

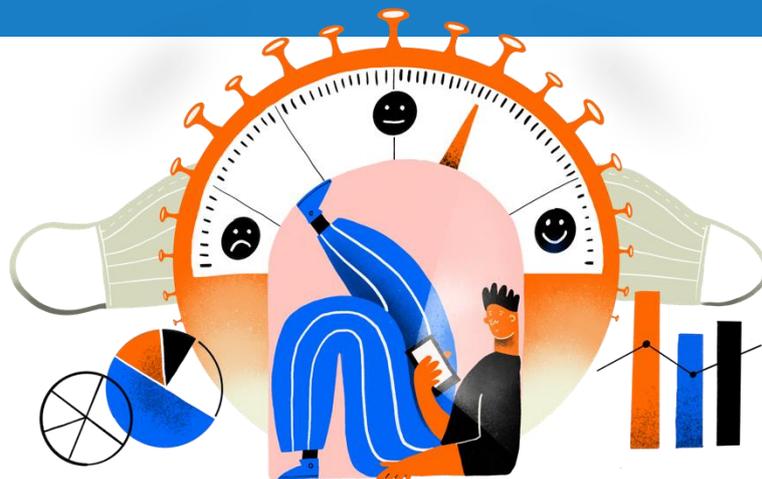
REPORT 36 :

On the eve of stricter measures: Attitudes toward the new measures and the vaccine pass

The motivation barometer

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Reference: Motivation Barometer (November 16, 2021). On the eve of stricter measures: Attitudes toward the new measures and the vaccine pass. Ghent, Leuven, Louvain-la-Neuve, Brussels, Belgium.



With the number of infections and ICU patients increasing rapidly, the government advisory body GEMS felt it necessary to propose stricter measures. To allow the advisory committee to make decisions based on scientific evidence, on the 15th and 16th of November we asked 2594 persons (mean age = 48.68 years; 69.3% have a high level of education; 72.6% are vaccinated; 70.9% are Dutch-speaking) about their attitude towards various stricter measures and a possible more restrictive version of the covid pass. As responses are highly dependent on vaccination status, data are presented separately for vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals.

This report answers the following two questions:

1. What is the attitude of the population towards possible reinforcement of the measures?
2. To what extent does the public support a vaccine passport and how does it compare to the covid pass (“Covid Safe Ticket”)?

Description of samples (collected on November 15 and 16) = 2594.***Vaccinated persons***

- N = 1849
- Mean age = 49.43 years (77.1% female; 74.1% Dutch-speaking; 31.9% with a master's degree).
- Employment status: 47.6% full-time, 22% part-time, 4.6% unemployed, 1.5% students and 21.5% retired.
- 17.7% had prior COVID-19 infection.

Unvaccinated persons who have been infected (31.2% of the non-vaccinated)

- N = 218
- Average age = 45.21 years (69.6% female; 59.6% male; 32.6% with a master's degree).
- Employment status: 60.1% full-time, 20.6% part-time, 4.1% unemployed, 1.8% students and 8.3% retired.

Non-vaccinated people who were not infected (68.8% of the non-vaccinated)

- N = 481
- Mean age = 47.08 years (68.3% female; 66.3% Dutch-speaking; 21.6% with a master's degree).
- Employment status: 52% full-time, 18.7% part-time, 6.9% unemployed, 2.7% students and 14.6% retired.

Take-home message

- Attitude towards stricter measures: In general, public opinion is still (fairly) supportive of all sorts of stricter measures, but this support is waning as more intrusion is made into people's private lives and into the lives of children from the age of 9.
- Vaccine pass and covid pass: We already know that the initially high level of support for the use of the covid pass has declined in recent months (see report 35), but support for the covid pass remains reasonably strong and certainly broader than for the introduction of a stricter vaccine pass. An analysis of the significance attributed to the two passes sheds light on this point. The vaccine pass is perceived even more strongly as a polarizing instrument than the covid pass, and more as a means of forcing non-vaccinated people to be vaccinated. Another reason for the reduced support for the vaccine pass is probably that its introduction implicitly weakens the value of the PCR test. Until now, the PCR test has been presented as an essential, safety-enhancing tool.

Question 1: What is the public's attitude towards a potential increase in measures?

