



CPC International Postal Update

By John Cicchitti

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The COVID-19 pandemic has presented historic challenges to the world's postal operators in 2020's first quarter. Below is a review of notable ways they are responding and other recent significant developments.

COVID-19 has led to closed borders and frozen transportation systems that prevent mail from moving between countries. Postal services struggle to balance worker safety and citizens' needs for mail and packages. Some consumers wonder whether their mail is safe to touch.

And there is good news as diplomacy leads to renewed postal service with Qatar and technological innovations come to places like Switzerland and Nigeria.

Coronavirus Upheaval Rocks Mail Delivery Across the Globe

The [World Economic Forum](#) (WEF) analyzed COVID-19's impact on international postal services. Here are some key findings:

- **Postal products are safe.** Virtually all official sources, including the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization, agree that it is generally safe to collect the mail, with a low to very low chance that coronavirus would be able to survive on mail and package surfaces. However, a new study warns that the coronavirus may survive up to 24 hours on cardboard. Standard precautionary measures (hand-washing, gloves, disinfectant, etc.) are wise when handling new deliveries.
- **Poste Italiane is still going strong.** Italy, which is so far bearing the worst of the pandemic, is still running its postal service at full capacity, according to the WEF. Though the country is suffering under a lockdown and a ten percent COVID-19 death rate for those infected, postal workers are pushing through to deliver the mail. Poste Italiane's efforts can be an example for posts across the world.



*A Poste Italiane sign in Rome.
Photo: Wikipedia*

- **Worker safety confronts increased e-commerce demand.** Unions representing postal workers are rightly concerned about their workers' health. But with people quarantined and unable to leave their homes, communities need postal workers more than ever. E-commerce demand has skyrocketed in places like the United Kingdom. Postal unions are worried the increased delivery volume is putting members at risk, and they're asking delivery services and e-commerce companies to limit sales to essential goods. The Communications Workers' Union, which represents postal workers in the United Kingdom, [encouraged](#) its members to take a sick day rather than deliver "pointless junk mail." Workers [answered](#) that call, forcing Royal Mail to consider reducing service.
- **Many borders are closed to mail delivery.** The [WEF](#) points out "a lengthening list of border closures and the disruption to air routes worldwide" is hamstringing international delivery service. With countries trying to limit contact with others, it was inevitable that international mail would see a temporary stoppage.

Countries Halt Chinese Mail

A number of national posts suspended the delivery of mail originating in China in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. New Zealand, [The New Zealand Herald](#) reports, discontinued mail to and from China after airlines stopped flights. Kazpost, Kazakhstan's postal service, also stopped their mail delivery to and from China, says [Reuters](#). And according to South Africa's [Sunday Times](#), the South African Post Office similarly suspended deliveries with China, citing challenges associated with COVID-19.

China has responded by disinfecting post offices to reassure delivery customers, the [Associated Press](#) reports.

Switzerland Initiates Same-Day Delivery in Zurich, Drone Delivery of Medical Items



The Swiss Post logo. Photo: Twitter

Zurich residents are the beneficiaries of a trial of same-day delivery from Swiss Post subsidiary notime, according to the [Postal Hub Podcast](#). The new process allows residents to receive "individual orders from online retailer Digitec Galaxus in their original packaging - without an address label, box and filler material." The service only uses carbon-neutral vehicles like bicycles.

