

Lack of global standards for COVID-19 certificates creates 'barrier to their successful implementation'

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The lack of global standards for coronavirus certificates is a key barrier to their successful implementation around the world, a new report warns.

Experts have called for widely accepted international standards for documentation which records COVID-19 vaccination and [health](#) status, although implementing them quickly will be difficult.

The University of Exeter research calls for policymakers to ensure coronavirus health status [certificate](#) providers abide by basic data protection principles, including lawfulness, fairness and transparency, purpose limitation, data minimisation, accuracy, storage limitation, integrity and confidentiality, and accountability. It identifies three key barriers to implementation—lack of trust, lack of global standards, and lack of a holistic approach.

The report recommends the certificates are only used during the pandemic, so that their use is discontinued once the WHO declares that COVID-19 is no longer a public health emergency of international concern.

It also says policymakers should ensure that COVID-19 health status certificate providers build data protection into the design of these certificates by default, and that the confidentiality and security of the information collected and processed are maintained. Providers of these certificates should prevent any unauthorized access, accidental loss, damage, or destruction of the data.

The report presents independent research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of UK Research & Innovation (UKRI)'s rapid response to COVID-19.

The research was led by Dr. Ana Beduschi, who carried out literature reviews and evaluations of primary and secondary sources of law. The research was also informed by twenty semi-structured interviews with technologists and experts in digital identity and certification conducted between December 2020 and March 2021. The study also benefited

from the insights and views of experts who participated in two workshops in March 2021 and May 2021.

Dr. Beduschi said: "Focusing only on the technological solutions for COVID-19 health status certificates is not sufficient. As these certificates have a direct impact on people's rights, there is a crucial need to consider the laws and regulations, including those on data privacy and human rights.

"If effectively implemented, COVID-19 health status certificates may contribute to managing the effects of the current pandemic. Yet, their introduction poses significant challenges to data privacy, equality and non-discrimination. The urgency surrounding the adoption of these measures should not lead to governments rolling out COVID-19 health [status](#) certificates in haste without the appropriate protection of data privacy and human rights.

"Policymakers must strike an adequate balance between protecting the rights and freedoms of all individuals and safeguarding public interests, while managing the effects of the pandemic."

The report emphasized that COVID-19 [health status](#) certificates should be available to all, not only those with high levels of digital literacy, but highlighted the risks of fraud associated with paper-based certificates. The research also underlined the need for secure applications and embedded technologies such as QR codes.

Provided by University of Exeter

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