

Funded by the Government of Japan



#2 - Biannual - November 2021

## Customs community moving towards recovery

Foreword by the Secretary General



Dr. Kunio Mikuriya

*The rapid development of vaccines against COVID-19 was followed by an unprecedented international effort to facilitate the deployment of vaccines in countries with high transmission rate. The collaboration and coordination of the global community to save lives and end the pandemic highlighted the crucial role of Customs at borders.*

*To facilitate one of the greatest ever cold chain operations, the Secretariat of the World Customs Organization (WCO) promptly produced a number of strategic tools providing specialized guidance to Members' Customs administrations and supporting them in tackling this challenge in an efficient and harmonized manner. The WCO has also taken a leadership role by partnering with international organizations and relevant stakeholders to foster global recovery, resilience and preparedness. It is an absolute priority to ensure a seamless flow of relief goods and facilitate the distribution of essential goods and medicines. The WCO is fully committed to providing its resources and know-how to ensure supply chain continuity and to make goods available rapidly to those in need, including by encouraging and coordinating global action by Customs.*

*Customs trade facilitation measures are crucial to mitigate the health and socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Improved cooperation between border agencies, the digitalization of procedures and the streamlining of policies and processes, to name but a few measures, make it possible to reduce red tape and to scale up the global vaccination response. For this reason, it is particularly appropriate to make trade facilitation, including the cross-border movement of critical medical goods and vaccines, the focus of this second edition of the WCO COVID-19 Newsletter produced as part of the COVID-19 Project, thus providing readers with an update on the latest initiatives and best practices. I hope that you will find the content and the insights provided by contributors on highly relevant topics informative. The fight against COVID-19 is not over; however, together we are taking multiple steps forward towards a successful conclusion.*

## Table of Contents

The WCO COVID-19 Project 2

The WCO COVID-19 Project enhances preparedness during disruptive events by promoting the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) 3

Update on the new WCO Guidelines 6

The WCO Compliance and Facilitation Directorate on track to reach the objectives of the WCO COVID-19 Action Plan 7

Hybrid AEO Validation: the way forward to secure and facilitate global supply chains 8

Virtual Validation Plan: recommendations to meet AEO programme (re)validation requirements remotely 9

Fostering global health: WCO a key player in the COVID-19 vaccination campaign 10

The importance of improving the operational preparedness of Customs administrations: the perspective of humanitarian actors 11

# The WCO COVID-19 Project

As part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in June 2020 the WCO launched the WCO COVID-19 Project with the financial support of the Government of Japan. The Project aims to support WCO Members (especially least developed and developing countries) in dealing with the impact of COVID-19 and to enhance their response to the pandemic. The overall purpose is to ensure the security, stability and continuity of global supply chains, while facilitating and expediting the supply of emergency relief goods.

**95**

Over the past year **95 WCO Members** have benefitted from the Project's events.

**5/6**

**WCO regions**

WCO COVID-19 Project's activities have covered **5 of the 6 WCO regions**.

**9**

To date **9 events** of different formats have been held in the framework of COVID-19 Project.



**130+**

More than **130 working hours** were dedicated to capacity building activities over the last year.

**30+**



More than **30 international experts** from various international agencies are assisting with Project implementation. Among our international partners, the WCO is closely cooperating with UNOCHA, UNCTAD, IFRC, IMPACCT, IDB and GATF.

Additional information on the Project is available here:

<http://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/facilita-tion/activities-and-pro-grammes/natural-disas-ter/coronavirus.aspx>



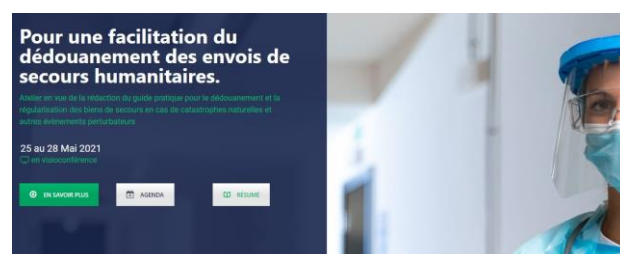
## The WCO COVID-19 Project helps Members in enhancing preparedness to better face disruptive events by supporting the development of standard operating procedures (SOPs)

One of the take-home messages shared by the international community, following the considerable joint financial, operational and humanitarian efforts made over recent months to tackle the global health crisis, is that we should be better equipped for the future, learning from past mistakes so as to respond effectively to unpredictable scenarios.