Vaccination status: Figure 1 expresses the number of vaccinated and unvaccinated people (in %) who support various stricter^{1 2} measures. The figure shows that:

- Attitudes of vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals were very different, with the latter being significantly more negative toward all restrictions.
- More than half of those vaccinated have a positive or very positive attitude toward reinforcements such as ventilation and telecommuting.
- Slightly less than half of those vaccinated support the use of self-testing for private gatherings, are willing to keep their distance everywhere, and are willing to accept the requirement for a covid pass in combination with the requirement for masks, ventilation, and keeping their distance for various meetings or gatherings, such as static gatherings (theater, movie theater), larger outdoor gatherings (e.g., Christmas markets, carnival, etc.), and gatherings in the food service industry.

¹ By examining differences between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals, the role of other relevant sociodemographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and education level, was filtered out.

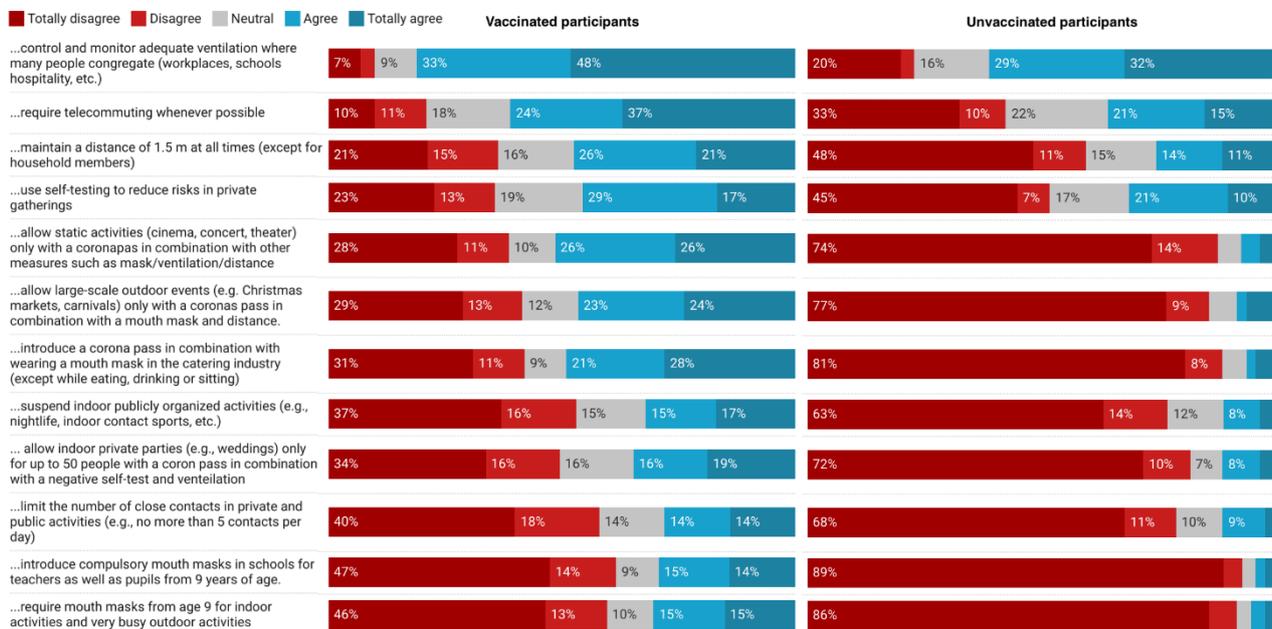
² The samples collected are not representative of the socio-demographic distribution of the population. Nevertheless, since December 2020, Dutch and French speaking participants have been recruited and the results presented have been weighted by age, region, education level and gender to (partially) correct for the non-representative nature of the samples.

- There is little support for restricting the number of contacts, suspending public activities such as nightlife, contact sports, and various restrictions on private gatherings (such as weddings).
- The introduction of compulsory masks from the age of 9 for indoor and outdoor activities and at school also receives significantly less support.

To summarize: in general, all kinds of measures still have good or decent public support, but this support is diminishing as we intrude into people's private lives and into the lives of children from the age of nine.

Figure 1

Percentage of the population, split between vaccinated and unvaccinated, who support stricter measures.

