



Humanitarian Military Interaction — COVID-19 in Complex Emergencies

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

WFP, its beneficiaries and the humanitarian community face a variety of challenges when interacting with militaries and other armed actors in contexts of ongoing armed conflict, let alone amidst a global pandemic like COVID-19. In order to address these concerns, this document outlines several FAQs obtained from WFP field staff that can be used to guide and support decision making during the COVID-19 response.

Relations with the military/armed actors in my area of operation are tense, and there is a high degree of suspicion towards the humanitarian community.

How do I manage relationships with these actors now, during the COVID-19 response?

- ◆ In discussions and negotiations with military/armed actors emphasize **mutual objectives**, including:
 - Preventing the spread of COVID-19 to military/armed actor personnel, humanitarian staff and beneficiaries alike.
 - Mitigating the impact of prevention and response measures through planning and coordination.
 - Sustaining existing WFP and humanitarian-wide assistance.
- ◆ Remember that any difficult trade-offs are decided on collectively with the CO, and should be considered based on WFP's acceptable level of risk. See the [Emergency Field Operations Pocketbook](#) for more info.
- ◆ Physical restrictions can make face-to-face discussions difficult and potentially unsafe. Ensure to find **other ways of communicating**, including secure messaging and voice service applications for phones and computers.
- ◆ Should physical interaction be necessary, interact discretely and preferably out of sight of the media.

Beneficiaries have expressed concern over the increased presence/activities conducted by the military/other armed actors.

How do you approach these concerns with beneficiaries and military alike?

- ◆ Beneficiaries may experience adverse reactions to the presence and measures enforced by military/armed actors, including strict lockdowns and restrictions on movement.
- ◆ The military/other armed actors may not be aware or fully comprehend how their actions are perceived or the potentially determinantal impact their actions have on protection and the ability to access basic services.
- ◆ You may choose to communicate and raise concerns of beneficiaries (e.g. emergency movement after curfew, children's exposure to weapons) with the military/other armed actors, anonymously and while ensuring to preserve the dignity and safety of both staff and beneficiaries.
- ◆ **Coordinated messaging** should be devised between relevant staff (e.g. Protection, Security, M&E, etc.) prior to discussions with military/other armed actors.

How do I address the perception by military/armed actors that humanitarian staff are a potential risk for the COVID-19 spread?

- ◆ As is with beneficiaries and communities, **gaining trust and acceptance** is a highly important investment with military/armed actors. Encourage dialogue about this concern by using **facts** related to COVID-19.
- ◆ The [WHO COVID-19 Webpage](#) and the [EPI-WIN Project](#) are useful resources.

- ◆ Reiterate WFP's mandate to deliver food assistance in emergencies and work with communities to improve nutrition and build resilience.
- ◆ Adhere to adequate prevention and mitigation measures to keep both yourself and the military/armed actors safe from contagion.
- ◆ **Should staff experience any verbal or physical harassment by military/armed actors, they should contact their Security Officer/Focal Point for advice and support.**

How do I respond to requests by military/other armed actors for aid and assistance for the purposes of their own personnel and operations?

- ◆ Though one can understand both the fears and concerns of militaries/armed actors also working to prevent and contain the virus, humanitarians need to remain (and be perceived as) **neutral and impartial**, with the sole aim of providing assistance to those who need it most.
- ◆ These types of requests must be coordinated through local Country Team structures and with a whole of government lens.
- ◆ Refer any requests for support by military/armed actors to senior management within the CO (e.g. Country Director or Deputy Country Director) and the OCHA CMCoord Officer/Focal Point.

In light of COVID-19, how do I discuss movement and access restrictions with the local military/other armed actors?

- ◆ In contexts with a plethora of humanitarian access and protection concerns, **outline current and potential constraints**, including those which could be construed as administrative restrictions related to COVID-19.
- ◆ **Prioritize** the issues you will discuss/negotiate on. Approach these topics with evidence to support your claims (e.g. number and type of access incidents, number of beneficiaries impacted, program criticality).
- ◆ Utilize the **humanitarian coordination structures** to raise common concerns and draft key messages.

- ◆ As enforcers and implementers, the military and other armed actors may be constrained and under pressure to prevent and respond to the virus. They may be highly limited in their ability to grant or permit adequate access. When necessary, **consider temporary alternatives to sustain operations.**
- ◆ Staff who are unable to pass through checkpoints or access an area should not put their safety and security at risk. Return home and contact the CO.
- ◆ Escalate urgent matters to CO Senior Management, UNOCHA and/or the Humanitarian Country Team.

How do I physically interact with military/armed actors while ensuring I remain healthy?

- ◆ Limit **any non-essential physical contact with military and other armed actors** to reduce the possibility of human-to-human transmission.
- ◆ If face-to-face interaction is nevertheless critical, make yourself aware of COVID-19 prevention strategies, including strict adherence to hand hygiene measures, respiratory etiquette and social distancing.
- ◆ Make sure you adhere to any guidelines implemented by the CO leadership and or Humanitarian Country Team for limiting in-person meetings.
- ◆ For the use of PPE staff may seek to align with the WHO guidance ([WHO Interim Guidance on the Rational Use of PPE for COVID-19](#)).

What resources can I use for further support and/or guidance?

- ◆ Your CO may decide to recruit a dedicated staff in country to engage with military/other armed actors. The [COVID-19 WFP Humanitarian Military Guidance](#) can provide you with advice, including a generic ToR for recruitment purposes. Additional guidance can be found on [OPWeb](#).
- ◆ **HQ's Humanitarian Military Interaction Unit- Hq.hmi@wfp.org** is available to support staff with any further questions or concerns.
- ◆ For any questions/requests related to **Humanitarian Access** please contact HQ_Technical_Access_Cell@wfp.org.