The disruption brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has generated extremely high economic and social costs and, with the increase in natural hazards and extreme weather events resulting from climate change, it appears clear that even when the pandemic is behind us, decision-makers will not be able to let their guard down if they want to protect citizens and safeguard economic prosperity.

International trade fuels the economic development of countries and must be facilitated. For supply chain stakeholders, who are tightly interconnected and interdependent, the absence of emergency measures could disrupt the flow of physical goods and the data and information associated with it, triggering a domino effect. This would also delay the delivery and increase the cost of humanitarian aid, putting the survival of countless numbers of people at risk.

Customs administrations are the vital link that facilitates and expedites the movement of relief and emergency goods, thus ensuring the continuity of humanitarian operations and minimizing the overall impact of natural disasters and similar events. During the pandemic, WCO Members having implemented emergency standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the clearance of relief consignments and supplies have reported many advantages stemming from the use of such a tool.



Home page of the website set up for the "Online workshop to assist Madagascar Customs in drafting Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the clearance and regularization of relief goods in case of natural disasters and other disruptive events", held on 25-28 May. <http://www.douanes.gov.mg/events/>



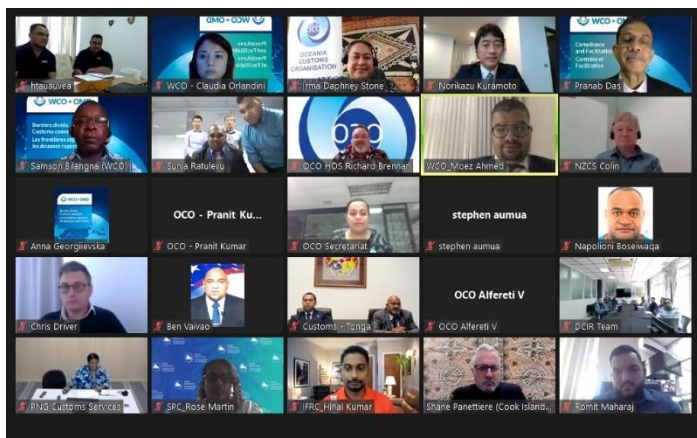


Photo showing the opening ceremony of the "WCO online sub-regional workshop to assist the Pacific Islands in improving their capacity in the clearance and regularization of relief goods in case of natural disasters and other disruptive events" held on the 19-21, 26 October 2021

In the June 2011 Resolution of the Customs Co-operation Council on the role of Customs in natural disaster relief, the WCO committed to supporting its Members in efficiently and effectively responding to emergencies. Through its COVID-19 Project, the WCO has been delivering capacity-building activities to beneficiary Customs administrations, helping them develop SOPs based on recognized best practices and high-level international standards. In particular, the Project has organized national workshops to foster the preparedness of certain WCO Members, namely Madagascar, Benin and Guatemala, as well as similar sub-regional initiatives for the Pacific islands and for the Members of the Central American Customs Committee. Through the guidance provided by experts from the WCO and partner international organizations, participants had the opportunity to identify bottlenecks in the importation of relief consignments and to reflect on how to streamline procedures and better manage relief goods and equipment clearance processes.

The workshops brought together a number of different actors involved in the humanitarian aid supply chain, including Customs administrations (both headquarters and frontline offices), border agencies, national authorities responsible for emergency plans, ministries and international organizations, such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Global Logistics Cluster, the World Food Programme (WFP) country offices, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the World Health Organization (WHO), Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private-sector stakeholders. Participants agreed that, in the case of disasters, effective coordination is vital to share the correct information on how to import aid supplies in a timely manner, thus ensuring full compliance with the requirements of the different links of the supply chain, including those of Customs and other border control authorities.

