



# GUIDELINES

**FOR THE MOVEMENT OF GOODS AND SERVICES ACROSS  
COMESA REGION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

(As adopted by the 8th Extra-Ordinary Council of Ministers` Meeting, 14th May 2020)

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# GUIDELINES FOR MOVEMENT OF GOODS AND SERVICES ACROSS THE COMESA REGION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## A. BACKGROUND

1. COMESA recognises that COVID-19 pandemic is a serious global crisis affecting Member States.
2. The COVID-19 crisis has brought to the fore the challenge of protecting the health of the population whilst avoiding undue disruptions to the free movement of persons and the delivery of goods and essential services across the region.
3. Recognising that, despite the incidence of the pandemic, the implementation of the Common Market policies on the movement of goods, services and persons should continue to be governed by the principle of market integration and regional cooperation between the Member States.
4. Amidst responses to combat COVID-19, COMESA Member States should continue to be guided by a collective commitment of maintaining open and connected supply chains working collaboratively to identify and address trade disruptions with ramifications on the flow of goods and essential services within the region.
5. COMESA also recognizes that it is in the collective interest of all its Member States to ensure that trade routes (road, rail, air and sea freight) remain open to facilitate the flow of goods including essential supplies.
6. In order to mitigate any negative impact by COVID -19 on the established COMESA trading arrangements with regard to the movement of goods and services within COMESA, it is important that Member States adopt common measures to safely maintain the flow of goods and services within the region considering the guidelines given by the AU, WCO and WHO on measures to be taken during the period of the COVID -19 pandemic.
7. Recognizing the guidelines developed by the other RECs with shared membership with COMESA including the EAC and SADC in response to the COVID-19.
8. Recognising the unique situations of Island States including Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles and the landlocked countries within the context of the Common Market while facilitating movement of goods and services.
9. COMESA Member States hereby adopt the following guidelines to facilitate movement of Goods and Services across the COMESA Region during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

## B. OBJECTIVES

### Main objective:

These guidelines are aimed at facilitating the movement of goods and services during the COVID-19 Pandemic without amending or replacing any provisions of the COMESA Treaty.

### The specific objectives of these guidelines are to:

1. Protect citizens from the COVID-19 Virus Pandemic.
2. Safeguard the existing trading arrangements (regional and international supply chains) in order to minimize the disruption to cross-border trade in goods and services, especially in essential services whilst striking the balance between primarily ensuring public health on one hand and the need to sustain national economies, livelihoods of citizens and food security.
3. Ensuring smooth and uninterrupted flow of goods and services including but not limited to essential goods, food and pharmaceutical and medical supplies and equipment during this COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Enhancing regional awareness on measures instituted against the COVID -19 pandemic by various authorities with regard to measures involving the movement of goods and services in the region.
5. Facilitating and encouraging local production and trading in essential goods and services within the region.
6. Advocating and supporting Member States' health safety measures and efforts to address closure of firms, jobs losses and make regional economies more resilient to any future crisis.

## C. KEY PRINCIPLES

1. These Guidelines are developed in recognition of Article 2, Article 50 and Article 110 of the COMESA Treaty.
2. Further, they are based on the assumption that COMESA Member States are implementing policies and measures recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) the World Customs Organization (WCO) and other industry-related international organizations to combat COVID-19.

3. Member States recognize that the logistics industry provides essential services in the movement of goods and services across the borders. In this regard, the logistics industry, covering the entire supply chain including custom clearance, warehousing, loading and offloading services and distribution, to final markets should be categorized by Member States as an essential service in the movement of goods and services.
4. Further, to recognize that whilst there is increased focus on essential goods and supplies, it is still imperative to ensure continued smooth flow of movement of all goods and supplies as this is essential for promotion and sustainability of livelihoods, industry, employment and the overall economies of the Member States.
5. The Guidelines have been developed to rally Member States to conform to uniform standards in order to minimize disruptions in the supply chain for essential goods across the COMESA region. Member States are therefore called upon to align their processes and procedures with international and regional guidelines.
6. Member States are urged to, where required, objectively and fairly impose restrictions to the cross-border and local transport of goods and passengers in accordance with Article 50 of the COMESA Treaty on grounds of public health, where those restrictions are:
  - a. transparent, i.e. disclosed in public statements/documents;
  - b. directly linked to COVID-19 justifications;
  - c. proportionate, i.e. not going beyond what is strictly necessary;
  - d. relevant and mode-specific, i.e. restrictions on any of the different transport modes must be adapted to that mode; and
  - e. non-discriminatory.