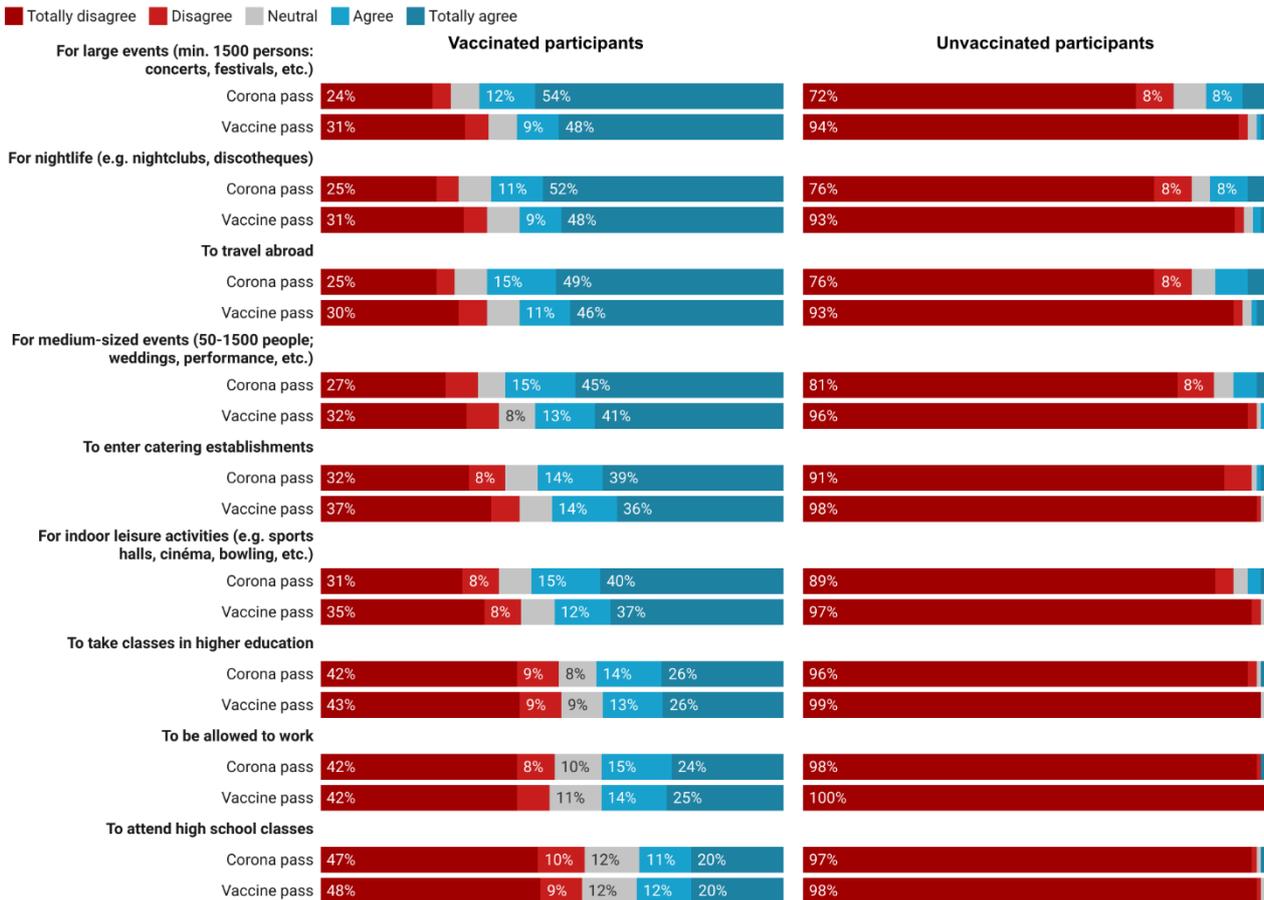


Question 2: To what extent is the vaccine pass supported and how is it perceived?

- Since November 1, the covid pass has also been rolled out more widely in Flanders. Now the question is whether we should introduce it in a stricter way, the so-called vaccine pass: only vaccination would still be sufficient as a ticket to an event or a place. A recent infection or a negative PCR test would no longer be considered as full equivalents. This would mean that unvaccinated people would be excluded from certain events or venues. Figure 2 shows support for the "traditional" covid pass and the stricter vaccine pass in various life domains, separately for vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals.
- This shows that:
 - Unvaccinated people are very much opposed to a pass, regardless of the version.
 - Vaccinated individuals are generally more supportive of the covid pass than a narrower version in the form of a vaccine pass.
 - Vaccinees tend to support the use of the covid pass (more than 50% agree or strongly agree) at medium and large gatherings, in nightlife, for travel, in the hospitality industry, and for indoor entertainment (movies, sports, etc.).
 - Support decreases (to half or less) for covid pass use in higher education, at work, and at school.