With the assistance of the WCO COVID-19 Project, participants in capacity-building activities reviewed and improved a number of Customs procedures, in both digital and hard copy format, including special procedures for expedited clearance of essential medical goods, vaccines and food products, enhanced coordination between different border authorities and expanded the use of an Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) programme. The next scheduled activities to be carried out by the WCO COVID-19 Project entail holding simulation exercises in selected beneficiary countries to test the procedures in place for the facilitation of relief consignments, aimed at fine-tuning Customs' readiness and enhancing coordination between all stakeholders involved in the importation of humanitarian aid.

*"Simplified procedures have been put in place to tackle COVID-19, but they are temporary. We now need a formal tool to expedite clearance".*

**Mr. Ernest Zafivanona Lainkana, Director General of Madagascar Customs**

*"Customs are key players in supply chain continuity and the facilitation of relief goods: this has been further confirmed by COVID-19".*

**Mr. Xavier Mitchell, Chairman of the Oceania Customs Organization**

*"Implementing harmonized recommendations is critical, as it will allow to better face future challenges".*

**Mr. W. Ovalle Ramirez, President Pro Tempore of the Central American Customs Committee and Director General of Guatemala Customs**



Photo showing the high-level panel of the "WCO online sub-regional workshop to assist Central American Customs Committee Members in improving their capacity in the processing of relief goods in case of natural disasters and other disruptive events", held from 15 to 17 November 2021. From left to right: Mr. Juan José Vides Mejía, Director General of Honduras Customs, Mr. Ricardo Treviño Chapa, Deputy Secretary General, WCO, Mr. W. Ovalle Ramirez, President Pro Tempore of the Central American Customs Committee and Director General of Guatemala Customs.

- The WCO COVID-19 Project supports Madagascar Customs in enhancing its preparedness by drafting SOPs to expedite the movement of relief goods and humanitarian aid: <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/media/newsroom/2021/june/the-wco-covid-19-project-supports-madagascar-customs.aspx>
- Online capacity-building workshop organized by the WCO COVID-19 Project supports Benin Customs in efficiently responding to pandemics and other natural disasters: <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/media/newsroom/2021/july/online-capacity-building-workshop-organized-by-the-wco-covid-19-project.aspx>
- Guatemala Customs reviews its SOPs for the movement of relief goods with the support of the WCO COVID-19 Project: <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/media/newsroom/2021/october/guatemala-customs-reviews-its-standard-operating-procedures-for-the-movement-of-relief-goods.aspx>
- The WCO COVID-19 Project supports Pacific islands Customs in efficiently facilitating the movement of emergency goods during disruptive events: <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/media/newsroom/2021/october/the-wco-covid-19-project-supports-pacific-islands-customs.aspx>
- Central American Customs Committee Members lay the foundations for a roadmap on disaster management with the support of the WCO COVID-19 Project <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/media/newsroom/2021/november/central-american-customs-committee-members-lay-the-foundations-for-a-roadmap.aspx>



*“The COVID-19 Project will allow Customs to better face disruptive scenarios such as COVID-19 by facilitating the continuity of the global supply chain and improving the protection of Customs officers by reducing the risk of infection.”*

**Mr. Charles Inoussa Sacca Boco,  
Director General of Benin Customs**

*Photo showing participants in the “Online workshop to assist Benin Customs in drafting SOPs for the clearance and regularization of relief goods in case of natural disasters and other disruptive events”, held from 19 to 22 July 2021 in Cotonou (Benin).*





## Update on the WCO Guidelines on disaster management and supply chain continuity

To overcome the numerous hurdles stemming from the COVID-19 crisis, WCO Members have worked hard to simplify and digitalize existing Customs procedures, supporting humanitarian interventions and providing economic relief to supply chain actors relying on trade facilitation to keep their business operations going.

The “WCO Guidelines on disaster management and supply chain continuity” that were drafted in the framework of the WCO COVID-19 Project comprise a set of guiding principles and best practices shared by WCO Members and relevant stakeholders. Customs administrations’ expertise was crucial in developing this innovative tool, embedding national and regional priorities and raising awareness of the role played by border authorities in disaster management.

The Guidelines were approved by the WCO Council at its 138th Session in June 2021. As it is a living document, the text will be updated and enriched on a regular basis in order to take account of the most advanced practices put in place by WCO Members and stakeholders. A reviewed version of the Guidelines was submitted to the WCO Permanent Technical Committee (PTC) for discussion and potential endorsement at the latter’s 233rd/234th Sessions in October 2021. It contains additional content on combating counterfeit medicines,

controlling transboundary movements of medical waste, anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing.

