

EU figures show major vaccine exports despite home shortage

March 11 2021, by Raf Casert



Police officers and wait in a line to receive their COVID-19 vaccine at the Brussels Expo center in Brussels, Thursday, March 4, 2021. The Expo is one of the largest vaccination centers in Belgium. (AP Photo/Olivier Matthys)

European Union figures show that the 27-nation bloc has allowed the

export of over 34 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines over the past weeks despite shortages at home as it continues to struggle to get its vaccine drive up to speed.

Several officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the figures said that over 9.1 million doses were exported to the United Kingdom at a time when diplomatic tensions rose over vaccine exports and the implementation of the Brexit divorce agreement. The EU had wanted AstraZeneca vaccines from Britain to make up the shortfall of the company's commitment to the EU.

The figures show that even if the EU is accused of "vaccine nationalism" major exports continue from the bloc. The exports are almost as high as the roughly 45 million doses that have been distributed within the EU as of last week.

One diplomat said that of over 200 authorizations for export granted only one was refused. Last week, a shipment of more than a quarter million AstraZeneca vaccines destined for Australia was blocked from leaving the EU, in the first use of an export control system instituted by the bloc to make sure big pharma companies would respect their contracts.

One official highlighted that the exports were "only for the producers that respect their contract commitments" towards the EU. Another said the figures also did not include exports to poorer nations around the world.



A healthcare worker administers a dose of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine to a woman at the Brussels Expo center in Brussels, Thursday, March 4, 2021. The Expo is one of the largest vaccination centers in Belgium. (AP Photo/Olivier Matthys)

The EU has been under pressure to increase the pace of vaccinations but member nations have complained that deliveries woefully trail demand. Nowhere is the discrepancy in vaccinations more glaring than in a comparison with Britain.

The last available figures show that 35 % of the U.K. adult population has had a vaccine shot while the figure in the EU stands at 9.6 %.

The U.K. heads the export list, with Canada coming second with 3.917

million doses, while Mexico was sent 3.134 million. The United States came 8th in the list with export approvals standing at 953,723.

The figures leave a sour taste for some, especially considering the export numbers to the United Kingdom. EU Council President Charles Michel lashed out this week saying that "the facts do not lie. The United Kingdom and the United States have imposed an outright ban on the export of vaccines or [vaccine](#) components produced on their territory."



Police officers and others sit in a waiting zone after receiving their COVID-19 vaccine at the Brussels Expo center in Brussels, Thursday, March 4, 2021. The Expo is one of the largest vaccination centers in Belgium. (AP Photo/Olivier Matthys)

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has denied there is such a ban, but the EU [export](#) figures do indicate that the bloc has had a role in the success of the British drive.

The figures were provided by the EU's executive Commission to representatives of member countries. Overall, the representatives have no issue with companies that respect their EU contract to continue such exports. Criticism has centered on AstraZeneca, the Anglo-Swedish company that promised some 80 million vaccines but now says it likely fall short by over half that because of production issues.

After an initial U.K. denial, Michel demanded that the U.K. provide more transparency over production and exports to other countries.

The EU is a major multinational pharmaceuticals hub with massive production capacity and wants to the companies that respect their commitments to continue exporting. "The EU has never stopped exporting," said Michel.

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