#### **D. FACILITATING THE CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT OF RELIEF AND ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES**

In order to facilitate the cross-border movement of relief consignments, essential food supplies and pharmaceuticals and medical equipment, Member States are urged to:

1. Coordinate and ensure cooperation in the activities of government agencies at national and regional levels with the objective of speeding up the movement, release and clearance of relief goods and essential food products.
2. Ensure the facilitation of movement of essential products, food supply, pharmaceuticals and medical equipment, including Personal Protection Equipment into and within the Common Market and control of their quality.

3. Prioritize the cross-border clearance of essential products and relief consignments through the development of priority processing channels and provide for free movement of transport drivers and assistants after suitable health screening.
4. Provide for the lodging of a simplified Goods declaration or of a provisional or incomplete Goods declaration and deferred final clearance based on risk management.
5. Provide for pre-arrival processing of the Goods declaration and release of the goods upon arrival essential food supplies and pharmaceuticals and medical equipment and relief consignments.
6. Apply risk management and perform inspections on essential food supplies and pharmaceuticals and medical equipment and relief goods only if deemed high risk.
7. Encourage coordination of inspections by the Customs Authorities and other government agencies, if possible, carried out at the same time.
8. Advocate for or support the waiving or suspension of import duties and taxes for essential food supplies and pharmaceuticals and medical equipment relief items as well as raw materials used in the production of the essential goods including pharmaceuticals and medical equipment.
9. Provide information materials (leaflets, banners, posters, electronic slides, etc.) on COVID-19 measures for distribution to citizens arriving or departing as well as on official websites.
10. Facilitate and encourage use of e-commerce and electronic payments platforms, such as, mobile money to significantly reduce the use of cash to curb the spread of COVID-19.
11. Adopt the latest edition of the WCO HS classification reference for COVID-19 medical supplies to facilitate its movement across the border.
12. Ensure that implementation of COVID-19 mitigation measures does not lead to the emergence of unnecessary obstacles to trade on the trade supply chain.
13. Create conducive environment for entrepreneurs to access trading opportunities and to do business while ensuring public health, safety and security.

## E. TRANSPORT OF GOODS AND CROSS BORDER FREIGHT TRANSPORT OPERATIONS

In light of the fact that significant trade among COMESA Member States is done by all modes of transport and that most of the Member States are reliant on cross border road transport, it is essential that common measures are adopted to ensure that the supply chains are maintained. It is imperative that all Member States conform to uniform guidelines in order to avoid any disruption in the supply chain for priority listed goods.

1. Member States should adopt a common approach and promote close cooperation measures to allow for uninterrupted movement of supplies so that there will be no serious disruption in the supply chain for goods and essential services.
2. Member States should give priority clearance to the following priority list of goods specific to the needs of region which are listed below: -
  - (i) Food Products:
    - (a) Staple food products,
    - (b) Chemicals, packaging and ancillary products used in the production of any food products.
  - (ii) Cleaning and hygiene products:
    - (a) Toilet paper, sanitary pads, sanitary tampons and condoms
    - (b) Hand sanitizer, disinfectants, soap, alcohol for industrial use, household cleaning products and personal protective equipment
    - (c) Products for the care of babies and toddlers
    - (d) Personal toiletries, including haircare, body and face washes, roll-ons, deodorants and toothpaste; and
    - (e) Chemicals, packaging and ancillary products used in the production of any of the above.
  - (iii) Medical supplies and equipment:
    - (a) Medical and hospital supplies, equipment and personal protective equipment;
    - (b) Veterinary supplies; and
    - (c) Raw materials and inputs such as chemicals, packaging and ancillary products used in the production of any of the above.

For (ii) and (iii) to be guided by the list “HS classification reference for COVID 19 medical supplies second edition” prepared jointly by the WCO and the WHO.

- (iv) Fuel (including coal and gas).
- (v) Courier and other expedited shipments including perishable goods;
- (vi) Agricultural inputs and raw materials for use in industries as may be required by individual Member States;
- (vii) Equipment and spares required for repair and maintenance of machinery used in the manufacture of essential goods.