The Guidelines are available here:

[http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/guidelines-disaster-management\\_en.pdf?db=web](http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/guidelines-disaster-management_en.pdf?db=web)

# The WCO Compliance and Facilitation Directorate is on track to achieve the objectives of the WCO COVID-19 Action Plan

By Pranab Kumar Das, Director of the WCO Compliance and Facilitation Directorate

**In January 2021, the WCO launched its COVID-19 Action Plan. This ambitious initiative, designed to tackle the current global health crisis, includes 25 strategic actions to be implemented over an 18-month period. The Action Plan confirms, once again, the commitment of the Organization to support the Customs community in the fight against COVID-19 and to enhance Members' role in the Customs processing of critical medicines and vaccines.**

During the pandemic, Customs administrations have been under severe pressure to facilitate the movement of high volumes of critical goods while protecting legitimate trade from different types of disruptions, including criminal ones. With its longstanding expertise in trade facilitation and enforcement matters, the WCO Compliance and Facilitation Directorate is particularly well placed to support administrations in this challenging task and, since the launch of the Action Plan, has taken important steps forward in implementing the actions under its responsibility.

In order to preserve supply chain continuity during this critical period, the Directorate has been supporting Members in developing new tools and improving existing ones to make them more effective during the pandemic and similar scenarios. Although the provisions on disaster relief contained in the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC) were already under review before the crisis, the ones related to COVID-19, such as relief consignments, IT and technologies, Coordinated Border Management and Rules of Origin, were given renewed attention. Before the end of this year, Step 4 of the revision process will be launched with a view to potentially completing a draft updated text by March 2023. The SAFE 2021 Framework of Standards (FoS) underwent a successful review cycle and was approved by the WCO Council in June 2021. The SAFE 2021 FoS contains provisions of particular relevance for tackling COVID-19, such as cooperation with other government agencies, the use of smart security devices, regional integration, and the harmonization of Advance Electronic Information (AEI) data elements. Furthermore, the second edition of the Secretariat Note on the role of Customs in facilitating and securing the cross-border movement of situationally critical medicines and vaccines was published<sup>1</sup> and the WCO Guidelines on disaster management and supply chain continuity were approved by the WCO Council and made available to the public<sup>2</sup>. An additional chapter on enforcement issues was submitted to

the 233rd/234th Sessions of the PTC in October 2021, at which it was endorsed. Given the importance of efficiently combating the movement of illicit medical goods, risk management has also been a high-priority topic on the Directorate's agenda. A new document on "Customs risk management during a pandemic" was produced and endorsed by the Enforcement Committee at its 41st Session. A number of initiatives were also organized at national and regional levels. The WCO's Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), Health and Safety Programme ran the first series of WCO workshops aimed at improving Customs administrations' awareness of counterfeit COVID-19-related goods, bringing together officials from the WCO Asia/Pacific (A/P), Europe, and North of Africa, Near and Middle East (MENA) regions. Additionally, given the considerable success of Operation STOP in 2020, in April 2021 the Directorate launched Operation STOP II. This provided a timely response to the global increase in illicit trafficking linked to COVID-19 and facilitated the careful monitoring of trends in such criminal activities, thus preventing national markets from being flooded by out of date, illegal and counterfeit goods (including COVID-19 test kits, sanitizer gels, masks, goggles, thermometers and medical gowns).

The Compliance and Facilitation Directorate has been actively raising awareness at different institutional levels about the role played by Customs administrations and sharing WCO Members' best practices to counter the threats to the health and safety of citizens for a number of important areas of competence. In parallel, it has ensured that the latest information, data and tools to operate in such a difficult context have been disseminated regularly. By fostering dialogue and joint action between Members, the WCO has contributed to maintaining the high standards of professionalism and reputation that make Customs highly appreciated and recognized by the wider international community.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/covid\\_19\\_vaccine/secretariat-note-vaccines\\_en.pdf?la=en](http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/covid_19_vaccine/secretariat-note-vaccines_en.pdf?la=en)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/facilitation/instrument-and-tools/tools/guidelines-on-disaster-management.aspx>

