

Sanctions: Commission expands Guidance on COVID-19-related humanitarian aid in sanctioned environments

The European Commission expanded its Guidance Note on how COVID-19-related humanitarian aid can be provided to countries and areas around the world that are subject to EU restrictive measures (sanctions). The Guidance now also has self-standing chapters on **Iran and Venezuela**.

The aim is to give practical guidance on how to comply with EU sanctions when providing humanitarian aid, in particular medical assistance, to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The Guidance clarifies the responsibilities and the processes for the provision of this aid in order to facilitate activities of humanitarian operators in Iran and Venezuela, and the channelling of equipment and assistance to fight the pandemic in these countries.

Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Executive Vice-President for an Economy that Works for People, said: *"Only with a joint and coordinated effort can we address the critical challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic poses. The European Commission is fully committed to facilitating the provision of much-needed aid to countries and areas around the world that are subject to EU sanctions."*

Josep **Borrell**, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President for a Stronger Europe in the World, said: *"EU sanctions and humanitarian assistance are in no way incompatible. EU sanctions are fully in line with all obligations under international law. They allow for exceptions, which can include provision of humanitarian assistance. Today's Guidance Note provides the necessary reassurance to humanitarian operators in these challenging times."*

Janez **Lenarčič**, Commissioner for Crisis Management, has also previously stated: *"Sanctions should not impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance, in line with International Humanitarian Law. Providing clarity is a step forward to addressing the many challenges humanitarian organisations face to deliver assistance on the ground, in such challenging contexts."*

The fight against the COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented challenge that requires global unity, cooperation, solidarity and compassion. While no country is spared, complex political or economic situations and ongoing conflicts in certain areas of the world add to the devastating effects that the pandemic has on the population in those countries.

This Guidance builds on the [first chapter of the note, which covered Syria](#) and was published in May 2020.

For more information on the Guidance Note

[EU sanctions](#) help to achieve key EU objectives such as preserving peace, strengthening international security, and consolidating and supporting democracy, international law and human rights. EU sanctions are targeted at those whose actions endanger these values, in order to reduce as much as possible any adverse consequences on the civilian population. The EU has about 40 different sanctions regimes currently in place.

Compliance by the EU with relevant international obligations and its policy of targeted measures underpin a system of exceptions that also aims to ensure that sanctions are applied in a way that takes into account the needs of humanitarian operators. These can include the provision of humanitarian assistance and humanitarian activities, including

medical assistance. Depending on the transactions and the restrictions existing in each case, humanitarian operators may need to request a prior authorisation in order to export certain goods to countries subject to sanctions. Such authorisations are granted by the competent authorities in each Member State.

Today's Guidance Note addresses a number of questions received by the Commission from donors, NGOs, banks and other actors involved in humanitarian activities, and from national authorities. Questions refer to exports of, and payments for protective gear, medicines, medical equipment, or the provision of medical assistance to the population in need in areas subject to EU sanctions. The note is addressed to all actors involved in the supply of humanitarian aid, such as the competent authorities of EU Member States, which manage the implementation of EU sanctions, and public and private operators (donors, NGOs, banks and other actors involved in humanitarian activities), which must comply with EU sanctions when providing assistance.

The Commission is also working closely with Member States to ensure that in the current context national procedures are transparent and easily accessible for humanitarian operators from the whole EU.

Background:

Within the European Commission, Executive Vice-President **Dombrovskis** is responsible for monitoring the enforcement of EU financial and economic sanctions across the Union. This includes supporting EU companies to carry out business which is fully compliant with EU sanctions. He is also responsible for developing proposals to enhance the EU's resilience to extraterritorial sanctions by third countries, in close cooperation with High Representative/Vice-President **Borrell** who ensures consistency of the Union's external action, including of the EU's sanctions policy, and coordinates external action in the Commission.

[Guidance note](#)

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