The EU has announced the opening of a sea corridor this weekend for shipping humanitarian aid from Cyprus to [Gaza](https://www.theguardian.com/world/gaza) in the race to stave off a famine that is already claiming lives.

“We are now very close to the opening of the corridor, hopefully this Sunday. And I’m very glad to see that an initial pilot operation will be launched today,” the EU commission president, Ursula Von der Leyen, told reporters after touring harbour facilities at the Cypriot port of Larnaca, the departure point for the aid shipments.

[Biden announces US will build pier on Gaza shore for large-scale aid delivery](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/07/biden-us-port-gaza-aid-delivery)

[Read more](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/07/biden-us-port-gaza-aid-delivery)

A pilot delivery is expected to set sail on Saturday, with a ship operated by a Spanish search and rescue group, Open Arms, taking food provided by the charity, World Central Kitchen.

“Today we are facing a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, and we stand by the innocent civilians in Palestine,” Von der Leyen said.

The EU said the shipments would go straight to Gaza, 210 nautical miles away, but did not say where they would land or unload, or how the food would be distributed from the landing point. It was also unclear what the link was between the weekend shipments and a US plan, [announced by Joe Biden on Thursday night](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/07/biden-us-port-gaza-aid-delivery), to build a floating dock off the Gaza shore over the next few weeks to receive aid shipments from Cyprus.

Von Der Leyen did not mention the US plan in her remarks in Larnaca, and the US president did not mention this weekend’s planned deliveries in [his State of the Union address](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/mar/07/joe-biden-state-of-the-union-address) to Congress.

On Friday the US, EU and other countries involved in the effort [formally announced their backing](https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=40247#flat) for the sea aid corridor, built around a proposal, the Amalthea Initiative, developed by Cyprus since November, outlining a mechanism for carrying out secure shipments to Gaza.

“The delivery of humanitarian assistance directly to Gaza by sea will be complex, and our nations will continue to assess and adjust our efforts to ensure we deliver aid as effectively as possible,” the statement said, signed by the European Commission, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Cyprus, the United Arab Emirates, the UK, and the US.

The statement noted the plan for a floating pier [announced by Biden](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/07/biden-us-port-gaza-aid-delivery), but did not explain how it would be integrated with the efforts of other members of the group. Aid workers have [generally been scathing](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/07/gaza-floating-port-aid-palestinians-impact) about the US pier scheme, pointing out that it would not be operational for several weeks, a lethal period of time in the face of a famine. They also noted it did not solve the problems of distribution and security which are currently hindering aid deliveries.

British foreign secretary David Cameron confirmed that the UK was part of the maritime corridor plan. “We continue to urge Israel to allow more trucks into Gaza as the fastest way to get aid to those who need it,” he said, adding it was “incredibly frustrating” that [Benjamin Netanyahu](https://www.theguardian.com/world/benjamin-netanyahu) was not heeding calls to open more crossing points.

Details of the weekend’s initial shipments were kept secret for security reasons.

“My understanding is that the shipment would go directly to Gaza, and of course we know that brings about a number of logistical challenges on which we have been working,” Balazs Ujvari, a European Commission spokesperson, said.

Aid workers said the US floating dock was expected to be constructed offshore from Gaza City and its small harbour, but it was not clear on Friday whether that would be the destination of Saturday’s expected pilot delivery.

The Cypriot Amalthea plan for a sea aid corridor is attracting international backing five months after the start of the war after 30,000 Palestinians have died there, and as Gaza, particularly the north of the coastal strip cut off by [Israel](https://www.theguardian.com/world/israel) forces, is slipping into famine.