# Hybrid AEO validation: the way forward to secure and facilitate global supply chains

By Hong Nguyen and Goro Suzuki, WCO Facilitation and Procedures Sub-Directorate

During the peak of the pandemic in mid-2020, several Customs administrations implemented innovative measures to carry out daily activities under stay-at-home or social distancing measures. The COVID-19 best practices<sup>3</sup> shared by WCO Members show that Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) consultation procedures have been replaced by various pioneering means, such as exchange of information via e-mail, telephone calls and virtual meetings. AEO virtual re-validation has also been piloted by some Members to maintain AEO certification for compliant AEOs.

Within the SAFE Working Group environment, WCO Members and the Private Sector Consultative Group (PSCG) conducted a review of several tools and instruments in the SAFE Package and suggested managing validation and re-validation virtually. The consolidated “AEO Implementation and Validation Guidance” was approved by the WCO Council in June 2021. The Guidance suggests that, depending on the requirements and circumstances of each Member, the AEO validation process should be carried out in a physical, virtual or hybrid manner.

Physical validation (on-site) should remain the main method when assessing a new AEO applicant given that, thanks to its live premises inspection and procedures testing, it offers the best possible conditions to understand the client’s architecture in a holistic manner.

Virtual re-validation is conducted remotely and allows Customs to perform relevant verification activities when the physical format is not applicable or appropriate, as has been the case during the pandemic. It is recommended not to use this procedure for new applicants unless justified and carefully considered by the relevant Customs administration.

Hybrid validation is a combination of the physical and virtual validation methods and the most helpful process put forward by the Guidance. This hybrid approach can serve as a useful tool to complement traditional validation, providing a viable



option to avoid supply chain disruption and permit the rollout of AEO programmes.

“Building back better” after the pandemic requires Customs to commit to bolstering sustainability for recovery and resilient supply chains. Accordingly, it is highly recommended that technology and creativity be applied to the measures implemented to run daily activities, helping businesses to overcome the economic crisis, save resources and stay well connected with stakeholders.

In this context, hybrid AEO validations are becoming the new norm worldwide, notably in the United States and in many countries in Latin America and in the Asia/Pacific region. In 2021, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) conducted nearly 1,000 virtual validations<sup>4</sup> and the Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT) Programme Director indicated that these virtual validations would continue to be an integral part of the Programme for qualifying members. The Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) also initiated a joint virtual validation initiative for the envisaged AEO Mutual Recognition Arrangement<sup>5</sup>. The WCO and PSCG Members have made a commitment to continue working towards fostering a harmonized approach, making hybrid AEO validation a valuable solution for moving forward.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/coronavirus.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.bing.com/search?q=ctpat+virtual+validation&form=PRBENL&pc=EUPP\\_DCTE&httpsmsn=1&msnews=1&refig=b4b48adb6c2b4e67ac09067be0413e5a&sp=1&q=UT&pq=ctpat+virtual+va&sk=PRE51&sc=1-16&cvid=b4b48adb6c2b4e67ac09067be0413e5a](https://www.bing.com/search?q=ctpat+virtual+validation&form=PRBENL&pc=EUPP_DCTE&httpsmsn=1&msnews=1&refig=b4b48adb6c2b4e67ac09067be0413e5a&sp=1&q=UT&pq=ctpat+virtual+va&sk=PRE51&sc=1-16&cvid=b4b48adb6c2b4e67ac09067be0413e5a)

<sup>5</sup> [https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/DG-30-48-Joint-Media-Statement\\_Final-00000002.pdf](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/DG-30-48-Joint-Media-Statement_Final-00000002.pdf)



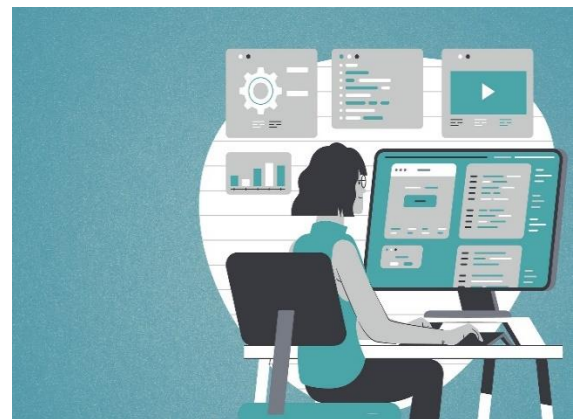
## Virtual Validation Plan: recommendations to meet AEO programme (re)validation requirements remotely