3. Member States should ensure that:

- (i) transport operators and their drivers are sensitized based on WHO and national guidelines to minimize transmission of COVID-19;
- (ii) truck drivers use protective equipment such as masks and gloves and sanitary materials such as hand sanitizer;
- (iii) all freight vehicles and drivers are treated in a non-discriminatory manner;
- (iv) health screening is carried out at the border or at any duly designated screening points along the route and social distancing strictly adhered to by the drivers; and in case the drivers are displaying any COVID 19 symptoms, they will not be allowed to enter and must be back to origin country;
- (v) where there is One Stop Border Post (OSBP), there is coordination to carry out health screening on one side of the border only to avoid overlaps and waiting times. The OSBP functions be carried out with equitable care and consideration to entrepreneurs and cross border traders taking into account vulnerable groups such as women, youth and people with disabilities;
- (vi) exit and entry screening of drivers and crews at Ports of Entry is carried out speedily and done in accordance with the WHO guidelines;
- (vii) ravel restrictions and mandatory quarantine for drivers and transport workers not displaying symptoms of COVID-19 may be waived subject to preserving protection and avoiding contagion. However, these drivers must strictly adhere to social distancing requirements to avoid possible contagion;
- (viii) other checks on documents and cargo en-route such as roadside stops should be minimized to ensure the free flow of goods and avoid delays;



- (ix) transport operators follow prescribed health protocols or instructions for vehicle sanitization, loading and unloading of goods;
- (x) transport operators issue company identification cards to truck drivers which should be produced together with official identification documents of truck drivers to law enforcement agents and health officials upon request; and
- (xi) transport operators provide isolation facilities for crews and employees returning from delivering.

## **F. CROSS BORDER ROAD PASSENGER TRANSPORT**

It is recommended that Inter-State mass movement of persons by buses/minibuses or other vehicles be suspended for defined periods except for the following exemptions mutually agreed and recognised between the country of origin, country of destination and country/ies of transit for as long as they are placed on mandatory quarantine:.

1. Citizens and residents returning to home Member States/places of residence subject to nationally prescribed quarantine periods.
2. security, emergency and humanitarian relief services as may be agreed between Member States.
3. transportation of work crews and teams under special arrangements between Member States (e.g. teams working on cross border transport, energy and infrastructure projects) including engineers and support staff.

## **G. AIR TRANSPORT**

With regard to air transport, the following measures should be deployed by Member States:

1. Member States should allow transportation of the COVID-19 medical equipment and medicines using passenger aircraft to provide additional airfreight capacity.
2. Encourage collaboration between aviation and logistics partners to provide transport essential services for emergency medical supplies and food aid in support of the COVID-19 relief effort.
3. Subject to national measures in place for the control of spreading COVID-19 virus, exempt airfreight operations from any COVID-19 related travel restrictions to ensure that essential goods and services and medical equipment and supplies are transported without restrictions.

4. Exempt air cargo crew members, who do not interact with the public and are confined to their hotels, from mandatory quarantine requirements.

## **H. OTHER MODES OF CROSS BORDER TRANSPORT**

For rail, inland waterways and maritime modes of transport, Member States to consult and agree on the conditions for the continued operation of interstate transport services.

### **I. REGULATING AND CONTROLLING TRUCKS/VEHICLES, AIRCRAFT AND VESSELS CARRYING ESSENTIAL GOODS AND SERVICES**

Member States shall ensure that:

1. Law enforcement officers and regulators facilitate the extension of validity of short-term cross border permits/licenses, transit visas for drivers and crew which have expired en-route due to different administrative procedures in force following the COVID-19 measures, until the vehicles are able to complete the journey.
2. The size of crew for trucks, aircraft and vessels is limited to the minimum required per vehicle to facilitate smooth border crossing in the region.
3. In the event that crews are quarantined following failure of COVID-19 screening while in transit, truck owners/operators be allowed to make necessary arrangements for a backup crew to ensure that the goods are delivered to the intended destination. Member States shall expedite the movement of backup crews after they have been cleared by Health Officials.
4. Truck drivers are required to declare their final destination and are urged to stop only at designated points along the transport corridors so as to limit the chances of spreading of Covid-19 during transit.
5. No operational restrictions will be imposed on foreign registered transporters entering a Member State as long as they operate within the essential services spectrum subject to national rules and regulations.

### **J. HANDLING OF CARGO AT PORTS OF ENTRY**

1. Member States should implement the principles of coordinated border management and ensure that an efficient cargo clearing processes is in place at all designated ports of entry and is facilitated by multi-agency teams such as Customs, Standards bodies, Health, Immigration, Security, Police, Port/Border control in one-stop centre to minimize the time taken to clear goods, drivers and crew expeditiously and avoid the spread of COVID due to unnecessary congestion at the entry/exit points.

