HUMANITARIAN EXEMPTIONS
To COVID-19 Government Measures

About this report

An outbreak of respiratory disease caused by a novel coronavirus (abbreviated "COVID-19") (CDC 2020) was first reported in China in December 2019. The outbreak was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020 (WHO 11/03/2020).

Worldwide, governments are implementing a range of measures to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. These actions may hamper humanitarian operations, particularly measures that restrict entry, movement, or people gathering. In some contexts, exemptions for humanitarian actors are in place to prevent the disruption of operations. This report explores humanitarian exemptions to measures adopted by governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

ACAPS' reports are a component of our broader effort to monitor the secondary impacts of the pandemic and are based on publicly available data assembled by our team through wide scanning of information across the globe.

Further country-specific analysis of the COVID-19 situation and analysis of challenges for humanitarian operations can be found here.

Countries with some type of exemptions for humanitarian purposes
- Yes
- Not available

Limitations

The COVID-19 response provides abundant sources of information. Care is needed to identify the most reliable sources.

This report includes information on humanitarian exemptions to government measures that was available as of 22 May 2020.

Government measures and exemptions granted are changing rapidly and often information is outdated by the time it has been identified. In case of humanitarian exemptions to government measures, it is a challenge to identify the correct information: the majority of information available reports the limitations caused by COVID-19 and its effects on the rollout of operations, rather than on exemptions granted to the delivery of aid despite containment measures.

For these reasons, the dataset and analysis are likely to have information gaps. Feedback and provision of information to fill information gaps about humanitarian exemptions is welcome.

Methodology

This report explores humanitarian exemptions to government measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, identified using data collected in the ACAPS #COVID19 Government Measures Dataset. For an overview of the Government Measures Taxonomy, including overall structure and definitions, please see the *ReadMe*.

The humanitarian exemptions dataset, published on 26/05/2020, explores exemptions to the government measures determined in the Government Measures Dataset, which are specifically in place for humanitarian operations and granted by governing authorities.

Countries surveyed:

- A total of 103 countries were surveyed for humanitarian exemptions.
- Data collection focused primarily on countries that ACAPS identifies as a humanitarian crisis, which includes 69 countries. More information on the classification of a crisis country available here.
- Additional countries were included, typically where humanitarian actors are most likely to operate and donor countries.
- Exemptions granted by non-crisis countries were included if they specifically referred to humanitarian exemptions (either applied to humanitarian actors or to people in need).

What we looked for:

- Exemptions to government measures in response to COVID-19 that apply specifically to humanitarian actors, personnel, and aid operations.
- Exemptions to government measures in response to COVID-19 granted to people in need. Such exemptions are included if the information refers to a humanitarian crisis context and if the information is relevant for humanitarian actors.

Key Sources

ACAPS consulted the main medical and travel security advice websites, along with the databases provided by travel and air transport associations. In addition, secondary data review was conducted using data made openly available by humanitarian actors, primarily through situation reports provided by UN agencies and the LogisticCluster's Cargo Entry Points Updates.

Data entry coding

The Secondary Data Review that populated the dataset was structured mirroring the Government Measures Dataset, around **five broad categories of measures** used to group the interventions governments are taking in response to COVID-19:

- Movement restrictions
- Social distancing
- Public health measures
- Governance and socioeconomic measures
- Lockdown

Every entry is an exemption from government measures accorded to humanitarian actors and coded according to this taxonomy. The dataset also provides information about the authority granting the exemption, given that operational actors are active in countries not entirely controlled by the same authority.

Overview of humanitarian exemptions to COVID-19 government measures

A total of 103 countries were reviewed, of which 76 were found to have at least one humanitarian exemption. Although information gaps (explained below) were present in the data collection, initial analysis indicates that 90 humanitarian exemptions are in place across 76 countries. The most common humanitarian exemption across all regions are those in place for movement restrictions, most commonly in response to international flight restriction measures. Africa was the region with the highest number of countries (22) that have humanitarian exemptions. 19 countries in Europe provide humanitarian exemptions, making it the region with the second highest number.

12 countries across the Americas have exemptions in place, all of which are movement restrictions. In Asia, 11 countries have humanitarian exemptions, including nine exemptions for movement restrictions. Across the Middle East, 19 exemptions are in place across nine countries, including multiple in Syria, Yemen, and Palestine. In the Pacific, three countries provide humanitarian exemptions, including Vanuatu, Micronesia, and New Zealand.

Out of 69 crisis countries examined, 40 (58%) had some type of humanitarian exemption. The most frequent humanitarian exemption, applied in 36 (52%) of the crisis countries, allows humanitarian and relief flights to operate despite international flight restrictions. General humanitarian exemptions, for instance tax exemptions for relief items such as healthcare equipment, are implemented in seven (10%) crisis countries.

Three crisis countries (4%) provide humanitarian exemptions to public health measures, including two isolation and quarantine policies exemptions and one exemption to testing policies. Data available suggests that two (3%) crisis countries provide humanitarian exemptions to lockdown measures. In Afghanistan, organisations related to the health sector are allowed to mobilise, despite a partial lockdown. In Greece, humanitarian agencies are permitted to enter refugee camps, regardless of current camp lockdown policies.

Key information gaps

- This report does not provide an analysis of the extent to which government measures have been implemented in the first place, nor an analysis of how exemptions granted by authorities are being applied in practice.

- Special arrangements for humanitarian actors might exist but are not reported, as data available may not be representative of all humanitarian exemptions in country. Circumstances where the granting authority is not the official government are particularly challenging to find.

- Information available on exemptions are not equally reported. Data on exemptions related to travel restrictions dominates and is more readily available. For example, humanitarian exemptions to movement restrictions — including flight restrictions and visa requirements — might be the most accessible, due to the relevance for tourists or citizens.

- Information about special authorisations needed by humanitarian actors is still sparse in this moment.

- It is a particular challenge to obtain information on exemptions in contexts where rules applied in a country differ between territories.

- Similar challenges for obtaining information occur in contexts where control over a territory is contested, because it is difficult to determine the granting authority.

- Governments might grand ad-hoc exemptions that are not reported as they apply only to selected aid actors on a case by case basis or are only temporary.

Countries reporting humanitarian exemptions

Countries with some type of exemptions for humanitarian purposes

- Yes
- Not available