

Passenger Locator Forms – update on exchange platform

Information from the Commission

The objective of this note is to inform Transport Ministers on the initiative to enhance contact tracing capabilities through Passenger Locator Forms, following the joint letter sent by Commissioners Vălean and Kyriakides to all Member States on 17 November 2020. The Commission will present this information under an ‘Any Other Business’ point on the agenda of the informal videoconference meeting of Transport Ministers on 8 December 2020.

The Commission would like to encourage Member States to join as soon as possible the pilot project developed by EASA, in line with the Communication on “Staying safe from COVID-19 during winter”¹.

Tracing close contacts of persons infected with COVID-19 is a central pillar in the fight against the spread of the virus within the European Union and can significantly reduce the reproduction rate.

As far as transport is concerned, Passenger Locator Forms (PLFs) are essential in this effort because they ensure that public health authorities can trace contacts of COVID-19 cases who have travelled by plane, train, ship or bus/coach, nationally or across borders whilst possibly infecting others.

One of the action areas identified by the Commission’s Communication on short-term EU health preparedness for COVID-19 outbreaks² was the development of EU mechanisms for common digital Passenger Location Forms for relevant transport sectors. These objectives are already pursued by the EU Healthy Gateways Joint Action, which aims to create a common EU template for digital passenger locator forms, a common entry point for Member State systems and a solution for those Member States without digital systems. One month ago, the Council recommended³ that a common Passenger Locator Form be put in place within the European Union.

In order to accelerate work in this area, a pilot project has started for air transport and the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) is developing a dedicated platform for the decentralised exchange of passenger travel data based on existing national digital platforms, in time for the end-of-2020 traveling season.

Once in place, this platform will allow contact tracing of all air passengers, including transit passengers who are currently not reachable using existing practices. Participation in this platform is open to all Member States with an eligible digital PLF and is voluntary. It is expected to become available for use by a limited number of Member States before Christmas, while others can join as soon as they are ready. EASA stands ready to assist interested Member States with the technical preparatory work to join the platform.

The aim is to make the same system available for all other modes of transport by April 2021. Data protection issues will be addressed by clearly limiting the duration for which the information can be kept, the purposes for which it can be used and the type of public authorities that have access to it.

Whilst the participation of Member States is voluntary, the success of this initiative and the benefits it could bring in terms of accelerating and simplifying contact tracing is ultimately dependent on the cooperation of Member States and the number that will take part in it.

¹ COM/2020/786, 2 December 2020, p. 7.

² COM/2020/318 final, 15 July 2020, p. 3-4.

³ Council Recommendation 2020/1475, OJ L 337, 14.10.2020, p. 3, recommendation #20.