- ★ Ideally, on-site validations should be the primary validation method, rather than remote ones.
- ★ If social distancing measures are in place, Customs should conduct physical follow-up visits as soon as possible.
- ★ AEO companies who were initially validated virtually should be re-validated on-site, or at least through a hybrid approach, at the start of the re-validation cycle.
- ★ The “trust but verify” approach should be applied by carefully using the Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ).

### In the event of virtual validations

- ★ Collect as much evidence as possible in advance.
- ★ Store data through an automated record-keeping system or an encrypted USB drive (e.g. Iron Keys)
- ★ Make sure that the record is properly maintained during the participants’ life cycle in the AEO programme.
- ★ Use a video conferencing platform for face-to-face question and answer sessions.
- ★ Ensure that the company has relevant documentation available in a digital format



*Unlike on-site validations, which are usually conducted in one day, virtual validations should be more flexible and may be organized over several days or even weeks, subject to the presence of the company’s staff to substantiate compliance.*

# Fostering global health: the WCO is a key player in the COVID-19 vaccination campaign and vaccine distribution



**To some of us, time may have appeared to stand still during the most acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. We were stuck at home because of lockdowns, trying to maintain a daily routine while monitoring trends in infection rates on the media, our window to the outside world, and dealing with the emotional burden of the unknown.**

The WCO sprang into action alongside other international players, supporting its Members in ensuring the continuity of supply chains and subsequently facilitating the largest vaccine distribution operation of modern times. A few days after the announcement by the pharmaceutical industry about the successful development of COVID-19 vaccines, the WCO Council unanimously adopted a Resolution on the Role of Customs in Facilitating the Cross-Border Movement of Situationally Critical Medicines and Vaccines at its 137th Session<sup>6</sup>. This Resolution encourages Customs administrations to implement simplified and harmonized standards on a number of key procedures, such as risk-based controls and inspections, the treatment of specialized containers, the handling of temperature-sensitive items and coordination with relevant government agencies. It also instructs the Secretariat to put in place specific measures for Members, helping them to respond to COVID-19 in an agile and effective manner.

In January 2021, the WCO Secretary General reached out to Members to encourage them to share up-to-date information and best practices to facilitate the distribution of vaccines across borders, strengthening effective cooperation between Customs administrations on a global scale. The WCO also released a new HS classification reference for vaccines and related supplies and equipment<sup>7</sup>, produced in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and relating to manufacturing, distribution and use matters. In February 2021, the WCO Secretariat released a Note on the role of Customs in facilitating and securing the cross-border movement of situationally critical medicines and vaccines, containing a number of Members' case studies and operational guidelines. An updated version of the Note was published in May 2021<sup>8</sup>.

Over the past year, the WCO has been actively working with partner international organizations, thus maximizing the impact of its work and fully contributing to the fight against

COVID-19. Joint statements were circulated, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)/WCO statement on the global transportation and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and associated medical supplies<sup>9</sup>, fostering safe, secure and efficient transport across borders. In April 2021, the WCO Secretary General took part in an event organized by the World Trade Organization (WTO) on COVID-19 and Vaccine Equity, highlighting the role played by Customs in tackling the challenges linked to cold supply chains, limited supplies and the scale of distribution.

The WCO also joined the Working Group on Free Flow of Goods under the Supply Chain and Manufacturing Taskforce of the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) initiative, alongside the WTO, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA) and individual pharmaceutical companies. In July of this year, the Joint Indicative List of Critical COVID-19 Vaccine Inputs<sup>10</sup> was issued as a result of collective work carried out in cooperation with the WTO, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), vaccine manufacturers and other organizations, providing consolidated information on the manufacturing, storage, distribution and administration of vaccines.