2. Customs authorities must ensure that there is continued availability of their customs declaration processing systems to avoid system failures that may arise causing long queues at the Port of entry. In addition, back up measures should be put in place in case of system failure.
3. Member States to apply mandatory pre-clearance processing of goods to reduce congestion and dwell time at the border.
4. Physical inspections should be carried out only where it is necessary based on updated risk management parameters and principles of AEO and PCA. Where border joint border inspection is not done, inspection at point of destination shall be conducted by relevant agencies.
5. Member States should accept electronic documents where Border agencies require permits, licenses and certificates for the imported goods to avoid delays at the ports of entry.
6. Member States to ensure that transport nodes (e.g. ports, airports, logistics hubs) are reinforced with requisite personnel as required.
7. Member States are also urged to ensure that border controls should be organised in a way that prevents the risk of dangerous overcrowding (emergence of large gatherings or queues), which risk increasing the spread of the virus.
8. Member States are also urged to consider eliminating unnecessary import, export and transit trade barriers to Covid-19 medical supplies and medicines and raw materials used in the production of essential goods and supplies.

#### **K. MOVEMENT OF GOODS IN TRANSIT/INLAND DELIVERIES**

Member States in an identified transit corridor must:

1. set up a network of national contact points and a platform to provide information on national and international transport and logistics measures taken in response to COVID -19;
2. work closely with this network to ensure the smooth flow of essential goods in all directions;
3. take action to ensure free movement of all transport workers involved in transportation of essential goods, whatever the transport mode;
4. ensure that rules such as travel restrictions and mandatory quarantine of transport

workers not displaying symptoms of COVID- 19 may be waived subject to each Member State risk management to avoid contagion;

5. ensure that drivers and their crew in transit to other Member States and those delivering essential goods inland, should be facilitated to move through their territory and to inland destinations as needed and their safety should be guaranteed in situations where travel restrictions have been put in place on grounds of public health to minimize COVID-19 spread; and
6. make consideration that under the prevailing circumstances, it might take longer for some goods in transit to reach exit customs offices. Customs Administrations are thus urged to waive the time-limit between customs office of departure to Customs office of exit.

#### **L. CUSTOMS/REVENUE AUTHORITIES SUPPORT TO THE ECONOMY AND SUSTAINING OF SUPPLY CHAIN CONTINUITY**

Member States are urged to:

1. To the extent possible, introduce tax relief measures, such as extending payment of duties, payment of duties in instalments, and duty drawback.
2. Waive penalties for delays that are due to late arrival of commercial documents from exporting countries.
3. Introduce facilitative measures with regard to the requirements to submit original documents or to stamp certain documents.
4. Provide greater facilities to ATA carnet holders when the temporarily imported goods cannot be re- exported due to a state of emergency.
5. Set up crisis teams to ensure the overall performance of customs tasks.
6. Take measures to guarantee personnel availability in the long term and operate a 24/7 customs clearance system.
7. Create a Helpdesk online or by phone that can serve as a single window for the trade to reach out to.
8. Designate priority lanes for freight transport and introduce measures to guarantee the supply chain continuity.
9. Facilitate the continuation of transport by road, including for goods in transit, in cases where the driver of the means of transports has COVID-19 symptoms by a backup driver.

10. Set health safety standards for officials working at border posts in dealing with imported or exported shipments and ensuring compliance with them.
11. Provide information materials (leaflets, banners, posters, electronic slides, etc) on measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic for distribution at customs outlets and border crossings as well as on official websites.

#### **M. TRADE IN SERVICES:**

In order to facilitate movement of trade in services in the region, Member States should:

1. Enable professional travel to ensure transportation of goods and services.
2. Safeguard and ensure smooth and continued operation of the logistics networks that serve as the backbone of global supply chains. The entire supply chain for essential goods and services must be considered including warehousing and transshipping and final distribution to market. Any planned transport-related restrictions should be notified to the COMESA Secretariat and to all other Member States in a timely manner without prejudice to the specific rules that apply to emergency measures in some sectors.
3. To the extent possible, provide for unrestricted cross-border movement for engineering and maintenance support services (including engineers and support staff) supporting the production and distribution of essential goods, medicine, medical supplies and equipment.
4. Consider improving digital infrastructural foundations to improve internet.
5. Consider the inclusion of internet service workers within 'essential services' not subject to work from home restrictions to avoid disruptions over the period of COVID-19.

