



Vaccination First—New Anti-COVID Rules in France

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The July surge in infections of the Delta variant of the SARS-Cov-2 virus in France prompted President Emmanuel Macron to announce new restrictions, which this time mainly affect unvaccinated people. Although the extension of the obligation to present a health pass when using services, included in the amendment to the health bill adopted on 25 July, has sparked protests, polls show that the majority of the public supports the new regulations. The priority of the French authorities is to avoid a new lockdown in the autumn as it would threaten the recovery of the economy and Macron's re-election.

Why are the new restrictions necessary?

The increased movement of people connected to the summer holidays led to a rapid increase in coronavirus infections in July, from about 3,000 cases a day at the start of the month to around 30,000 a day at the end. The Delta strain has become the dominant strain of the virus among the infected (over 80% of all cases). At the same time, the vaccination rate had begun to decline due to a lack of applicants: at the beginning of July, there were around 160,000 daily injections, well below the May record (over 400,000) despite a supply of vaccines. By 27 July, just over 34 million French people, or just 50% of the population, had been fully vaccinated. The authorities felt that new solutions were needed to quickly increase the number of vaccinated people in order to achieve herd immunity.

What's new in the amendment to the health bill?

The amendment provides for compulsory vaccinations of selected professional groups: medical personnel, firefighters, and some military. Those among them who are not vaccinated by 15 September will be suspended from work without pay. From August, the validity of health passes for the vaccinated, convalescent, or those with a negative PCR test result is also to be extended. Presenting the passes will be a condition of entry to cafes, restaurants, fairs, service outlets, and public transport. The amendment also abolishes the current reimbursement of PCR tests. At the same time, people at high risk will be able to receive a third dose of the vaccine (booster) from September, and

schoolchildren over 12 years of age are already eligible for vaccination.

How did the public and certain political parties react?

A poll published on 13 July shows that 76% of French support compulsory vaccination of selected groups. Support for health passes is lower, from 66% for mass events to 58% for admission to restaurants. After the announcement of the amendments by Macron, the number of registrations for vaccinations amounted to 3.7 million between just 12 and 20 July. The prospect of new restrictions also provoked protests—on 17 and 24 July, between 110,000 and 160,000 people marched throughout France. A poll from 25 July shows that the protests are supported by 35% of the French. The health passes are also opposed by part of the opposition, mainly the far left and far right. A split was visible among the Gaullists: while some MPs contested the changes, local government officials were more restrained in their criticism. The Constitutional Council will rule on the compliance of the amendments with the constitution on 5 August.

How will the new restrictions affect Macron's political plans and ambitions?

Despite the emotions raised by the new restrictions, Macron thinks that the result of the presidential elections scheduled for April 2022 will primarily be determined by the state of the economy. The government has set itself a target of 6% GDP growth in 2021, which would prove the effectiveness of the measures taken, including the "France Relance" recovery plan that is currently being

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implemented. From the point of view of political strategy, it is also better to introduce controversial solutions almost a year before the elections than during the campaign. Macron wants to devote the last months of his first term to preparing and carrying out the French presidency of the EU Council and to promote the idea of a new EU investment

plan, the aim of which is to strengthen the effect of the actions taken so far by the Member States. A risk to the president's image may be posed by possible difficulties related to the enforcement of the new regulations, such as long queues or failures of IT systems.