The work of the WCO Secretariat to support Customs administrations in facilitating the vaccine distribution effort is ongoing. Guidance materials and best practices are being streamlined and reviewed regularly in consultation with WCO Members, international partners and relevant stakeholders. Customs administrations worldwide are facing similar challenges and the WCO is committed to helping them develop the most efficient and up-to-date tools, thus jointly overcoming the hurdles faced and ensuring greater protection of the health of citizens around the world as well as of the global economy.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/about-us/legal-instruments/resolutions/resolution-facilitating-cross-border-movement-of-situationally-critical-medicines-and-vaccines.pdf?la=en>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/covid-19-list-for-vaccines/hs-classification-reference-vaccines-english.pdf?la=en>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/covid\\_19\\_vaccine/secretariat-note-vaccines\\_en.pdf?la=en](http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/covid_19_vaccine/secretariat-note-vaccines_en.pdf?la=en)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/covid\\_19\\_vaccine/t-on-the-global-transportation-and-distribution-of-covid\\_19-vaccines-and-associated-medical-supplies\\_en.pdf?la=en](http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/covid_19_vaccine/t-on-the-global-transportation-and-distribution-of-covid_19-vaccines-and-associated-medical-supplies_en.pdf?la=en)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/media/newsroom/2021/july/joint-indicative-list-of-critical-covid-19-vaccine.aspx>



## The importance of improving the operational preparedness of Customs administrations: the perspective of humanitarian actors

By Virginie Bohl, former United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) Officer and IMPACCT Group Coordinator

A lack of operational preparedness of Customs administrations can have consequences for all actors involved in disaster relief. The greatest impact is felt by the affected populations who do not receive the humanitarian aid they need to survive. This makes it difficult for humanitarian organizations to fulfil their mission of saving lives. Any lack of preparedness is also felt by Customs administrations which are faced with the dual challenge of protecting borders from the importation of prohibited goods and criminal activities and guarding against the misuse of humanitarian channels for tax advantages or other reasons, while simultaneously ensuring the rapid and efficient importation of relief goods and equipment to provide timely assistance to people in need. However, despite United Nations (UN) resolutions, recommendations and international instruments, in many countries clear procedures and protocols and effective cross-border facilitation measures are far from being implemented.

Firstly, focus should be placed on the WCO's international conventions, such as the RKC and its Annex J-5 on relief goods; the Istanbul Convention on Temporary Admission and its Annex B.9 on goods imported for humanitarian aid purposes; and the Tampere Convention on the provision of telecommunication resources for disaster mitigation and relief operations. The provisions of these conventions should be included in national legislation. This would, among other things, provide legal facilities for assisting humanitarian organizations, such as exemption from all duties and taxes, simplification and reduction to a minimum of the documentation required for importation, and minimal inspections to release humanitarian aid containers as quickly as possible.

Secondly, as most of the goods imported in the context of relief operations are regulated ones, coordination and collaboration between Customs administrations and other regulatory authorities should be strengthened. For example, the importation of medicines and medical equipment or the importation of telecommunications equipment after a disaster requires the approval of several government agencies, which can be a lengthy and complicated process. The creation and implementation of an operational One Stop Border Post (OSBP) at humanitarian entry points, bringing together the various stakeholders, would be an important contribution to simplifying border formalities.

Thirdly and finally, the drafting of SOPs makes it possible to describe all the mechanisms and procedures that must be applied when importing humanitarian aid. These procedures are useful not only for Customs officials at points of entry to ensure that procedures are applied uniformly, but also, and more importantly, for humanitarian actors who are responsible for importing relief goods. Without them, logistics providers are unable to meet the administrative requirements for the rapid, correct and lawful clearance of imported goods.





**Get in touch:**  
[COVID19BCProject@wcoomd.org](mailto:COVID19BCProject@wcoomd.org)

### Editorial note

The COVID-19 Project Newsletter is distributed free of charge in English and French and is available on the WCO website. The WCO COVID-19 Project Team wishes to express its sincere thanks to all contributors. Please note that the opinions expressed in this Newsletter are the Team's own and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Organization. The WCO Secretariat reserves the right to publish, not to publish or edit articles to ensure they conform to the Newsletter's editorial policy. Contributions are welcome in English and French.

Photo credits: P. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11: ©Pixabay © World Customs Organization;