large volumes of PLF data. In fact, data show that some Member States did not even use the EWRS selective exchange messages in the past years, thereby compromising the timeliness and effectiveness of contact tracing. As long as PLFs remain an optional tool and as long as Member States do not exchange relevant information on cross-border passengers through the PLF exchange platform, the contact tracing will be sub-optimal and will undermine our ability to control the spread of COVID-19.

We can therefore no longer afford to wait to move beyond the pilot stage of PLF and the PLF exchange platform. The voluntary nature of PLF systems needs to be reconsidered in view of the serious consequences of new variants. In this context, the Commission adopted on 1 December¹ a Communication ‘Addressing together current and new COVID-19 challenges’, which emphasises that it is essential to have the 14-day travel history of all arrivals into the EU, as well as the ability to identify those in close contact with an infected passenger, so that they can be effectively traced, and underlines the need for all Member States to put in place effective passenger locator forms.

Therefore, the Commission is currently working on a legal solution that could address these challenges.

In addition to the need for Member States to cooperate on containing the spread of the new variant, there is the need to ensure the protection of the Single Market, as successfully done over the past months thanks to the Green Lanes. The essential role of transport workers (including seafarers and pilots) should be recognised and their special treatment maintained. The proper functioning of the Single Market requires that these categories of workers be exempt from testing requirements and systematic border checks, as these measures risk paralysing EU supply chains and inflicting further economic hardship on our citizens. In order to avoid this, transport workers should also be prioritised in the administration of the booster doses in the context of the Member States’ vaccination strategies.

¹ COM(2021) 764 final