

SNFBA

Case study for the session: Ethics and governance of digital technologies during a pandemic (Part II)

Mandatory Covid-19 digital certificates for all workers in Italy

Financial Times coverage: [LINK1](#)

The Washington Post coverage: [LINK2](#)

In 2021, a massive vaccination campaign has allowed Italy to gradually regain some degree of normality in social activities and initiate its path of economic recovery.

In an effort to sustain such trends, in the Summer of 2021, the Italian government decided to introduce mandatory Covid-19 certificates for all actively employed workers. As of October 15th 2021, all public and private workers need to have a valid Green Pass in order to carry out their occupation.

A Green Pass is a smartphone-based digital certification, originally developed under the coordination of the European Union, and reporting proof of vaccination, proof of a negative COVID-19 test or proof of recovery from COVID-19.

Prior to the enforcement of such mandate, Green Passes had already been mandated as a conditions to access certain trains, airplanes and a number of leisure-related venues such as restaurants, stadiums, sporting facilities, and movie theaters.

In the intentions of the Italian government, mandating the use of Green Passes to all workers is expected to incentivize an estimated 3.8 million unvaccinated Italian workers to get vaccinated. Workers who still refuse being vaccinated can still use the digital certificate to show the result of a negative test undertaken in the last 48 hours. The state does not cover the cost of such tests, but while some companies decided to cover them, they are generally paid out-of-pocket by individuals.

In Italy, 81% of the population above the age of 12 (71% of the overall population – figures 1 and 2 respectively) is fully vaccinated with one of the four EMA approved vaccines (Moderna, Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Janssen). This rate is among much higher than the average in Europe (fig.3).

At the moment of its entry into force, the Italian Green Pass policy sparked a wave of protests leading to anger-driven demonstrations in cities like Rome and Milan and to sit-ins that blocked the activities of major ports like Genoa and Trieste for days.

Protestors are not necessarily against the Covid-19 vaccine per se (although most of them are), but rather against the Green Pass policy itself. They argue that such policy forces them to “pay to go to work” and thus poses unacceptable limits to their “fundamental right to work”. The anti-Green Pass protest has been infiltrated by far-right (neo fascist) organizations leading to numerous episodes of violence. The Italian government has not revised its policy.

So far, the expected rise in new vaccinations has not occurred (fig. 5). A marked increase in the number of Covid-19 tests correlated to the entry into force of the mandate is instead clearly observable (fig. 6).

Questions for discussion:

- Is the Italian Green Pass mandate ethically acceptable? What trade-offs does it imply?
- Is it ethically justified only insofar as it actually boosts vaccination rates?
- Does it discriminate against non-vaccinated workers?
- Does the policy limit individual autonomy? And if so, is such limitation ethically defensible?
- Does the State have an ethical obligation to cover for the cost of testing?
- Do workers have a civic obligation to do their part in the collective effort towards recovery? If so, is it justified to legally enforce such an obligation?
- What should the State respond to the protesters, and on what ethical grounds?



Figure 1: number of vaccines



Figure 2

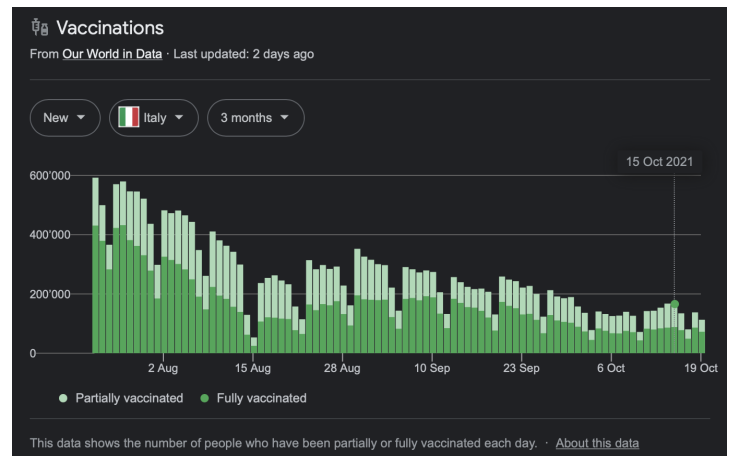


Figure 5

Cumulative uptake of at least one dose in the total population in EU/EEA	Cumulative uptake of full vaccination in the total population in EU/EEA
68.1%	63.4%

Cumulative uptake (%) of at least one vaccine dose and full vaccination in the total population in EU/EEA countries as of 2021-10-20

Figure 3

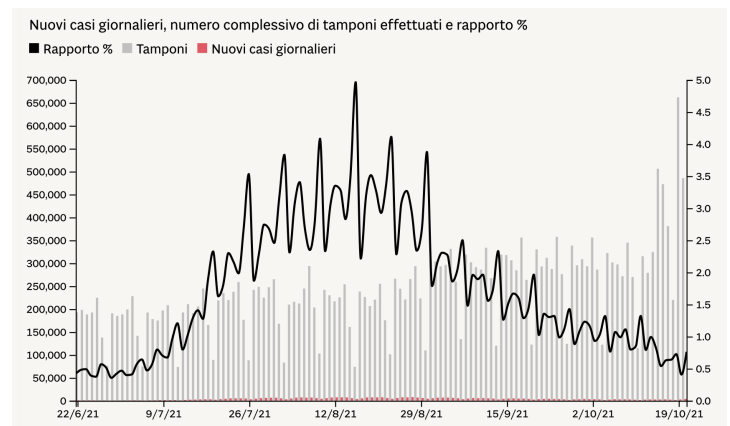


Figure 6: daily count of Covid-19 tests (grey)