

NATO's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, NATO continues to deliver credible and effective deterrence and defence. Our ability to conduct operations has not been undermined, our forces remain ready, and our crucial work goes on.

From the start of the outbreak, NATO has implemented robust measures to limit the spread of the virus and minimise risks to our personnel and the communities they serve. NATO military medical staff remain vigilant and are monitoring for any impact on NATO forces deployed on operations.

NATO is also a platform for sharing information and best practice among Allies. As part of NATO's work to strengthen resilience, we have been working with Allies for years to enhance preparedness across the whole of government, including in the health sector.

Allies continue to stand together and support each other in this pandemic, through different NATO arrangements, as well as bilaterally. Allied armed forces across the Alliance are also playing an essential role in supporting national civilian efforts.

NATO and Allied Measures

- Allied armed forces** are playing a vital role in supporting national civilian responses across the Alliance. This support includes logistics and planning, field hospitals, the transport of patients, disinfection of public areas, and at border crossings.
- NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC)** is an important tool helping to provide relief to Allies and partners. It is NATO's principal civil emergency response mechanism in the Euro-Atlantic area. The Centre operates on a 24/7 basis, coordinating requests from NATO Allies and partners for help, as well as offers of assistance to cope with the consequences of major crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. **For example**, in response to requests for assistance from North Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 8 April Turkey provided all three countries medical supplies, including protective clothing, masks and test kits. On 9 April, in response to a request by Spain, Luxembourg donated 1,440 kilos of TYVEK material to make protective equipment for health personnel. Earlier, in bilateral aid to North Macedonia, Hungary provided 100,000 masks and 5,000 protective suits and Slovenia provided 200,000 masks. The U.S. Government has committed \$1.1 million to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak in North Macedonia. North Macedonia received a field hospital donated by Norway, allowing it to double the capacity at the Infectious Disease Clinic at Skopje's largest hospital in the combat against Covid-19. Norway also donated medical supplies to North Macedonia worth 180,000 Euro. In response to Spain and Italy's requests for assistance made through the EADRCC, the Czech Republic bilaterally provided both countries with medical supplies, including 10,000 protective medical suits each. Through the same mechanism, Turkey provided Italy and Spain with medical supplies such as masks, personal protection equipment and disinfectants.
- The **NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA)** has a leading role in responding to the crisis. The NSPA provides logistics support and the organisation of transport of key supplies and equipment to Allies, partners and other international organisations. As of 11 April, the NSPA has delivered Intensive Care Unit ventilators to Italy, personal protective equipment to Spain and medical supplies to Norway. Earlier, the NSPA had helped Luxembourg increase its hospital capacity by providing field hospital tents, mobilising equipment in less than 24 hours.
- NATO supports the **Strategic Airlift International Solution (SALIS)** programme. The programme enables participating Allies to charter commercial transport aircraft. **For example**, on 10 April Poland used SALIS to import 190,000 masks and 180,000 protective suits. Earlier, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have used SALIS to import planeloads of medical supplies, including facemasks, surgical gloves and protective suits.



Turkish military A400M Aircraft being loaded with medical equipment for the United Kingdom at Ankara airbase, TUR. Photo by TUR MOD.



Military transport aircraft CASA of the Czech Army transporting 1,000,000 masks to North Macedonia.

- As part of the **Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC)**, participating Allies and partner countries jointly own and operate three C-17 Globemaster heavy cargo aircraft, sharing flying hours and costs. **For example**, Romania has used the capability to import protective material with three shipments during this month, including a shipment of 100,000 suits on 8 April, with support of the United States.
- **Bilateral assistance between Allies and between Allies and partners** continues to be an important part of the international response, showing the strength of NATO solidarity. **For example**, a Czech Army aircraft transported 1,000,000 masks to North Macedonia on 10 April. Earlier on 3 April two Spanish military aircraft transported 50 ventilators sent by the German government to Spain. The German air force flew Italian and French patients for treatment, and doctors from Poland and Albania travelling to help their Italian colleagues.
- Allied armed forces are also **supporting local communities in NATO areas of operations**. **For example**, on 7 April the US-led KFOR Regional Command East delivered gloves, face masks and other medical supplies to the Mayors of Mitrovica North and South in Kosovo.
- The **reinforcement of NATO deployments with medical teams** allows allied armed forces to ensure that deployed troops stay healthy, that all precautionary measures are taken, and that local health care systems are not burdened. **For example**, military medics from Croatia, Germany and the Netherlands arrived in Lithuania on 13 April to reinforce NATO's enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup.
- The **Movements Coordination Centre Europe (MCCE)** provides logistical support in optimizing the use of airlift, sealift and land movement assets of armed forces. The Centre supports its 28 member nations from NATO and the European Union, by providing coordination services, comparing military movement requests and available transport assets, both military and chartered. It operates under a Technical Agreement signed by its member nations and is based in the Netherlands.
- **NATO's Rapid Air Mobility** initiative has simplified procedures for military relief flights, by using a NATO call sign and expediting Air Traffic Control clearances. The initiative is made possible by close cooperation between NATO and EUROCONTROL. **For example**, on 10 April the Rapid Air Mobility Initiative facilitated the delivery of medical supplies and protective equipment from Turkey to the United Kingdom.
- **Cooperation with partner countries and international organisations** continues to be essential for NATO. We are coordinating with the World Health Organization, the United Nations, and the European Union. In particular, NATO and EU staffs are cooperating to counter disinformation about COVID-19. We also remain in close contact with the ICRC and the OSCE.



A C-17 Globemaster cargo plane at Bucharest airport with 45 tons of supplies to combat the effects of the pandemic.
Photo by Laurentio Turoi

Rapid Air Mobility - Background

The North Atlantic Council authorized on 2 April 2020 the application of NATO's Rapid Air Mobility (RAM) process in order to facilitate unimpeded military air transport of medical supplies and resources needed across Europe. This supports relief flights carrying cargo and personnel critical to the fight against the pandemic.

NATO's Rapid Air Mobility is an established process designed to speed up military reinforcement by air. Military aircraft are assigned a unique NATO Call Sign, enabling the expeditious handling for air traffic control and accelerated diplomatic clearances for the flights. With the NATO Call Sign, relief flights benefit from fast track diplomatic clearance as well as from the removal of route restrictions by the European Organization for the Safety of Air Navigation (EUROCONTROL) along the route. The NATO Call Sign identifies to EUROCONTROL which flight plans require priority handling. In accordance with the Rapid Air Mobility process, SHAPE is responsible for coordinating the assignment of the NATO Call Signs in concert with EUROCONTROL.

More information: <https://www.nato.int/covid19>

Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC):

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_117757.htm

NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA):

<https://www.nspa.nato.int/en/index.htm>

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