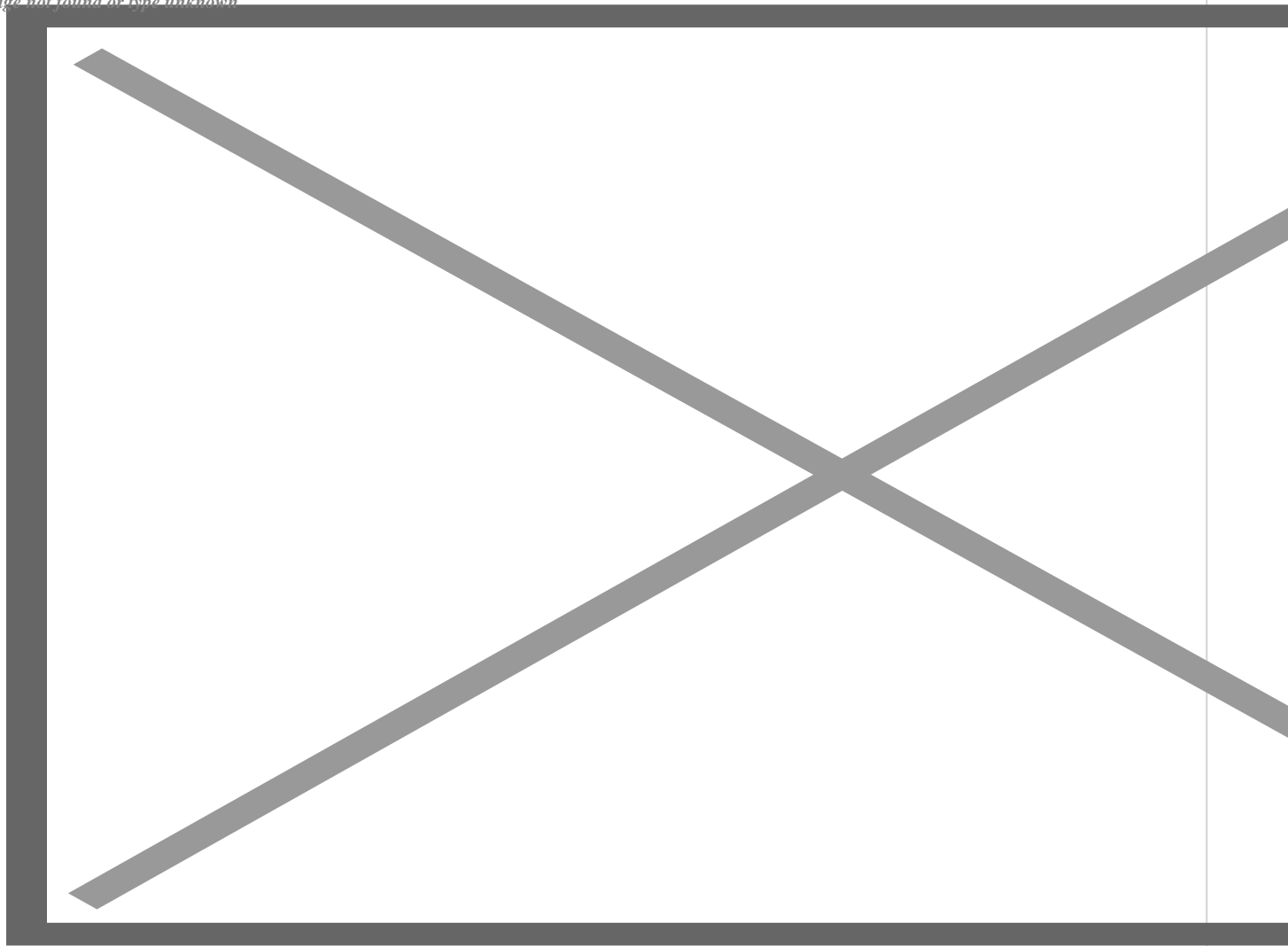


French cafés sit empty as police raid outdoor diners

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A diner shows her COVID-19 health pass in a Paris cafe, August 9, 2021. © REUTERS/Benoit Tessier

Paris, August 10 (RHC)-- Police in France have begun enforcing the vaccination pass mandate to enter cafés and restaurants, leading to many of their tables being empty during the usually busy lunchtime, as the French lunched on public benches instead.

On Monday, President Emmanuel Macron's government extended the controversial 'pass sanitaire' requirement to dining venues, even outdoor ones, disregarding the weekend of mass protests that drew at least 250,000 people onto the streets across France.

A video doing the rounds on social media, shot by a Reuters photographer, showed French police checking diners' papers. Those without the pass face a ?135 *(\$158) fine, which increases to ?9,000 (\$10,560) for a repeat offense.

By lunchtime, many sidewalk cafés were sitting completely empty as their regular customers chose instead to sit on public benches outside – according to a multitude of photos and comments posted on social media, anyway.

The famous Grande Brasserie, near the Bastille square, had a few customers inside, but no one out on its patio. One Twitter user speculated that the outdoor seating areas were empty as the result of some kind of nationwide boycott of the health pass.

The pass, introduced by Macron to compel vaccinations against COVID-19, has been mandatory for entrance to museums, movie theaters, swimming pools, and other venues since July 21. The courts have also ruled that it was constitutional to mandate vaccinations for healthcare workers, some of whom have gone on strike in protest.

Facing a rising number of Covid-19 cases attributed to the Delta variant of the virus, the French authorities have pressed hard to vaccinate everyone. Meanwhile, vaccine makers Pfizer and Moderna have drastically increased the price of their vaccines in the European Union.

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