

Fears of 'chaos' as Italy adopts tough Covid pass regime

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Italy will require all workers to show a coronavirus health pass from Friday, one of the world's toughest anti-COVID regimes that has already sparked riots and which many fear will cause "chaos".

More than 85 percent of Italians over the age of 12 have received at least one shot of a COVID-19 vaccine, making them eligible for the so-called

Green Pass certificate.

But according to various estimates, about 2.5 million of the country's 23 million workers are unvaccinated, and risk being denied access to the workplace from October 15.

"You have no idea of the chaos that we will have in firms," the president of the heavily industrialised northern Veneto region, Luca Zaia, said recently.

Unvaccinated workers can still get a Green Pass by getting tested for coronavirus or with a certificate of recovery, if they contracted the virus within the previous six months.

If they instead opt to qualify through testing, they have to take them at their own expense, and repeat them every 48 hours.

Zaia suggested there was not enough testing capacity to meet potential demand, raising the prospect of mass absenteeism from work.

"The entrepreneurs I talk to are very worried," he said.

Green passes are already required for teachers and other school workers, and for other activities such as eating indoors in bars and restaurants, or going to the cinema, museums and football games.

Avoid lockdowns

But they are not popular, at least among a sizeable minority—as shown by last Saturday's riots in Rome, where an anti-pass demonstration degenerated into an assault on the CGIL trade union building led by the neo-fascist Forza Nuova party.

Anyone caught in the workplace without a Green Pass risks fines ranging from 600 to 1,500 euros (\$700-1700).

And those who fail to turn up for work because they don't have one face suspension on no pay—but cannot be fired.

Meanwhile, employers can be fined 400-1,000 euros for not checking if their staff comply with the rules.

Prime Minister Mario Draghi opted for compulsory COVID passes last month in a bid to prevent further lockdowns and support Italy's recovery from a record 8.9-percent recession last year.

The measure, which follows a similar initiative introduced in Greece last month, was also intended to boost vaccination rates.

Business lobby Confindustria has been among the staunchest backers of the Green Pass in Italy, one of the European countries hardest hit by coronavirus with more than 130,000 deaths.

The focus is on "creating workplaces that are as safe as possible... because it is the only way to ensure public health and economic recovery," vice president Maurizio Stirpe told the Corriere della Sera newspaper.

Trade unions, on the other hand, have been sceptical. They first called for a blanket rule forcing all Italians to get jabbed, arguing that option would have avoided discrimination between vaccinated and unvaccinated workers.

Threats from dock workers

But the government has stopped short of that, partly because one of the

members of Draghi's left-right coalition government, the nationalist League party of Matteo Salvini, opposed compulsory vaccines.

Once the government ignored the unions' advice, [worker](#) representatives successfully requested that unvaccinated employees should be suspended rather than fired.

But the unions failed to secure free COVID tests for workers that they wanted the state or employers to pay for.

"Personally, I will get tested," Stefano, one of the people who protested in Rome last week, told AFP. But he complained that it was "absurd" for him to have to pay to continue doing his job.

So far, only dock workers in Trieste have been offered the possibility of free COVID tests, but they are still threatening to block all activities in their port, a major hub in the northeast, from October 15.

Meanwhile, there are concerns violence could break out again next Saturday, when the anti-pass movement is planning further protests and unions are preparing for a big anti-fascist rally in Rome.

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