Figure 2

Acceptability of the covid pass and the stricter vaccine pass in different domains, split between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals (%)

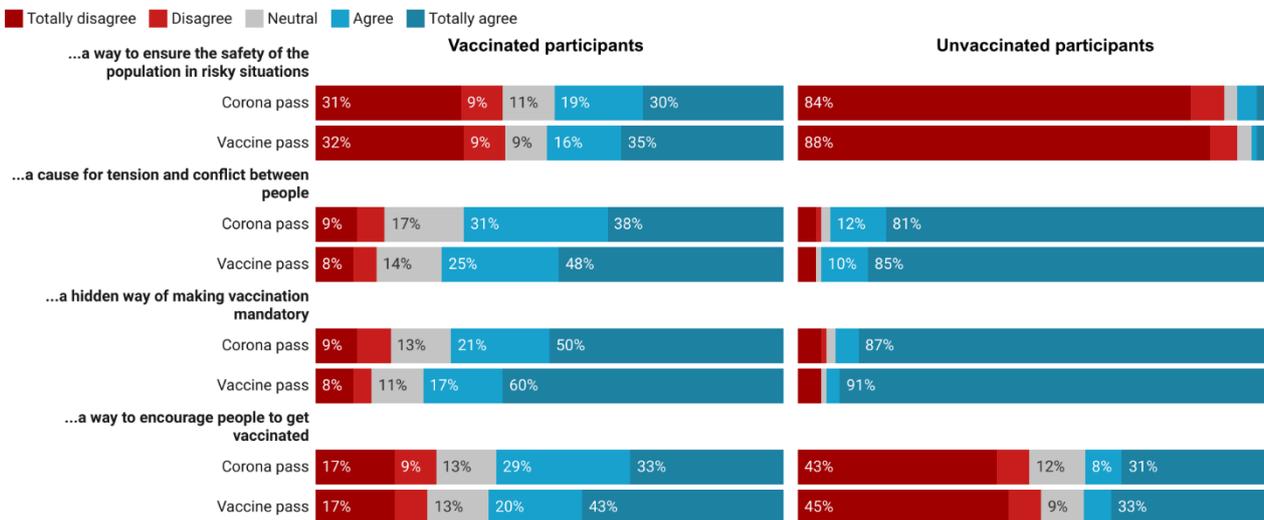


- Meaning of the vaccine pass:** Figure 3 shows the extent to which respondents attach different meanings to the vaccine pass and the covid pass. Various aspects were questioned, including the extent to which the covid pass and the vaccine pass have a safety-enhancing function, are a lever to encourage vaccination, are experienced as a means of pressure, or are a source of conflict or tension. This shows the following:

 - Non-vaccinated people do not see either as a tool to increase safety. They see the pass primarily as a source of polarization and conflict and as a backdoor way to mandate vaccination. 40% recognize that a pass can also be seen as a way to motivate them (somewhat) to get vaccinated.
 - Half of those vaccinated see the covid pass and vaccine pass as a source of security, and more than half see them as a source of conflict and as a backdoor way to make vaccination mandatory. They also see both passes as a way to persuade people to get vaccinated.
 - The vaccine pass is seen as a more polarizing tool and is perceived as more coercive by vaccinees, which helps explain its lower support (Figure 2).

Figure 3

Extent to which participants assign different significance to the vaccine pass versus the covid pass, for vaccinated and non-vaccinated (in %).



To summarize: We already know that the initially high level of support for the use of the covid pass has declined in recent months (see Report 35), but support for the covid pass remains reasonably strong and certainly broader than for the introduction of a stricter vaccine pass. An analysis of the significance attributed to the two passes sheds light on this point. The vaccine pass is perceived even more strongly as a polarizing instrument than the covid pass, and more as a means of constrain non-vaccinated people to be vaccinated. Another reason for the reduced support for the vaccine pass is probably that its introduction implicitly undermines the usefulness of the PCR test, whereas until now the PCR test has been presented as an essential, safety-enhancing tool.

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