#### **N. MONITORING AND EVALUATION MECHANISM AND SHARING OF BEST PRACTICES**

1. The Secretariat, in consultation with Member States, should:
  - a. Together with the National Task Forces on COVID-19 (Trade and Health) coordinate implementing the provisions of these guidelines during COVID-19;
  - b. Mobilize resources to assist Member States in addressing the challenges of COVID-19 and coordinate the implementation of the guidelines;

- c. Publish periodical bulletins or newsletter or through other media on the COMESA official website (<https://www.comesa.int>) regarding Member States' best practices and updated information including trade-related regulatory measures that are put in place in each Member States introduced as a result of the COVID-19 based on updates collected from the Member states and other relevant sources; and
    - d. Share the best practices and updated information on the implementation of these guidelines and other related matters aimed at protecting the health and well-being of their citizens as well as minimizing disruption to the movement of goods, transport and essential services across the region.
  2. Member States should:
    - a. Increase transparency by publishing on the internet and sharing with the Secretariat the updated information on new trade and customs and related measures introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Member States are encouraged to use the standard Template attached in Annex I in sharing their periodical information and data on a weekly basis;
    - b. To the extent permitted by their laws, cooperate and share information about the COVID-19 epidemic in their territory which includes, but is not limited to, number of cases, number of deaths, treatments and research findings related to the disease;
    - c. Provide high frequency, timely and detailed trade statistics to facilitate the monitoring of impacts of the COVID-19 on trade flows;
    - d. Notify and update details of their COVID-19 focal persons and contact points to the Secretariat including their names, position, place and email/telephone address for smooth communication; and
    - e. Develop post COVID-19 plans and measures to respond to increased trade levels expected at the cessation of COVID-19 measures.
  3. These Guidelines will be reviewed and updated to respond to any changes that may affect implementation of the provisions therein.

## References

1. The COMESA Treaty
2. WHO Guidelines on COVID-19; <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
3. WCO Guidelines on COVID-19 Pandemic;  
<http://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/coronavirus.aspx>
4. WCO HS Classification Reference for COVID-19 Medical Supplies;  
[http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/nomenclature/covid\\_19/hs-classification-reference\\_2\\_1-24\\_4\\_20\\_en.pdf?la=en](http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/nomenclature/covid_19/hs-classification-reference_2_1-24_4_20_en.pdf?la=en)
5. Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) Guidelines, <https://africacdc.org/covid-19/covid-19-resources/>
6. EAC Guidelines on COVID-19 Pandemic, <https://www.eac.int/coronavirus>
7. SADC Guidelines on Harmonization and Facilitation of Cross Border Transport operations across the region during the COVID-19 Pandemic, [https://www.sadc.int/files/8315/8626/0246/Final\\_SADC\\_Guidelines\\_on\\_Cross-Border\\_Transport\\_during\\_COVID19-Adopted\\_on\\_6\\_April\\_2020-ENGLISH.pdf](https://www.sadc.int/files/8315/8626/0246/Final_SADC_Guidelines_on_Cross-Border_Transport_during_COVID19-Adopted_on_6_April_2020-ENGLISH.pdf)
8. COVID-19 in COMESA Platform; <http://comstat.comesa.int/covid-19>
9. COVID-19 Measures put in Place by Member States - 4th Update; <https://www.comesa.int/37212/>

## ANNEX -I: TEMPLATE FOR REPORTING UPDATES OF MEMBER STATE'S MEASURES ON COVID-19 AND RELATED INFORMATION

Reporting Country Name: ..... Coordinating Ministry..... Report Date Interval: .....

### PART A. COVID-19 Cases – Weekly National Situational Update ( as of reported date)

Description	Female	Male	Total
Total Laboratory Test Conducted			
Total Confirmed Cases			
Total Cases of Deaths			
Total Recovered			
Total Number of Active Cases			

### PART B. Country Measures Taken in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic (Weekly report)

General Measures Taken	Measures That Impact Trade and Investment (Industry)	Start date/end date	References/Source/weblinks



**PART C. Monthly Update Data on Trade Flow of Goods (Import, Export and Cross-border Transit) (Value in USD)**

Trade Regime	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Import goods (Entry)												
Export goods (Exit)												
Temporary import												
Temporary Export												
Cross Border Transit goods												
Total												

**PART D. Monthly Update Data on Trade Flow of Goods (Import, Export and Cross-border Transit) (Top 20 Goods by Source/Destination)**

#	Goods Description	Import goods (Entry)	Export goods (Exit)	Temporary import	Temporary Export	Cross Border Transit goods	Total value in USD
1							
2							
3							
4							
<b>Total</b>							
%							



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