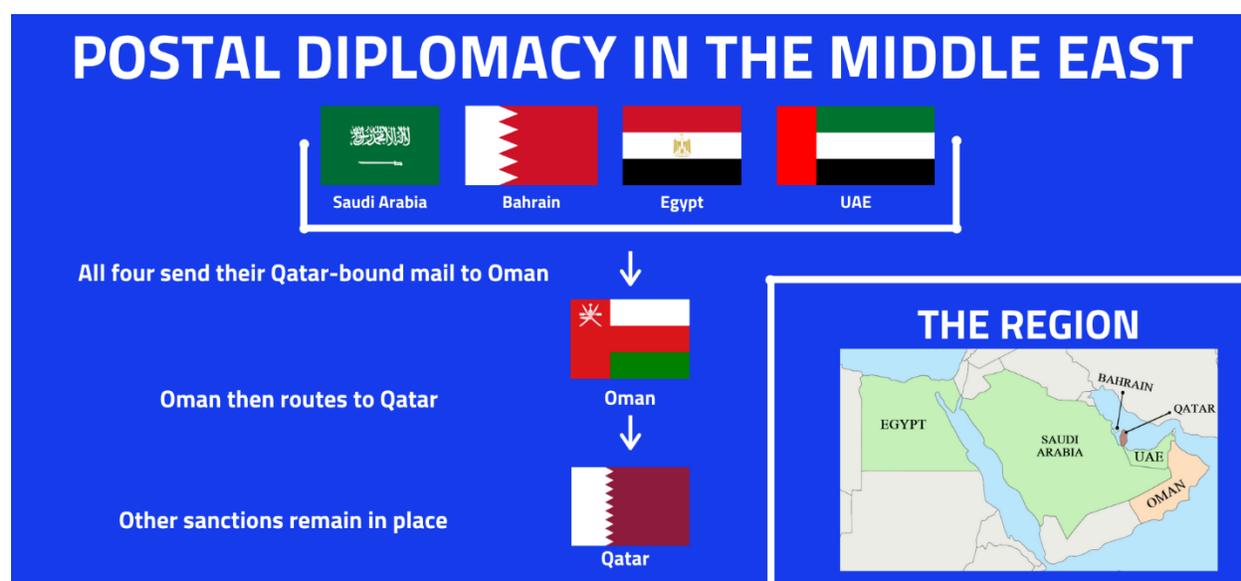
And in a separate development that could help the country's response to coronavirus, Swiss Post and Matternet resumed transporting

medical samples via drone. [Post and Parcel](#) reports that the program was previously grounded after several accidents. Subsequent investigations reveal however that the efforts “maintain high safety standards and a high level of safety awareness.”

Middle Eastern Countries Resume Postal Service With Qatar

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Bahrain ended their postal embargo of Qatar in late February, announcing they would resume indirect delivery service through Oman, according to [Reuters](#). The United Arab Emirates [ended](#) its postal embargo a few weeks earlier. In 2017, the countries had “cut most political, trade, and transport ties with Qatar over charges it supports terrorism.” [Reuters](#) adds that a U.N.-sponsored meeting between the five countries’ postal representatives may have helped resolve the postal issues.

Despite postal restrictions being lifted, the terrorism-related dispute is ongoing, and the other sanctions remain in place.



Nigeria Introduces Postal-Communications Partnership

Nigeria’s Communications Commission and its Postal Service moved forward with a joint center for Internet commerce, e-governance and e-agriculture, according to [PM News](#) in Nigeria. The Post Master General of Nigeria, Dr. Ismail Adewusi, said that the two organizations will work to develop broadband networks in poorly covered areas and to expand postal banking.

Spain Investigates Amazon

Spain announced an investigation into Amazon's delivery practices and whether Amazon's business model makes the company a postal service. [Financial Post](#) writes, "If Amazon is deemed to be a postal service, the company would face increased scrutiny from local authorities." Amazon would need to comply with additional "labor, tax, privacy and immigration" laws if classified as a postal service.

Pos Malaysia Doubles Its Mail Fees

In late January, Malaysia's postal service doubled its rates for all mail weighing less than two kilograms. According to [The Edge Markets](#), Pos Malaysia's chief executive officer said the rate increase would reinforce the ability of the organization to meet its universal service obligation.

Pos Malaysia suffered financial difficulties in 2019, after falling mail volume and rising costs hammered the organization's bottom line. The U.S.-led reforms at the Universal Postal Union on terminal dues was also expected to exacerbate these trends. CPC discussed these issues in depth in our last international update [here](#).

United Nations Stamps Encourage Climate Change Action

The United Nations published a sheet of stamps to publicize its Act Now climate change effort, according to [Linn's Stamp News](#). The Act Now stamp sheet encourages its users to take numerous actions to fight climate change. These include shorter showers, vegetarian meals, recycling, saving electricity, and using refillable cups and bags.

Postal Workers Brave the Pandemic to Deliver the Mail

During this historic pandemic, postal workers around the world are providing essential and important services. They help those who are quarantined get medicine and other critical items, deliver much needed checks and other essentials to the elderly and play an indispensable role in keeping society connected. They are public service champions who continue to do their jobs in the face of a deadly, invisible threat. From Italy to the United Kingdom to the United States, postal workers have shown dedication and resolve at this most difficult of times. From all of us at CPC, thank you to all postal workers!

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